

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE



Opening Statement
The Honorable Tom McClintock
Chairman
House Water and Power Subcommittee
Oversight Hearing on “Examining the Spending, Priorities and the Missions of the Bureau of Reclamation and the U.S. Geological Survey’s Water Resources Program”
March 2, 2011

With today’s hearing, the Water and Power Sub-Committee will begin the process of restoring abundance as the principal objective of America’s Federal water and power policy. We meet today to receive testimony from the Bureau of Reclamation and the U.S. Geological Service on their plans for the coming year. We do so in conjunction with our responsibility under the Federal Budget Act to provide guidance to the House Budget Committee as it prepares the 2012 budget and with our responsibility under House Resolution 72 to identify regulations and practices of the government that are impeding job creation and burdening economic growth.

In my opinion, all of these hearings and all of the actions stemming from them must be focused on developing the vast water and hydro-electric resources in our nation. The failure of the last generation to keep pace with our water and power needs has caused chronic water shortages and skyrocketing electricity prices that are causing serious economic harm.

In addition, willful policies that have deliberately misallocated our resources must be reversed.

California’s Central Valley, where 200 billion gallons of water were deliberately diverted away from vital agriculture for the enjoyment and amusement of the 2-inch Delta Smelt is a case in point. These water diversions have destroyed a quarter million acres of the most fertile farmland in America, thrown tens of thousands of farm families into unemployment and impacted fruit, vegetable and nut prices in grocery stores across America.

In Northern Arizona, 1,000 megawatts of hydroelectricity – enough to power a million homes – has been lost due to environmental mandates for the humpback chub.

In the Klamath, the federal government is seeking to destroy four perfectly good hydroelectric dams at the cost of more than a half billion dollars at a time when we can’t guarantee enough electricity to keep refrigerators running this summer. The rationale is to save the salmon, but the same proposal would close the Iron Gate Fish Hatchery that produces 5 million salmon smolt each year.

Meanwhile, funds that ought to be going to water and power development are instead being squandered on subsidizing low-flow toilets, salmon festivals, tiger salamander studies and grants to private associations whose principal activity is to sue the federal government.

We have also thrown hundreds of millions of taxpayer dollars into wildly expensive conservation programs that do little or nothing to develop new water and power resources.

Those days are over.

It is the objective of this sub-committee to restore the original – and as yet unfulfilled -- mission of the Bureau of Reclamation – to develop and utilize our nation’s vast water and hydroelectric resources to build a new era of abundance and prosperity for our nation.

And, I might add, to complete the greening of the west, to tame the environmentally devastating cycle of floods and droughts and to assure the perpetuation and propagation of all species through expansion of fish hatcheries and other cost-effective means.

We will seek to inventory all of our potential water and power resources, establish and apply a uniform cost-benefit analysis to prioritize financing for those projects that produce the greatest benefits at the lowest costs, and to restore the “beneficiary pays” doctrine that assures those who benefit from these projects pay for these projects, protecting general taxpayers of one community from being plundered for projects that exclusively benefit another.

With these policies in place, we can fulfill the Bureau’s original mission, to make the desert bloom and to open a new era in America where water and power shortages – and the policies that created them -- are a distant memory.

I also want to acknowledge the past work of the U.S. Geological Survey that produced accurate and reliable data necessary for sound resource policy and management. Today I will merely express the expectation that it will take stronger steps to resist efforts to politicize or compromise its work. I especially endorse Mr. Werkheiser’s statement that “the public deserves to know whether its investments are having tangible results.”

I hope that this administration will become a partner in this new era of abundance rather than an obstacle. The rationing of shortages has never solved a shortage – only a policy of abundance can do that. We have wasted not only money but time, and we can afford to waste no more of either.