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Opening Statement of
Chairman Doc Hastings
Committee on Natural Resources
On Wednesday, March 19, 2014
Fresno, California

**Full Committee Oversight Field Hearing on "California Water Crisis and Its Impacts:
The Need for Immediate and Long-Term Solutions"**

It's always a pleasure to be back in Fresno.

Our regions have a lot in common. They were once deserts, but they were transformed into the most productive soils on earth after our nation wisely realized that the deserts would bloom if they had water and the necessary infrastructure of multi-purpose dams, reservoirs and canals. Entire agricultural economies and ways of life grew around our ability to irrigate these dormant lands.

In our regions, food grows where water flows. Conversely, communities wither and can die when the water spigot stops. As many of you know, this is an all-too-familiar occurrence here in the San Joaquin Valley. And, if it can happen here, it can happen anywhere in the western United States.

As Chairman of the House Natural Resources Committee, I have painfully watched the cycle that has gone on here over the past few years. In 2009 and 2010, a man-made drought brought this region to its knees, where communities experienced 40% unemployment and food lines handed out Chinese-produced carrots to the victims of senseless regulatory drought. This followed with two good water years.

During those relatively good times, the House passed a comprehensive bill intended to ensure that man-made drought never returned. That bill fell on deaf ears in the Senate and the Administration. Now, we are back to yet another drought and this one could be far more catastrophic than before. History is once again repeating itself.

It doesn't have to be this way. We have an opportunity to right the wrongs of what's gone on here and to learn lessons from the past.

First, let's stop the deliberate diversion of billions of gallons of water to a three-inch fish when the science has not demonstrated that the fish is being helped by the diversions. When the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals validated the Delta smelt Biological Opinion last week, it said that species have been quote "afforded the highest of priorities by law even it means the sacrifices of the anticipated benefits of the project" unquote. The opinion went on to say that quote "Resolution of these fundamental policy questions...lies with Congress." Unquote. I concur. The Endangered Species Act needs reformed and we plan to begin that process in the next few weeks.

Second, let's re-invest in new water storage to capture water in wet times so we can deliver it in dry times. The West is what it is today because of storage projects and we are literally throwing that legacy away by thinking that conservation alone can resolve water shortages.

There is a demonstrated willingness from non-federal interests to invest in storage. The problem is that a maze of federal environmental regulations – including a Biological Opinion on Delta smelt – will continue to make it a difficult process to make these project a reality. I note that feasibility studies on three storage projects here in California have gone on for over a decade. Our great country put a man on the moon in less time. This Administration must stop getting ready to get ready on new storage. The California water bill recently passed by the House immediately authorizes construction of storage by eliminating bureaucratic paralyzes-by-analyses and by tapping into private investment.

Third, parties on all sides must have the political will to find common-sense solutions. To only resolve this situation in the short-term is simply kicking the can down the road. I only wish that more California House and U.S. Senate Democrats, all of which I invited, could be sitting here to listen to the long-term solutions posed today.

Mr. Valadao's recently passed bill is a great start to bringing short and long-term help. Long-term solutions must be part of the equation or we will repeat this destructive drought cycle once again. We must not be short-sighted. I hope that the Senate can do its part so a meaningful but rapid negotiation can truly happen. The Senate is entitled to its solution, but the next step is to pass their solution and if there are differences, get together to work differences out.

In closing, I want to thank Mr. Valadao for his leadership on his bill and in asking for this hearing. The people of the San Joaquin Valley have asked for and deserve nothing less than their water. We are here to listen and to bring your message back to Washington, DC.

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