Southwest Climate Hub/SubHub Workshop
Coping With Historic Drought in California Rangelands:
Developing Strategies, Tactics and Tools

Purpose: The purpose of the proposed workshop is to gather USDA Conservation Agencies, UC Cooperative Extension, Industry and Conservation NGO Leaders to examine the state of the livestock grazing industry and to identify possible post-drought actions necessary to assist the industry in reestablishing sustainable grazing practices.
Duration: 2 day workshop, mid-September 2015
Location: Davis CA
Participants: Relevant USDA Agency contacts for mitigation and adaption efforts (e.g., NRCS, RD, FSA, USFS)

Background: The drought in California is of historic proportion, both in its intensity and its effect on agriculture. While irrigated agriculture operations have to make decisions about crops, irrigation schedules and other management activities, rangeland-based livestock operations have to make similarly difficult, but fundamentally different decisions. Reduced forage production is universal across regions and the only two options are to buy replacement forage or reduce livestock numbers. Response to short-term drought usually involves purchased feed, but the intensity and length of this drought has resulted in most operators reducing livestock numbers. The financial impact has been softened somewhat by the high live cattle prices for the past two years, but high prices also limit post-drought restocking options. We propose to bring technical and program state specialists together with industry leaders to develop strategies for post drought actions that can assist producers in returning to sustainable grazing operations. Participants will discuss suitable mitigation options and the impacts of GHG mitigation efforts under the extremely adverse condition of prolonged, sustained drought.

USDA Building Block connection: This effort is linked to the grazing lands building block. Joel Brown (NRCS) will be leading the team conducting the workshop. Brown is the lead for the USDA grazing lands building block and the team had developed estimates of potential sequestration and mitigation activities. This workshop will follow the building blocks plan.

Technologies: The most pressing need for technology development for mitigation in California rangelands is the development of a monitoring approach that can capture the impacts of mitigation and adaptation technologies on GHG fluxes. We will attempt to explore a means to track management activities on California rangelands that will allow us to make credible and scientifically accurate estimates of GHG fluxes.

Introductory Speakers:

- USDA Southwest Climate Hub Director – introduction
- UC Extension Rangeland Leader - status of rangeland resource and livestock operations
- California Cattlemen's Association field representative - status of industry

- NRCS/FS specialists – summary of conservation program options
- FSA specialists on financial assistance programs

Topics for Discussion or break-out sessions:

- Actions for continued drought options
- Actions that can be taken if there is a return to normal rainfall in 2016

In rebuilding the system following prolonged drought, is it possible to alter previous practices/stocking rates to support range health, ranchers and GHG mitigations goals?

- How can we develop outreach and support activities

Budget request: $15K

While this proposal is not directly linked with the California 4th Assessment of Climate Change, mitigation on rangeland is a part of this assessment and some of the workshop findings will likely have value to this assessment. Additionally, Governor Brown recently released an even more aggressive plan to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in California. This workshop is a specific step in support of the broader efforts.