



WESTERN STATES WATER COUNCIL

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Web Page: www.westgov.org/wswc

Position No. 287

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VIA FAX: 202-226-6953
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The Honorable Grace Napolitano
Chair, Water and Power Subcommittee
Natural Resources Committee
1522 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Cathy McMorris
Ranking Republican Member
Water and Power Subcommittee
1329 Longworth HOB
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Madam Chair:

I'm writing as Chairman of the Western States Water Council to express the Council's views on H.R. 135, to establish the "Twenty-First Century Water Commission." The Council consists of member state representatives appointed by eighteen governors.

The Council's mission is to promote cooperation among its member states in the management and development of water resources in the West. In this capacity, the Council has recognized and documented the need for additional supplies to meet growing consumptive use demands and also to support existing water infrastructure rehabilitation. The Western Governors' Association adopted a June 2006 report, "Water Needs and Strategies for a Sustainable Future," prepared by the Council, with 28 recommendations for addressing future challenges. A copy of the report is enclosed, and is available at www.westgov.org.

Because the West is often subject to wide swings in water supplies, Council member states have identified drought planning and response as a priority problem, and similarly flagged flood emergency planning and response. Council member states also recognize as a significant challenge the need to sustain instream values generally, and specifically for maintaining and enhancing water quality, and for protecting endangered species. Overlying many of the above challenges are legal and institutional conflicts facing western states, many involving federal/state relationships, conflicts between states, and disputes among water users.

Given this context, it has been some time since a comprehensive study of the available water supplies and the future needs of the United States has been undertaken. Thus, a study, such as that proposed in H.R. 135, could be of substantial benefit to the West. The House has twice passed this legislation, but no action was taken in the Senate.

If such a commission is to be successful, it will be important that it represent the diverse interests that exist. This is particularly so in the West, which by its very nature is a semi-arid climate where there is heavy reliance on the ability to capture run-off from snowmelt and storage reservoirs. To assure that such representation exists, the Western States Water Council would be happy to be of assistance as members of the Commission are selected.

We appreciate the legislation's reference to the importance of state rights with regard to water resources. The last congressionally authorized commission on water, the Western Water Policy Review Advisory Commission established in 1996, was perceived to be flawed in this respect. In a very real way, state efforts collectively represent a "national water strategy." We encourage you to refer to the WGA Water Report, which underscores state priorities.

Nevertheless, the federal government's role is vital. There are numerous federal programs that deal with water resources development, management and protection. As a result, the issue of coordination of these programs and related federal projects to improve efficiency and their ability to assert states in the primary role in water management would be a useful focus for the Commission.

In summary, we believe that the work that is contemplated for the Twenty-First Century Water Commission under H.R. 135 could be beneficial. If it is to be successful, it will be vital that there be appropriate representation on the Commission to reflect the diverse interests across the nation in water resources, and that in its recommendations, the Commission reflect the long-held Congressional policy of deference to states regarding water management.

We appreciate your consideration of the Council's views on these matters.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Duane A. Smith". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized 'D' and 'S'.

Duane Smith, Chairman
Western States Water Council

Enclosure