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**Heller, Other Western Senators Introduce Legislation to** **Advance Water Priorities for Drought-Stricken States** **(Washington, DC)** – Recently, U.S. Senators Dean Heller (R-Nev.), Jeff Flake (R-Ariz.), John Barrasso (R-Wyo.), John McCain (R-Ariz.), James Risch (R-Idaho), and Steve Daines (R-Mont.) introduced [S.2902](http://www.flake.senate.gov/public/_cache/files/0d35dd0c-8f4f-48a2-8f26-7cc42c974f87/s.2902-as-introduced-flo16553-.pdf), *The Western Water Supply and Planning Enhancement Act,* to provide forward-looking measures to help drought-stricken states make better use of existing water infrastructure, increase conservation efforts, and protect state-issued water rights. Specific provisions in the bill would:          Direct the re-evaluation of flood control operations to western storage reservoirs (U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, or non-federal) in order to use up-to-date forecasting methods and hydrology to enhance water storage.         Direct a study by the National Academy of Sciences and an implementation plan by the Department of Interior (DOI) on how to best control water-intensive invasive species like tamarisk, also known as salt cedar.         Encourage voluntary efforts to conserve water in order to protect Lake Mead from falling into shortage by building on a successful pilot program and providing additional guidance to the Secretary of the Interior on the conserved water.         Apply a streamlined permitting process for forest and wildland restoration efforts to help protect watersheds in critical water supply areas.         Ensure that DOI and the Department of Agriculture respect state-issued water rights and abide by state groundwater laws when managing groundwater under federal lands. This language was originally introduced as [S. 982.](https://www.congress.gov/bill/114th-congress/senate-bill/982) by Senators Heller, Barrasso, Flake, McCain, and Risch.  “As Nevada suffers from drought, it is imperative we work to find innovative ways to sustain our water supply and bolster our state’s water security. Without it, our state cannot maintain its economic competitiveness nor can our communities continue to grow and flourish. I am proud to work with my western colleagues on this legislation to ensure every drop of western water is stretched as far as it will go,” **said Heller.** “Congress needs to take steps that allow states to better utilize existing resources and strengthen state-level planning and management efforts,” **said Flake.** “Reliable access to water is fundamental to Western economies and these measures provide a variety of tools to fight water shortages.”“Developing and maintaining a clean and abundant water supply is not just an issue for other parts of the country. It's the lifeblood of our western communities,” **said Barrasso.** “This legislation will help develop and enhance our water resources, which is critical to economic development, job creation and our environment.”“Catastrophic wildfire and historic drought are the biggest challenges facing Arizona in the 21st century, and the two issues are inextricably linked,” **said McCain.** “It’s never been more urgent to address these mounting challenges for the sake of future generations. Our bill makes critical strides towards this end by thinning our fire-prone forests near key water supplies, advancing the eradication of the water-intensive salt cedar that is decimating water levels in the Colorado River, and ensuring that more water stored in Lake Mead is available to Arizona.”“Water is a basic need of life. In Montana and across the West, we depend on a steady supply to irrigate our crops, water our livestock and provide energy through hydropower,” **said Daines.** “The Western Water Supply and Planning Enhancement Act will go a long way towards ensuring states, communities, farmers and ranchers have access to a reliable and a dedicated water supply."**Background:** The Senators recently sent a letter to Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee Chairman Lisa Murkowski (R-Alaska) and Ranking Member Maria Cantwell (D-Wash.) requesting a committee hearing on the bill. The signed copy of the letter can be viewed [here.](http://www.flake.senate.gov/public/_cache/files/078b71ec-e81e-4503-9867-886f3840e19f/05.10.16-letter-to-enr-re-western-drought-bill.pdf) ###cid:image005.png@01D15EA3.CEBDCB00cid:image006.png@01D15EA3.CEBDCB00cid:image007.png@01D15EA3.CEBDCB00 |