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July 27, 2023

United States House of Representatives
The Honorable Max Miller
The Honorable Deborah Ross
Committee on Science, Space and Technology's Environment Subcommittee
2321 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

RE: Weather Research and Forecasting Innovation Act of 2017 reauthorization and provisions for NOAA's National Integrated Drought Information System (NIDIS)

Dear House Science, Space and Technology Environment Subcommittee Chair Miller and Ranking Member Ross:

Membership of the Interstate Council on Water Policy (ICWP) includes state and interstate water resources management agencies, each who work closely with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) National Integrated Drought Information System (NIDIS) to coordinate drought monitoring, forecasting, planning, and information at national, state, and local levels. As the House on Science Space and Technology's Environment Subcommittee considers reauthorization of the Weather Research and Forecasting Innovation Act of 2017, **ICWP offers strong support for its passage** with considerations for **key enhancements to the NIDIS program** as outlined below.

ICWP holds a seat on the NIDIS Executive Council, alongside key senior natural resource officials from federal agencies (such as the US Department of Agriculture, Department of Interior and others) as well as leaders from state, local government, academia, nongovernmental organizations and the private sector. We consult with NIDIS and the Executive Council regularly to coordinate and integrate drought research, build upon existing federal, tribal, state, and local partnerships and support the national drought early warning information system.

Drought is not a one-size-fits-all condition that only affects one part of the country. Many of our members rely heavily on the information, resources and communications provided by NIDIS, before, during and after drought events. The following recommendations reflect priority areas for our members:

Leader in Water Policy Information, Influence and Implementation

1 -- Authorize funding to finish NIDIS Drought Early Warning System (DEWS) rollout

Drought and its impacts vary from region to region. The development and implementation of regional drought early warning systems (DEWS) allows for responsiveness to particular geographic and hydrologic circumstances. Regional DEWS are important collaborative federal, regional, state, and local interagency efforts to improve drought early warning capacity and build long-term drought resilience throughout the region. While there are currently eight highly beneficial DEWS regions in operation across the country, that leaves 20 percent of the geographic U.S. that are not represented.

ICWP requests that provisions in the Weather Act pertaining to NIDIS reauthorization **authorize funding to finish DEWS rollout in areas of the country that are impacted by drought and not covered by DEWS.** The priority rollouts pertain to regions that are currently severely affected by drought: Mid-Atlantic, Great Lakes and the Lower Mississippi. Additional regions include Hawaii, Alaska, Puerto Rico and the Pacific Islands. At a minimum, the cost to complete this rollout would be \$3.5 million.

2 -- Authorize funding and resources to build out ecological drought research grant opportunities

The overarching goals of NIDIS, as defined by the public laws authorizing the program (P.L. 109-430, P.L. 113-86, and P.L. 115-423) include conducting research and monitoring drought impact assessment communications, supporting improvements in water prediction, and providing timely data, information, and products on drought.

While drought has traditionally been viewed with a human-centric lens (i.e.- socioeconomic, hydrologic or agricultural impacts), ecological drought and drought impacts to ecosystem health are an emerging issue for NIDIS. It is now more important than ever to close information gaps and ensure that we have a holistic understanding of drought's impacts to ecosystems and ecologically available water.

NIDIS Regional DEWS Strategic Action Plans identified ecological drought management challenges around the United States at national and regional scales. Additionally, the Fiscal Year 2022 NIDIS research competition cooperatively funded seven two-year projects focused on ecological drought, indicating the value of developing research and tools to improve our understanding and management of drought risk in terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems. In support of these efforts, ICWP requests that the Weather Act reauthorization include provisions to **authorize funds to the NIDIS competitive grant program specifically dedicated to carry out ecological drought research** at or above the FY2022 funding level (\$3,847,022).

3 -- Authorize funding for additional resources to support/build out flash drought capabilities including early warning, impact assessment, damage prevention and mitigation

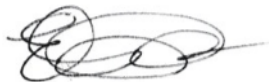
The 2017 Northern Plains flash drought's quick onset and severity were not forecasted, and it resulted in fires that burned 4.8 million acres and U.S. agricultural losses more than \$2.6 billion. Episodes like this have occurred more frequently over the years since and have

sparked intense interest in improving our understanding and preparedness for flash drought.

To grow a robust, shared understanding of flash drought, resources must be dedicated to research and develop tools to improve flash drought early warning capabilities for NIDIS. Since 2020, NIDIS has been actively involved in enhancing our understanding of flash drought. NIDIS is a crucial convener to develop resources for decisionmakers and enhance their capabilities for timely flash drought response. ICWP requests that Weather Act reauthorization include provisions to **authorize funds for NIDIS that are solely dedicated to flash drought research, responsive coordination, and public education.**

If you have any questions regarding these comments as the Weather Act reauthorization is developed, please contact me at: Beth@icwp.org or 307-772-1999. Thank you for the opportunity to provide this input.

Regards,



Beth Callaway
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CC:

The Honorable Frank Lucas, Chairman, Committee on Science, Space and
Technology
Veva DeHeza, Executive Director, National Integrated Drought Information System
Tony Willardson, Executive Director, Western States Water Council