



WESTERN STATES WATER COUNCIL

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Position #313

May 8, 2009

The Honorable Barbara Boxer, Chairman
Senate Environment & Public Works Committee
410 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510-6175

Dear Chairman Boxer,

The Western States Water Council advises the Western Governors' Association on water policy issues. We are interested by the passage in the House of the National Water Research and Development Initiative Act (H.R. 1145), and its intent to coordinate the federal government's role in designing and implementing federal water research, development, demonstration, data collection and dissemination, education, and technology transfer activities. We agree with the need to focus limited federal research resources, and would encourage an emphasis on practical applications addressing present and future water management challenges.

We are concerned that the proposed interagency committee and its charge appear to be modeled after the approach used by the federal government for the Climate Change Science Program (CCSP), an interagency effort, which has not proven to be particularly effective. External reviews of CCSP have highlighted the difficulties of managing a program so structured, and – most importantly from our perspective – the absence of dialog between the program and users of the information it would generate. Two-way communications with users of information from federal research programs – such as state and local governments – must be a key component of efforts to design federal water research programs. As presently drafted, H.R. 1145 lacks this key function, requiring only that in preparing the National Water Research and Assessment Plan “...the interagency committee shall consider and utilize recommendations and information from State, local, and tribal governments and contained in reports that have addressed water research needs.”

Not unlike our current national fiscal crisis, in the West we face an uncertain future due to increasing demands related to population growth and growing demands for water for both economic and environmental needs. We are living on past investments (federal, state, local and private) in an infrastructure system that has sustained us for over a century, but much of which is now well beyond its design life. Moreover, climate change and variability introduce a greater degree of uncertainty and threat to the sustainable use of our national water resources.

The Western Governors' Association has adopted a 2006 report entitled *Water Needs and Strategies for a Sustainable Future* and a 2008 *Next Steps* report. Both include a number of recommendations. As passed by the House and sent to the Senate, much of H.R. 1145 is consistent with these recommendations. We are interested in where the initiative coordination office might be located and how funding for the office will be allocated among the federal agencies.

The former included Recommendation 2.A. "Federal and state agencies should increase support and funding for state and federal basic water data gathering activities that can serve as the basis for sound decision making. Gaps in data should be identified. Remote sensing capabilities, including Landsat thermal data, and developing technologies, such as the use of Doppler radar to measure streamflows, are important tools that need to be retained and fostered..." and

Recommendation 2.B. "Use the research programs at western state universities to focus research on practical applications of promising new technologies, and identify areas where the increased use of technology...should be promoted to enable more efficient and cost effective operations."

The *Next Steps* report added Recommendation 7. "State and federal water resource agencies should work together to provide universal access to the water-related data collected by all state, local, and federal agencies, as well as tools and models that better enable the synthesis, visualization and evaluation of water-related data..." and

Recommendation 11. "The Congress and the Administration should support more spending for research and development related to innovative water conservation and supply augmentation strategies, including ground water recharge and recovery, desalination, recycling and reuse, and weather modification. Financial assistance should be provided as well where there is a significant national or regional benefit."

Our future prosperity as a Nation and a region will depend on wise investments in rebuilding our capacity to provide adequate supplies of clean fresh water for future generations. We appreciate your leadership in addressing these challenges and your commitment to investing in science and technology as a necessary step in wise decision-making and future problem-solving.

We would appreciate the opportunity to work with you as this and other legislation is considered further that would enhance our national research capabilities as they relate to addressing our water management challenges in the West and the Nation.

Sincerely,



Garland Erbe, Chairman
Western States Water Council