

Statement of William E. Rinne
Acting Commissioner, Bureau of Reclamation
U.S. Department of the Interior

Before the House Resources Committee
Subcommittee on Water and Power

H.R. 630

City of Yuma Improvement Act
July 27, 2006

Mr. Chairman, I am William E. Rinne, Acting Commissioner of the Bureau of Reclamation. I am pleased to provide the Administration's views of H.R. 630, which provides for the transfer of certain Federal lands managed by the Bureau of Reclamation to the City of Yuma, Arizona, and the receipt by the Bureau of Reclamation of clear title to certain parcels of land, known as the "railroad parcels," which are used by Reclamation for its Yuma Desalting Plant. The Department supports the intent of this legislation, but we believe that this can be accomplished through existing land transfer processes provided by the General Service Administration's authorities.

There would be benefits to both Reclamation and the City of Yuma from this land transfer. Reclamation will obtain clear title to portions of a railroad right-of-way required for the delivery of chemicals to the Yuma Desalting Plant managed by Reclamation's Yuma Area Office. The title to the rail property has been clouded for many years due to its sale by Southern Pacific Transportation Company to both the City of Yuma and Reclamation.

In exchange for giving up its claim to the railroad parcels, this legislation provides that the City of Yuma would obtain title to seven parcels currently owned by Reclamation located within the City. These parcels total approximately 7 acres but are scattered throughout the City. The parcels slated for transfer are difficult for Reclamation to manage and are not usable for project purposes. Previously, three of the Federal parcels were used by the Yuma County Water Users Association for ditch rider residences. These residences have been moved to more convenient locations, and Reclamation has no further need for these properties or any of the other parcels listed in this exchange. The City of Yuma will use these properties in order to further the City's development plans.

As a matter of policy, we support working with states and local governments to resolve land tenure and land transfer issues that advance worthwhile public policy objectives, and we have no objection to the transfer of these specific lands from Reclamation ownership. While none of the parcels to be exchanged has been appraised, Reclamation's rough estimate is that the parcels being conveyed to the City are not worth more than \$500,000. We view this as a directed exchange by Congress, not an equal value exchange.

We think that the end goal of transferring the lands in question to the City is laudable, but we note that this legislation provides for a directed exchange that avoids the normal procedures followed for Federal land disposal. The value to the United States of clear title to the railroad parcels is uncertain. The lack of established value from the railroad parcels does not compel opposition to the proposed transfer. However, in the absence of legislation, an administrative process exists through which the General Services Administration (GSA) can accomplish the intended purpose of this legislation. The Administrator of GSA can make government-owned land available at no cost to cities such as Yuma for a variety of public use purposes, such as public health, public education, for historic monuments, airports, parks and recreation, emergency rescue, fire fighting, law enforcement, and many other public uses. We could support this legislation if it included a role for GSA in ensuring that the lands to be transferred meet GSA's criteria for transfer to the City without compensation to the Federal government.

Additionally, the City of Yuma has updated its Proposed Property Ownership map since this legislation was originally introduced. Reclamation recommends Section 2(a)2 of the bill be amended to strike reference to the City's August 2004 map and instead refer to the July 25, 2005 map.

This concludes my statement. I am pleased to answer any questions.