

Drought Program Overview

Project Description

Portions of the western United States, particularly California, are currently experiencing historic drought conditions, which are having devastating effects through the loss of farm and farm-related jobs and through economic losses due to decreased agricultural production. Under the Reclamation States Emergency Drought Relief Act of 1991, as amended (Drought Act), and other authorities, the Bureau of Reclamation will use \$40 million from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) to fund emergency drought relief projects that can quickly and effectively mitigate the consequences of the current drought by making the greatest quantities of water available for areas that are hardest hit.

Reclamation worked closely with local water users to identify potential drought projects and worked with the Bureau of Indian Affairs to identify projects for Native American communities. The projects from the state of California rose to the top of the list because of the severity and length of the drought in the state. In April 2009, Secretary Salazar announced that \$40 million of Recovery Act funding would be made available for “emergency drought relief in the West, focused on California.”

Reclamation assembled an internal team to review, screen, and prioritize drought projects for ARRA funding. The first level of review for screening projects included an evaluation to determine the applicability of the proposed projects in meeting the criteria of the Drought Act. The projects were also screened using ARRA objectives for expenditures: preserve and create jobs and promote economic recovery; assist the most impacted by recession; and invest in environmental protection and infrastructure that will provide long-term economic benefits. Projects passing these initial reviews moved to the next level of screening.

The second level of review included the Secretary of the Interior’s priorities such as assisting in meeting water supply needs of Native American communities and projects that create long-term and lasting benefits to the public (including fish and wildlife enhancement). Native American and wildlife refuge projects that passed the first and second level of screening were funded. The remaining projects underwent a third level of review as described below in order to obtain ratings and rankings for each of the projects.

The third level of review consisted of rating the remaining projects using criteria associated with both Reclamation’s Drought Act Program and ARRA including:

- How quickly funds would be obligated (e.g., would the need for specialized contractors or protracted environmental analysis delay the obligation process?).
- How quickly funding can be expended following award.
- How critical is the drought-related impact that will be addressed by the project such as:
 - Projects that will address health and safety impacts related to drought.
 - Projects that will mitigate economic impacts from drought (e.g., crop losses, and job losses).
 - Projects that address drought impacts to fish and wildlife and other environmental impacts (e.g., avoid subsidence related to groundwater development, and water quality issues).
- How the project will provide significant benefits to address drought-related impacts such as:
 - Involve a greater quantity of water.
 - Benefit a greater number of users.
 - Have multiple benefits to people, agriculture, environment, etc.

- Broader in geographic scope.
- What was the cost per acre-foot of water for the project.
- If the project beneficiary will contribute funding towards completion of the project.

Sixteen tribal projects, seven temporary pipeline and pump projects, 51 new well projects (not including the tribal projects), and 19 well enhancement projects were selected for funding. In addition a groundwater monitoring project was also selected for ARRA funding to determine the effects the ARRA funded drought projects would have on the area. The San Joaquin region of the Central Valley has experienced some of the highest land subsidence in the world. The monitoring will provide real-time information to help prevent ARRA-funded wells from causing groundwater overdrought and land subsidence.

The funds for Native American projects will assist in meeting the water supply needs of Native American communities impacted by drought. The funds for the wildlife refuges not only assist in protecting the environment by providing more reliable water sources for the refuges, but also reduce the overall water demand on the Federal Central Valley Project. The remaining projects primarily provide relief to preserve permanent crops and associated jobs in an area that is experiencing prolonged drought, economic hardship, and some of the highest unemployment rates in the country.

To effectively implement the program, Reclamation is phasing the work in three different categories: 1. installation of temporary pipelines and pumps, 2. existing well refurbishment, and 3. installation of new wells. While Reclamation will be working to fund all three of these categories concurrently, it is expected the installation of temporary pipelines and pumps will be completed first, followed by the well rehabilitation, and then by the new well installation.

Project Benefits

- Activities to minimize losses and damages resulting from drought conditions will:
- Pump groundwater to satisfy required water deliveries to wildlife refuges, thereby freeing up water for municipal and industrial, and agricultural water contractors.
- Provide critical municipal supplies to urban customers, small communities and tribes impacted by drought.
- Provide a temporary source of water to preserve permanent crops and the jobs associated with those crops.
- Increase water flow data and improve monitoring of hydrologic conditions to allow water users to closely control water diversions, consumptive use, groundwater levels, and land subsidence.

Budget Information

Recovery funding: \$40 million.