



SENATE RESOLUTION 02-018

BY SENATOR(S) Isgar, Entz, Hillman, Musgrave, Anderson, Andrews, Arnold, Cairns, Chlouber, Dyer, Epps, Evans, Fitz-Gerald, Gordon, Hagedorn, Hanna, Hernandez, Lamborn, Linkhart, Matsunaka, May, McElhany, Nichol, Owen, Pascoe, Perlmutter, Phillips, Reeves, Takis, Tate, Taylor, Teck, Thiebaut, Tupa, and Windels.

CONCERNING EMERGENCY DROUGHT DISASTER DESIGNATION.

WHEREAS, Weather patterns throughout the State of Colorado are characterized by inconsistent and unreliable precipitation patterns, raising concerns about water availability in an already semi-arid climate; and

WHEREAS, According to the latest snow surveys conducted by the Natural Resources Conservation Service, Colorado's snowpack reached record low levels on May 1, 2002, bringing this year's statewide snowpack down to only 19% of average; and

WHEREAS, Currently, the entire state is considered by the United States Drought Monitor to be experiencing drought conditions of either severe or extreme classification; and

WHEREAS, Drought conditions have already impacted the winter wheat crop that was planted in the fall of 2001, almost 20% of which has been abandoned; and

WHEREAS, Due to limited snowpack, there will be less water available for irrigated crops, making it difficult for ranchers to raise winter feed or irrigate summer pastures; and

WHEREAS, The status of 95% of land available for livestock grazing is considered to be in fair condition at best, meaning that livestock herds will have less forage available, forcing some ranchers to purchase hay for feeding or sell off their herds altogether; and

WHEREAS, Farmers and ranchers in Colorado are hesitant to plant summer crops considering that many winter crops did not survive due to insufficient precipitation, painting a bleak picture for any new crops planted in the midst of serious drought conditions; and

WHEREAS, Many of those farmers and ranchers have land enrolled in federally funded conservation programs and are unable to use that land for crop production or livestock grazing without official release from program restrictions; and

WHEREAS, During normal growing seasons, agricultural landowners largely benefit from participation in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) by receiving annual rental payments and cost-share assistance in exchange for establishing approved conservation practices on eligible farmland; and

WHEREAS, An emergency drought disaster designation from the United States Department of Agriculture would offer relief to CRP participants who see the use of their program-enrolled land as a viable relief option in such desperate times; and

WHEREAS, The ability to hay and graze CRP-enrolled land, which also is not immune to rapidly increasing drought conditions, would make additional forage available at a critical time; now, therefore,

Be It Resolved by the Senate of the Sixty-third General Assembly of the State of Colorado:

(1) That current drought conditions in the State of Colorado are sufficient reason for obtaining emergency drought disaster designation by the United States Department of Agriculture.

(2) That such designation is necessary for Colorado farmers and ranchers to become eligible for low-interest emergency loans from the Farm Service Agency to recover from production and physical losses.

(3) That such designation is also necessary for farmers and ranchers to again gain access to Conservation Reserve Program lands.

(4) That use of lands set aside for conservation may be an important component in helping Colorado's agricultural communities, which have already experienced tremendous economic loss.

Be It Further Resolved, That a copy of this Joint Resolution be sent to United States Secretary of Agriculture Ann Veneman.

Stan Matsunaka
PRESIDENT OF
THE SENATE

Karen Goldman
SECRETARY OF
THE SENATE