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

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August 13, 2012

The Honorable Gene Dodaro
Comptroller General of the United States
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G St., N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20548

Dear Mr. Dodaro:

Freshwater flows abundantly in the nation's lakes, rivers, streams, and underground aquifers. However, because of climatic conditions and increased usage, water is not always available when and where it is needed or in the amount desired. Users with different interests and objectives, such as agricultural irrigation or municipal water supply, must share the available water, and users may not always get the amount of water they need or want, particularly in times of shortage. Competition for water and the potential for conflict grow as the number of users increases and/or the amount of available water decreases, and conflicts can extend across state or national borders.

The widespread drought conditions of 2012 have renewed attention on a critical challenge for the United States—ensuring a sufficient freshwater supply to sustain quality of life and economic growth. Across the nation, there is increasing competition to meet the freshwater needs of growing cities and suburbs, farms, industries, recreation, and wildlife. In 2003, GAO issued GAO-03-514—*Freshwater Supply: States' Views of How Federal Agencies Could Help Them Meet the Challenges of Expected Shortages*. This report provided a comprehensive overview of water availability and use trends, as well as state views on expected shortages and ways in which the federal government could help them meet future challenges.

We would like to request that GAO update this seminal report in light of new and continued stresses on water supplies. Specifically, we would like GAO to report on the following key issues:

- How have freshwater conditions, including both surface and groundwater, changed in the last decade? What have been the drivers and effects of these changes? And to what extent do these changes over the last decade match the predictions made in GAO-03-514?

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- What is the forecast over the next 10 years for water availability and use? What are the potential implications for agriculture, municipal supply (including possible impacts on water rates), thermoelectric power plants, oil and gas production and mining, and other major sectors of the economy? How are changes in the climate and extreme weather expected to affect water availability and use? What locations are most likely to experience water shortages and why? And what are the potential consequences of such shortages?
- How does the federal government support state water management efforts and what could the federal government do to enhance its support?

Please contact Camille Calimlim Touton (Camille.Calimlim@mail.house.gov or 202-225-6065) with the Committee on Natural Resources to discuss in detail the specific scope of work and timeline for completing this request. Thank you for your consideration and attention to this request.

Sincerely,


Edward J. Markey