



## Charge to the National Drought Policy Commission

- Determine, in consultation with the National Drought Mitigation Center in Lincoln, Nebraska, and other appropriate entities, what needs exist on the federal, state, local, and tribal levels to prepare for and respond to drought emergencies.
- Review all existing federal laws and programs relating to drought.
- Review pertinent state, local, and tribal laws and programs relating to drought.
- Determine what differences exist between the needs of those affected by drought and federal laws and programs designed to mitigate the impacts of and respond to drought.
- Collaborate with the Western Drought Coordination Council and other appropriate entities to consider regional drought initiatives and the application of such initiatives at the national level.
- Recommend how federal drought laws and programs can be better integrated with ongoing state, local, and tribal programs into a comprehensive national policy to mitigate the impacts of and respond to drought emergencies without diminishing the right of states to control water through state law and considering the need to protect the environment.
- Recommend how to improve public awareness of the need for drought mitigation and develop a coordinated approach to drought mitigation and response by governmental and nongovernmental entities, including academic, private, and nonprofit interests.
- Recommend whether all federal drought preparation and response programs should be consolidated under one existing federal agency and, if so, identify such agency.

## CONSEQUENCES OF DROUGHT

Drought is perhaps the most obstinate and pernicious of the dramatic events that Nature conjures up. It can last longer and extend across larger areas than hurricanes, tornadoes, floods, and earthquakes. At its most severe, drought creates vast, windblown dust bowls—eroding the landscape, damaging terrestrial and aquatic wildlife habitat, contributing to widespread wildfire, causing hundreds of millions of dollars in losses, and dashing hopes and dreams.

Drought may be the last straw in driving farm and ranch families off their land and livestock producers out of business. It brings hardship to water-dependent enterprises such as commercial fishing, marinas, river outfitters and guides, landscapers, golf courses, and water theme parks. In many small communities, downturns in farming, ranching, and recreation have a rippling effect, causing loss of income for seed and implement retailers, recreation equipment suppliers, and Main Street businesses—from grocery stores to clothing outlets, entertainment

operations, restaurants, and banks. This in turn creates revenue shortfalls for local governments.

Drought can have devastating impacts on the lives of migrant agricultural workers and people employed in seasonal, recreation-dependent jobs. Drought can lead to tough decisions regarding allocation of water and result in stringent water-use limitations. Drought can also cause problems in ensuring safe drinking water as well as adequate water supplies for municipal, county, and rural fire-fighting efforts and for the dilution of wastewater effluent.

In large managed river basins and water systems such as the Columbia, Missouri, the state and federal California reservoir systems, the Colorado River, the Apalachicola-Chattahoochee-Flint, and others, drought creates or exacerbates conflicts about who should get water. The most common conflicts pit older, established uses such as agriculture and navigation against newer uses such as recreation and water for growing municipal populations, and water for direct human use against water for ecosystems.