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

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Opening Statement of Chairman Doc Hastings
House Natural Resources Committee
On Monday, April 11, 2011
Before the Water and Power Subcommittee Hearing on
"Overcoming Man-Made Drought: Time for Congress to Listen and Act"

Thank you for holding today's hearing. Today marks a turning point in reversing the man-made plight of the San Joaquin Valley.

For those of who don't know me, I'm Doc Hastings. I'm privileged to chair the House Natural Resources Committee. My congressional district contains two of the largest federal irrigation projects in the nation. The Yakima Project and the Columbia Basin Project. These projects literally turned the desert into some of the most productive farmland in the world. The dams that impounded the water for these projects helped power the Manhattan Project that enabled our nation to win World War II and the Cold War. To this day, they continue to generate renewable and emissions-free hydropower for millions. These multi-purpose projects – like the visionary Central Valley Project – formed the foundation for the western United States.

Despite their successes, these projects have been under constant assault from those with extreme political agendas. Litigation and regulation have hi-jacked these projects to the point where their purposes have been compromised. The water and power ratepayers in my region have literally watched as never-ending litigation and a federal judge determine how a river flows. I understand that it's a very similar situation here when it comes to putting the needs of a three-inch fish over the needs of people.

If it can happen here, it can happen anywhere. The San Joaquin Valley situation of the last two years should be a warning to us all that we cannot stand by for history to repeat itself. While Mother Nature has helped temporarily rescue this region with historic precipitation, a regulatory drought could re-appear all too quickly.

The question is whether this Congress will let that happen. Republicans tried over the last two years to resolve this situation, but were not even allowed to debate the merits of proposals aimed at turning the pumps back on to historic levels. Democrat leaders wouldn't even hold an official field hearing on this topic.

All of that changes today. Today's hearing is a first step to right the regulatory wrongs of the past, to end future man-made droughts and to give farm families and workers long-term economic prosperity and jobs. The time to act is now. Let's make it happen.