



Committee on Natural Resources U.S. House of Representatives

Chairman Doc Hastings

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Current Drought Conditions Highlight Need for Water Storage Legislation to Provide Important Water Supplies

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Today, the House Natural Resources Subcommittee on Water and Power held a legislative hearing on three proposals aimed at jumpstarting surface water storage development through the western United States.

“In my central Washington state district, the Yakima Valley is a poster child for needing new surface storage. Conservation plays an important part of meeting water needs in the Valley, but farmers, communities and environmental needs demand that we create new water. And, time and again, the numbers alone dictate the need for new storage,” said Chairman Doc Hastings (WA-04). “For new and expanded storage reservoirs to become a reality in the Yakima Valley and elsewhere in the West, there must a sea-change in how the federal government reacts to new storage. The current paralysis-by-analysis approach must be streamlined and we, as policymakers, must find innovative ways to re-invest in storage while adhering to the ‘beneficiaries pay’ rule. That’s exactly what these bills before us do today.”

“These bills are intended to advance the theory that we can once again return to the policy of abundance,” said Subcommittee Chairman Tom McClintock (CA-04). “For years we have been told that water conservation is the answer to our problems, well water conservation is important in managing a major drought but it does not add to supply. What we are now discovering is that by confusing conservation with supply we have no way to cope with drought. If this current drought has taught us anything, it must be that there is no substitute for adding supply and these bills begin to restore that process for a new generation that is sadder and wiser from the mistakes of their predecessors.”

Much of the western United States is facing historic drought. New water storage development is critical to providing and storing water supplies for farmers, ranchers and municipalities. Additionally, multi-purpose dams and reservoirs can generate affordable emissions-free electricity, tame ravaging floods, provide recreational opportunities and provide year-round cold water flows for fisheries. Current bureaucratic paralysis and duplicative federal regulations delay proposed water storage projects for years while environmental litigation, regulations and population growth strain current infrastructure.

During today’s hearing, Committee Members heard from witnesses who testified on the critical nature of water storage legislation and solutions presented in legislative proposals.

[Chris Hurd](#), San Joaquin Valley Farmer, Family Farm Alliance Board Member, testified on the economic impacts of water shortages on California farmers and the need for a legislative solution facilitating new water storage. *“Maybe we should ask our grandparents and our parents, whose hardships led to the foresight to build our existing reservoirs, canal systems, and other infrastructure we enjoy today, and upon which our quality of life depends, whether or not these costs are justified. Our generation must step up and continue to develop our water resources to better meet our future needs, including those of our environment, and this water storage discussion draft bill would go a long way in helping us in this endeavor.”*

[Patrick O’Toole](#), President, Family Farm Alliance, supports H.R 3980, the *Water Supply Permitting Coordination Act (McClintock, Lummis)* to accomplish better agency coordination regarding the federal permitting process for developing additional water supplies. *“Clearly, the existing procedures for developing additional water supplies need to be revised to make project approval less burdensome. By the time project applicants approach federal agencies for permits to construct multi-million dollar projects; they have already invested extensive resources toward analyzing project alternatives to determine which project is best suited to their budgetary constraints.”*

[Stuart Somach](#), Lawyer, Somach Simmons and Dunn, testified on H.R. 3981, *The Accelerated Revenue, Repayment, and Surface Water Storage Enhancement Act (Hastings, WA)*. *“Enactment of this legislation will provide a comprehensive means for those who desire early repayment to do so. It, of course, also avoids the ‘piecemeal’ legislative process that has been used in the past. It also provides a mechanism to assist in the financing and development of surface water storage without adding new federal budget related pressures.”*

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