

NICK J. RAHALL II, WV
CHAIRMAN
DALE E. KILDEE, MI
ENI F.H. FALEOMAVAEGA, AS
NEIL ABERCROMBIE, HI
FRANK PALLONE, JR., NJ
GRACE F. NAPOLITANO, CA
RUSH D. HOLT, NJ
RAUL M. GRIJALVA, AZ
MADELEINE Z. BORDALLO, GU
JIM COSTA, CA
DAN BOREN, OK
GREGORIO SABLAN, MP
MARTIN HEINRICH, NM
GEORGE MILLER, CA
EDWARD J. MARKEY, MA
PETER A. DeFAZIO, OR
MAURICE D. HINCHEY, NY
DONNA M. CHRISTENSEN, VI
DIANA DeGETTE, CO
RON KIND, WI
LOIS CAPPS, CA
JAY INSLEE, WA
JOE BACA, CA
STEPHANIE HERSETH SANDLIN, SD
JOHN P. SARBANES, MD
CAROL SHEA-PORTER, NH
NIKI TSONGAS, MA
FRANK KRATOVIL, JR., MD
PEDRO R. PIERLUISI, PR

JAMES H. ZOIA
CHIEF OF STAFF

U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Natural Resources
Washington, DC 20515

DOC HASTINGS, WA
RANKING REPUBLICAN MEMBER
DON YOUNG, AK
ELTON GALLEGLY, CA
JOHN J. DUNCAN, JR., TN
JEFF FLAKE, AZ
HENRY E. BROWN, JR., SC
CATHY McMORRIS RODGERS, WA
LOUIE GOHMERT, TX
ROB BISHOP, UT
BILL SHUSTER, PA
DOUG LAMBORN, CO
ADRIAN SMITH, NE
ROBERT J. WITTMAN, VA
PAUL C. BROUN, GA
JOHN FLEMING, LA
MIKE COFFMAN, CO
JASON CHAFFETZ, UT
CYNTHIA M. LUMMIS, WY
TOM McCLINTOCK, CA
BILL CASSIDY, LA

TODD YOUNG
REPUBLICAN CHIEF OF STAFF

Opening Statement of Ranking Member Doc Hastings
Before the Committee on Natural Resources
On Tuesday, March 31, 2009

Oversight hearing on

“The California Drought: Actions by Federal and State agencies to address impacts on lands, fisheries, and water users”

Thank you for holding this hearing on such an important matter impacting the jobs and livelihoods of tens of thousands of Americans’ and their communities.

While this hearing is focused on California’s drought, many of the discussions today might as well be applicable to many regions of our Nation suffering from lack of adequate water supplies. Even in my region of the Pacific Northwest, drought has serious impacts on people and the environment.

Drought has touched this planet for millions of years – even before industrialization -- and it will continue to do so. The question is over how mankind has reacted to and will respond to the challenges associated with drought.

Over a century ago, our great Nation had the foresight to construct dams and reservoirs to help drought-proof ourselves, settle the Western United States, feed the masses and harness the emissions-free power of moving water. The Columbia Basin and Yakima irrigation projects in my district and a network of dams in the Pacific Northwest serve as a constant reminder of this legendary vision.

Californians enjoy the same benefits with the federal Central Valley Project and the State Water Project. Both projects were built to counter alternating periods of drought and flooding while providing consistent amounts of water to farms and populated regions. Similar to what has happened in the Pacific Northwest, these projects served their intended purpose until environmental litigation and judicial rulings led to uncertainty and a belief among many that our government has put the needs of endangered species above people.

That belief will be a central theme in today’s hearing. Some of our colleagues will soon speak of how hard-working families have been brought to their knees by a three-inch fish called the Delta Smelt. We will meet a look-alike relative of this fish soon. Communities dependent on irrigated agriculture are now approaching 40% unemployment as they watched over 83 billion gallons of water (or 255,000 acre feet) – which was water normally dedicated to the fields -- go out to the ocean in the last month alone. Their plight is as real as it gets and this picture of a

formerly working mom with her two sons --who waited in food lines for two hours in Mendota, California only to be turned away because the food ran out -- says it all. It's important to protect lands and endangered fish, but our government's environmental policies shouldn't make our communities endangered in the process.

This disaster could also increase food prices nationwide and American taxpayers will have to pay for disaster and social assistance – all over a three-inch fish. In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, I note that many of my Republican colleagues from California have sent us a letter stating that this drought was man-made and asking for field hearings where non-governmental witnesses can have the opportunity to testify. I wholeheartedly concur with this letter and ask that it be made part of the hearing record. With that, I look forward to today's hearing.