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Need for Storage, ESA Flexibility Comes Through at D.C. Conference

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When ACWA members arrived in Washington, D.C. in late February for the association's annual D.C. Conference, three topics were on everyone's mind: California's drought and the need for both short-term and long-term solutions.

In discussions with Administration officials and meetings on Capitol Hill, the conversation quickly turned to the drought and how it is affecting farms, communities and the entire economy of our state.

With Congress weighing legislation to provide relief to drought-stricken California, ACWA members used the opportunity to urge the state's congressional delegation to work together to fashion a bipartisan bill that can meet the state's needs and advance the coequal goals of improved water supply reliability and Delta ecosystem health.

Leaders on both sides of the aisle took the time to share their thoughts on short- and long-term solutions. Sen. Dianne Feinstein (D-CA) delivered impassioned remarks about the need for additional storage (as did all other leaders) to capture water from the wet years for use in dry times. She mentioned the potential benefits of raising Shasta Dam as well as the possibility of constructing new reservoirs at Temperance Flat and Sites in order to provide more storage for both north- and south-of-Delta water users.

She also cited an additional proposal that should be investigated further: increasing the storage capacity at San Luis Reservoir while seismic work is being done. Early analysis by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation suggests the reservoir's capacity could increase by as much as 130,000 acre-feet.

We also heard from U.S. Rep. David Valadao (R-21), who described how the drought is affecting Californians in his district and stressed the need for a bipartisan solution.

(See the March 7 issue of ACWA News for more on remarks from Sen. Feinstein and Rep. Valadao. The senator's complete remarks can be found [here](#) [1].)

In addition to storage, it's clear that we need a more flexible approach to implementing regulations such as the Endangered Species Act. As we look at the universe of actions needed to improve our water supply reliability and combat the effects of future droughts, modifying how the federal government implements the ESA should be on the table.

The ESA did not cause the drought, but the manner in which the ESA has been implemented by the federal government has made the impacts of the drought worse by constraining a system already stressed by historically dry conditions. Four years ago, the ACWA Board developed policy principles on ESA implementation, urging the federal government to implement this powerful law in a manner more consistent with the coequal policy goals in California law of water supply reliability and Delta ecosystem restoration. Now is the time for the federal government to heed this advice.

As we emphasized in our conversations in Washington D.C., California is indeed facing crisis conditions. Congress and federal agencies have a key role to play in responding to that crisis.

The federal government operates the state's largest water supply project and it sets powerful regulations that impact federal, state, and local water supply projects in California. We cannot face the challenges of this or future droughts in California without a functional partnership with the federal government.

We urge all members of our congressional delegation to work together to craft a bill that can move forward with bipartisan support. ACWA stands ready to do whatever we can to assist with that important task.

This is an unprecedented drought. But it is also an unprecedented opportunity to advance solutions so future generations do not find themselves in a similar crisis.

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[1] <http://www.acwa.com/sites/default/files/blog/u133/2014/03/2014-02-26-senator-dianne-feinstein-remarks-acwa.pdf>