

**Statement of John Tubbs, Deputy Assistant Secretary  
for Water and Science  
U.S. Department of the Interior**

**Before the  
Committee on Natural Resources  
Subcommittee on Water and Power  
U.S. House of Representatives  
June 17, 2010**

**HR 4719 – Southwest Border Region Water Task Force**

Madam Chairwoman and Members of the Subcommittee, I am John Tubbs, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Water and Science at the Department of the Interior (Department). I am pleased to provide the views of the Department on HR 4719, legislation to establish the “Southwest Border Region Water Task Force.” The Department supports the intent of HR 4719. However, we believe the legislation is unnecessary given existing authorities, is potentially problematic to implement, and it would have to compete for funds with the ongoing operations, maintenance and construction obligations on the Department and its bureaus.

HR 4719 would establish a multi-agency, border-region water Task Force comprised of representatives from at least seven Federal agencies including the Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation), the Environmental Protection Agency, the Department of Agriculture, the Department of Housing and Urban Development, the Army Corps of Engineers, the Economic Development Administration, and the Indian Health Service. Among other things, the bill calls on the Task Force to assess the water needs of communities in the southwest border region (defined as California, Arizona, New Mexico and Texas), determine “the relative priority of water projects in the Southwest region”, and submit regular reports to Congress and the public regarding the execution of the Task Force’s duties.

The Department supports efforts to address the future of America’s and the Southwest’s water supply. In Reclamation’s Fiscal Year (FY) 2011 budget request, the Department established a program called WaterSMART (Sustain and Manage America’s Resources for Tomorrow), that is consistent with many of the long-term goals in HR 4719. WaterSMART’s purpose is to ensure that the Department pursues a sustainable water supply by providing Federal leadership and assistance to help secure and stretch water supplies for use by existing and future generations. Of particular interest to the Southwest region, the previously established Basin Studies component of the WaterSMART Program is already at work on a study of the Colorado River Basin, which will analyze how the basin’s existing water and power infrastructure will perform in response to the projections of future water supplies and demands. This Colorado River Basin Study is a joint effort of Reclamation and the seven Colorado River Basin states, and also

includes participation of tribes and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The Department's FY 2011 Budget requested \$72.9 million for the WaterSmart initiative, a \$36.4 million increase over the FY 2010 enacted levels for these programs.

Also in the Southwest, Reclamation's FY 2011 budget request seeks funds to establish two new Landscape Conservation Cooperatives (LCCs) in regions that include parts of California, Arizona, New Mexico and Texas. The LCCs will coordinate climate change science efforts and resource management strategies among users of the River. The involvement of States, Tribes, other Federal agencies, NGOs and other stakeholders in the LCCs will be key to this process.

Reclamation operates extensive water and power infrastructure in the Southwest, including major features of the Colorado River Storage Project and the Boulder Canyon Project. In a typical year, Reclamation's projects along the Lower Colorado River deliver 7.5 million acre-feet (maf) of water to users in Arizona, California, Nevada, and 1.5 maf to the country of Mexico. The water helps irrigate more than 2.5 million acres of land and meet the domestic needs of more than 23 million people. Powerplants at Hoover, Davis and Parker Dams typically generate about six billion kilowatt hours of hydroelectric power each year. This power, enough to serve nearly 1.4 million homes, is distributed to contractors in Arizona, Nevada and California. Upriver, the features of the Colorado River Storage Project, which include Glen Canyon Dam, produce about 4.5 billion kilowatt hours of power and provide recreation opportunities for several million people in a given year.

Reclamation continues to work with dozens of local entities who use the water and power from these projects to improve their infrastructure. But even with those activities underway, several potential problems could complicate implementation of the provisions in HR 4719, which calls for the prioritization of water projects in several states, particularly within the six-month intervals called for in the bill. The Federal role in each state's water infrastructure varies widely depending on the projects and the relevant statutory history. A methodology for determining the "relative priority of water projects in the southwest border region" is not defined in the bill, and raises a number of policy and administrative questions. Within Reclamation and the Department, an annual budget is formulated with consideration for a number of priorities such as project capability, contracts, operations and maintenance needs, tribal, compact or treaty obligations, Indian water rights settlements and other factors. And while this process of budget formulation takes place across the 17 Reclamation states, it does not strictly break down to the four-state southwestern border area as defined by the bill or its reference to Section 15732 of Title 40 of the U.S. Code.

While a number of Federal agencies are participating in authorized water projects throughout the southwest border region, the Federal roles, authorizations and cost shares for those projects vary widely according to the specific statutory history underlying each of these projects, as referenced above. Each project is at various stages of conception, design, construction or often even

litigation, with wide variability in the status of the non-Federal cost shares. Reclamation outlines its priorities and objectives in the President's budget and projects are provided with funding via the annual appropriations process.

It is unclear what criteria would be used to prioritize these projects across agencies through the Task Force, and further unclear what effect such prioritization would have, given that the process could be subjective and of uncertain value, and would not provide any new resources that lead toward a project's completion. This bill also duplicates many of the activities and authorities that agencies use to implement and execute their water resource-related programs and projects. Also, while the Department does not support the process described in HR 4719, many of the duties assigned to the Task Force under Section 1 paragraphs (c), (d), and (e) may benefit from inclusion of the International Boundary and Water Commission (IBWC) under paragraph (b).

Madam Chairwoman, this concludes my written statement. I am pleased to answer any questions the Subcommittee may have.

**STATEMENT OF JOHN TUBBS, DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY  
FOR WATER AND SCIENCE  
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR**

**BEFORE THE  
COMMITTEE ON RESOURCES  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON WATER AND POWER  
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**ON**

**H.R. 5487, “WATER RESOURCES RESEARCH ACT AMENDMENTS OF 2010”**

Madam Chairwoman and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to discuss the Department's views on H.R. 5487, “Water Resources Research Amendments Act of 2010,” a bill to reauthorize grants for fiscal year FY 2012 through 2016 for applied water supply research regarding the water resources research and technology institutes established under the Water Resources Research Act of 1984.

The Department agrees with the goals of the Water Resources Research Act of 1984, specifically to support academic research to aid in the resolution of State and regional water problems, to promote technology transfer, and to provide for training of scientists and engineers. The program authorized by this Act involves collaboration that includes other Federal partners, plus State and local governments, universities, and the private sector. The Department strongly supports H.R. 5487 to reauthorize grants for applied water supply research. This program has proven to be a success and continues to make valuable contributions.

Evaluations are currently required every 3 years, but this bill changes the evaluation period from 3 years to 5 years as authorized in previous legislation. The Department supports this revision for reasons of both cost and effectiveness. Because research projects take more than 3 years to complete and publish, a 5 year cycle allows a better evaluation of the program.

In addition, there is growing evidence that strong research of water resources issues will be increasingly important as water managers work to adapt water programs to more variable hydrologic conditions as a result of a changing climate. The legislation should recognize the importance of addressing climate change related issues as part of a larger water resources agenda. The legislation provides a mechanism to encourage graduate students in research projects related to climate change. Research priorities under section 104(g) are set jointly by the Institutes and the Secretary of the Interior and could therefore include topics related to climate change and could place an emphasis on projects involving graduate students.

### Program Overview

The Water Resources Research Act of 1984 established a Federal-State partnership in water resources research, education, and information transfer through a matching grant program that authorizes State Water Resources Research Institutes at land grant universities across the Nation. There are currently 54 Institutes: one in each State, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and Guam. The Guam institute also serves the Federated States of Micronesia and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands. The Institutes provide new opportunities for young people through their research and educational efforts. Student internships supported by the Institutes provide an invaluable and practical training experience for the next generation of hydrologic scientists and engineers and afford students the unprecedented opportunity to participate in research projects while helping to influence their decision to pursue careers in water resources.

The Water Resources Research Act Program provides an institutional mechanism for promoting State, regional, and national coordination of water resources research, training coordination, and information and technology transfer. In 2009, the program provided training and support to over 500 undergraduate and graduate students by involving them in institute-sponsored research activities funded under the Act. With its matching requirements, the program is also a key mechanism for promoting State investments in research and training. In fact, the Institutes have developed a constituency and a program that far exceeds that supported by their direct Federal appropriation. As part of the ongoing evaluation mandated by the Act, the institutes reported that over the 5-year period 2003 through 2007, they obtained over \$346 million in funding from state, local, and other federal agencies through grants, contracts, cooperative agreements, and other arrangements. This is an annual average of \$69 million, or \$1.3 million per institute.

Each Institute operates a program of multi-year research, education, and information transfer projects focused on State and regional water resource priorities. In 2009, the Institutes supported 225 applied research projects utilizing Federal and matching funds. Most institutes selected these projects in response to priorities established by the Institutes' advisory committees and through a competitive, peer-review process.

### Conclusion

The Department strongly supports H.R. 5487 reauthorizing the Water Resources Resource Act. This program has proven to be a successful partnership that continues to make valuable contributions.

This concludes my formal statement, Madam Chairwoman. I will be pleased to respond to your questions.