



TESTIMONY
OF
THE WATER RESOURCES COALITION

FOR THE RECORD
OF THE U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON WATER RESOURCES AND THE ENVIRONMENT

CONCERNING COMPREHENSIVE WATERSHED MANAGEMENT
AND PLANNING: DROUGHT-RELATED ISSUES IN THE SOUTHEASTERN
UNITED STATES

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“And it never failed that during the dry years the people forgot about the rich years, and during the wet years they lost all memory of the dry years. It was always that way.”

-----John Steinbeck

East of Eden

Madam Chairwoman, Members of the Subcommittee, the Water Resources Coalition was established in 2007 to promote the development, implementation and funding of a comprehensive national water resources policy. Our membership is made up of organizations representing state and local governments, conservation, engineering and construction, waterways and transportation services. We believe that it is important the United States has a comprehensive, national water resources policy, that is developed, implemented, and funded so as to provide a sustainable, productive economy, a healthy aquatic ecology and provides for public health and safety.

It is fortunate and unfortunate this hearing has to be held today. In 1998, Congress passed the National Drought Policy Act, which created the National Drought Policy Commission and challenged the participants to recommend a better to mitigate the effects of droughts. As the report noted, drought occurs somewhere every year in the United States. It can and does extend over long periods and large areas, and it brings hardship as witnesses at this hearing have testified. As an editorial from South Carolina recently noted, “the drought that continues to plague the Southeast shows we cannot count on water being an unlimited resources to be taken at whim.”

History can be a strict instructor when it comes to teaching a lesson. Studies show that the Federal government spent \$3.3 billion responding to the 1953-1956 drought, at least \$6.5 billion during the 1976-1977 drought, and about \$6 billion during the 1988 -1989 drought. The National Drought Policy Commission contends that we can reduce this nation’s vulnerability to the impacts of drought by making preparedness the cornerstone of national drought policy. How do we get there from here?

This Subcommittee, in its foresight, led an effort over the past seven years that culminated in the passage of the Water Resources Development Act of 2007. The Act provided several important tools to meet this challenge head on. They are:

1. Section 2010. Watershed and river basin assessments. This section amends section 729(f)(1) of the Water Resources Development Act of 1986 to provide a 75 percent Federal share for watershed and river basin assessments carried out under that section to encourage States and local

governments to engage in regional planning. By changing the non-Federal cost share to 25 percent, non-Federal interests may now satisfy their full cost share by credits for in-kind services.

2. Sec. 2013. Technical Assistance. This section facilitates increased Corps support to states, tribes and localities through modest adjustments to Section 22 of the Flood Control Act of 1970. By authorizing in-kind services to meet non-Federal cost-sharing, we see this legislation creating opportunities for Corps partnerships with States, tribes and interstate organizations.
3. Sec. 2017. Access to water resource data. This section empowers partnerships between the Corps and non-Federal interests to share data and develop analysis tools to support integrated water resources management.
4. Sec. 2033. Planning. This Section emphasizes Corps planning and scientific knowledge by supporting Planning Centers of Expertise to position the Corps to lead complex, science-based and integrated planning.
5. Sec. 5119. Statewide comprehensive water planning, Oklahoma. This is a groundbreaking authority to support state water resources planning through the unparalleled water resources planning, engineering and technical knowledge of the Corps. This section is an excellent example of what the new trend line should be the future in water resources planning.

As a result of these tools being made available, Coalition members found themselves in complete disappointment when the President's FY09 Budget was released for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers program. We believe this subcommittee shares that disappointment as a result of your Budget hearing in early February. The country cannot continue to afford an ongoing failure to invest in this nation's water infrastructure. Those decisions can be guided by the tools provided to assist those charged with the responsibility to meet the future economic and human water resource needs in a timely manner.

It is time for the Federal government's water resource agencies to collectively "get their act together" and better assist Tribal, regional, state and local governments by listening to those "partners" and strategically plan for supporting them through the Federal government's own human, financial and knowledge capital. We believe Congress has provided the Corps' program a model that should be considered on a national scale for proper water planning. As we noted above, Section 5119 of the WRDA 2007 authorizes Statewide

Comprehensive Water Planning for the state of Oklahoma. This authorized technical assistance directs the Secretary of the Army to assist in : 1) acquisition of hydrologic data, groundwater characterization, database development, and data distribution; 2) expansion of surface water and groundwater monitoring networks; 3) assessment of existing water resources; 4) numerical analysis and modeling necessary to provide an integrated understanding of water resources and water management options; 5) participation in state planning forums and planning groups; 6) coordination of federal water planning efforts; and 7) technical review of data, models, planning scenarios, and water plans developed by states.

Looking to the states for non-Federal leadership is critical for making this work. The state of Oregon is engaged in an effort – Headwaters 2 Ocean – Ensuring Sustainable Water Resources for Oregon’s Future, that recognizes the importance of water to a healthy state economy and one of the pillars of its quality of life that many have noted. They have recognized and built upon their past models for innovation and partnership in the water resource planning arena. And they have a long list of potential partners – including the Federal government – to help move forward this vision. They look to their “tool box” of – economic incentives, technical guidance, planning documents, regulatory requirements, legal opinions, case studies and best management practices, partnerships and treaties, and technology assistance – as the foundation for moving forward.

We have attached a list of Water Resource Planning Principles that are from a book sponsored by one of our member organizations. The book, State Water Resource Planning in the United States is an excellent tool to assist with the use of the tools that have been provided by WRDA 2007. We don’t need another study or another commission to move forward in this area. As Congress begins the effort to move forward with the development of WRDA 2008, the Coalition would encourage you to seek out from the Tribes, states, regional and local government organizations the need for changes in the existing authorities that might better assist them in moving forward in this critical area.

One area that many have been talking about, and this Committee has confronted in the National Energy/ Climate Change legislative effort, has been what to do with regard to the future water resource programs meeting climate change challenges. An idea that we would like to put forward is the authority to develop single purpose water supply projects to capture the melting snowpack that is expected to occur as a result of climate change. Looking at and examining those possibilities in the context of state water resource planning would seem logical in this context.

The Coalition would like to thank the Subcommittee for considering our views as you look at the issues surrounding comprehensive watershed management and

planning. We recognize your jurisdiction over the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the Maritime Administration and the EPA in this arena. It is important to reach out to other Congressional Committees with jurisdiction over the Bureau of Reclamation, the U.S. Geological Survey, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Indian Affairs, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the Department of Energy. Given the large Federal footprint in this country, in particularly in the West, it is important for a coordinated effort by Congress take place.

Thank you again for including this statement in your hearing record on this important area to the nation's future. Leadership is key to making this happen in a timely manner.

WATER RESOURCE PLANNING PRINCIPLES

Management of water resources should be sustainable so as to ensure that present and future generations have adequate supplies of good quality water to support their needs as well as those of natural systems.

Water resources planning processes should address ways to instill citizens with a stewardship obligation to conserve and protect their water resources.

Water resource planning and management should be founded on sound science, recognizing the interdependence of economic development and environmental quality.

Identification and prioritization of critical water-related issues and the development of strategies for addressing them should be ingrained in water planning processes.

Attributes of accountability and performance should be evident in water resources plans.

Available data and information technology should be optimally used to aid in setting priorities, assessing plan effectiveness, and to facilitate public access to information.

Water quality, water quantity, surface water, and ground water are interrelated and should be considered in that context, along with that of reasonable and beneficial use.

Effective water resources management requires meaningful participation, coordination, and collaboration among all affected stakeholders, including all relevant levels of government.

Working partnerships between water resources planning agencies and relevant stakeholder organizations foster plan acceptance and implementation.

Stakeholder involvement should be up-front, open, and collaborative.

Water planning agencies should design and maintain data systems that contain the scientific, demographic, institutional and economic information needed to develop sound plans and support good decisions.

Water resources planners should seek and incorporate innovative practices in their planning processes.

Water resource planners should consider partnering with water research organizations to aid them in developing databases and approaches to support planning and decision making processes.

Periodic revision of water plans will be required to accommodate new scientific and policy developments, and changing social, economic, cultural, and environmental conditions.

Water resource assessments should include current water sources and uses as well as forecasts of future water requirements for humans and ecosystems.

To the extent practical, the potential impact of global climate change should be considered in water resources plans.

Given concern for homeland security, water resources planners should incorporate measures that focus on water security, namely robustness, resiliency, emergency response, and the sustainability or recovery of services under catastrophic conditions.

Monitoring criteria for measuring the effectiveness of implemented alternatives should be included in water resources plans.

Mediation services to facilitate reaching consensus on water planning issues should be incorporated into the planning processes.

Water planners should consider the use of adaptive management as a planning tool. This process provides planning flexibility by incorporating scientific feedback as plans are implemented. The process encourages learning as plan implementation unfolds so that future decisions will have an enhanced database to support them.

An emerging tool applicable to water resources planning is share vision modeling. These models are suited for collaborative planning processes. They provide the technical rigor needed to identify options and tradeoffs while permitting stakeholders without modeling experience to participate in the process.

Educational programs directed towards children, the public, decision making bodies, NGO's, and others should be considered part of the planning process. Such programs support understanding among stakeholders, reaching consensus, and informed decision making.

Water planners should consider the need for research to support planning processes. This could be in-house, accomplished by partner organizations, or provided by contractors.

OVERVIEW OF ELEMENTS FOR CONSIDERATION AT THE STATE LEVEL FOR PLANNING PURPOSES

Published State Water Plan

Goal, vision, mission

Direct stakeholder involvement

Shared vision planning

Monitoring and assessment

Compartmentalized planning

Regional, river basin, watershed

NGO involvement

Federal & local government involvement

Coordination/collaboration

Adaptive management

Integrated planning

Comprehensive planning

Plan implementation strategy

Research component

Education component

Drought management component

Climate change

Plan revision timetable

Sustainability considered

Water supply planning only

Excerpted from: State Water Resources Planning in the United States by Warren Viessman, Jr. and Timothy D. Feather. Published in 2006 by the American Society of Civil Engineers.