



WESTERN STATES WATER COUNCIL

942 East North Union Avenue, Suite A-201 | Midvale, Utah 84047-1764 | (801) 561-5300 | FAX (801) 255-9642

Web Page: www.westgov.org/lwswc

November 4, 2008

Position #311

Mr. Steven L. Stockton, P.E.
Director of Civil Works
Department of the Army
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
441 G Street NW
Washington, DC 20314-1000

Dear Mr. Stockton,

I wish to acknowledge receipt of your letter of October 23, 2008, and to express appreciation for your invitation to be of assistance to the Corps in their water planning initiative. We look forward to working with you and will designate a contact person in the near future for this purpose. In the meantime, we wish to convey the sense of the concern expressed at our recent meetings held in Oklahoma City to which you alluded. While the remainder of this letter was prepared prior to receipt of your letter, we did not alter the language, since we want to convey the nature of the concerns expressed at our meeting, as well as the desire of our members to be of assistance.

We applaud you for your interest in determining how federal assistance can best support states with implementing their planning efforts and presenting a "snapshot" of planning steps they are taking to meet their present and future water-related needs. However, the states need to be involved in any study up front.

We understand there may be an interest in completing a report in time to be of use to the new Administration and the new Congress -- but any unilateral, prescriptive evaluation of state water plans across the Nation is not likely to be effective and could be counterproductive to cooperative federal-state relationships. To be successful and useful the report must include states' input. With the limited time available it is imperative that the Corps meet soon with each state to obtain information, then each state and the Council must be given a reasonable amount of time to review and comment on the report.

Every western state has some form of a state water plan, or planning process, which has developed over time in response to evolving resource needs and financial and political constraints. The study should focus on opportunities to provide financial and technical assistance for state water planning, as opposed to a critical analysis of state water plans and administrative functions. There are valid reasons for the differences in state water planning processes, and federal incentives should focus on promoting strategic, integrated water resources planning to meet future needs, including infrastructure needs to adapt to climate change and facilitate sustainable growth.

The Western Governors' Association has adopted the 2006 Water Needs and Strategies for a Sustainable Future and 2008 "Next Steps" Reports. The 2006 Water Report encourages member states to "develop and implement strong state water plans" and directs that the WSWC compile a state-by-state and Westwide summary of existing water uses, water plans and planning efforts, current ground and surface water supplies, and anticipated future demands, then identify and evaluate trends and common themes." It adds, "The focus should be on a grassroots, watershed approach to identifying water problems and potential solutions from the ground up, integrating these efforts into individual state plans.

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Similarly, regional or multi-state and multiple river basin strategic plans should be comprised of these building blocks.”

Our first attempt at gathering western water use information revealed that many states lack the basic data on water supplies and demands, especially consumptive uses, needed to produce an effective water budget for future water planning and sound decisionmaking. The 2008 Next Steps Report identified a number of interim steps to help provide states with some of the data that is lacking and tools to better assess their water resource supplies and future needs, “recognizing that a truly national assessment must begin at the state and local level with appropriate technical and financial support from the federal government.”

We are not yet persuaded that the current direction of the Corps effort is in harmony with the Governors’ vision, and your oft expressed support for collaborative partnerships. We would also like to better understand what current statutory authority the Corps has available to implement their recommendations that emerge from this study that might be useful to the states. We would appreciate the opportunity to work with you to review the purposes and processes envisioned for this project, including the survey or interview questions, date and place for the Western regional conference and format for the National meeting, among other study details. In this regard, the anticipated West regional planning conference could be held prior to or in conjunction with the Council’s next regularly scheduled meetings in Kansas City, Kansas on April 22-24, 2009. An appropriate first step would be to define the West study region to include the 17 WSWC member states. We believe this is an opportunity to use the Council and recently created Western States Federal Agency Support Team (WestFAST) to enlist the support of the western states and other federal agencies for this effort and add value to the final product.

We sincerely appreciate our past working relationship and look forward to exploring ways to more effectively collaborate on this study now and in the future.

Sincerely,



Garland Erbele, Chairman
Western States Water Council

cc: Jonne Hower, Federal Liaison Officer