

November 29, 2011

U.S. House of Representatives
Subcommittee on Water and Power
Washington, DC 20515

Re: HR 3263; Lake Thunderbird Efficient Use Act of 2011

I am Randy Worden, District Manager of the Central Oklahoma Master Conservancy District. The District's headquarters are located at 12500 Alameda Dr., Norman, OK 73026. The District, under contract with the Bureau of Reclamation, operates and maintains the Norman Project which was approved by an act of Congress on June 27, 1960 (74 Stat. 225) and which authorized construction, operation and maintenance of the Norman Project. The Norman Project includes Lake Thunderbird and its dam, raw water pumping facility, relift pumping facility, tanks, pipelines and all properties and rights-of-way associated with the project. The District provides water to the cities of Del City, Midwest City and Norman with an approximate population of 225,000 people.

The proposed legislation (HR 3263) will allow the Norman Project to import and store non-project water in Lake Thunderbird.

The Bureau of Reclamation, in its Definite Plan Report for the Norman Project, determined the firm yield of the lake to be 21,800 AF. Based on Reclamation's analysis, the Oklahoma Water Resources Board granted 21,600 AF of water rights to the District. Reclamation's determined yield was based on conjunctive use with the cities providing 4800 acre-feet of groundwater to firm up the yield in the lake. Arsenic contaminated many of the wells used by the customer cities in the Bureau's analysis of the lake's firm yield, thus removing them from operation. Additionally, population growth has consumed some of the groundwater reserved to firm up the lake's yield. Therefore, the water supply is not adequate to provide the firm yield of 21,600 acre-feet as permitted by the Oklahoma Water Resources Board during a repeat of the drought of record.

Oklahoma has been in a drought since July 2010, despite a few showers that have occurred this Fall. The drought has resulted in decreased lake elevations, implementation of conservation measures by user cities and serious concern over the potential water supply shortfall. Further, the drought conditions are projected to continue through 2012. The existing and projected drought conditions make it extremely important to gain passage of HR 3263.

In 2009, the District authorized an Augmentation Study to investigate possible water supply sources to augment the water supply in Lake Thunderbird. The study was completed in 2010. The study included an Environmental Assessment (EA) to insure there would be no harmful impacts from importing and storing water from Atoka and McGee Creek Reservoirs in Southeast Oklahoma. The EA resulted in a Finding Of No Significant Impact (FONSI) to import and store water from Atoka and McGee Creek Reservoirs into Lake Thunderbird. Concurrent with the study, the District had discussions with the City of Oklahoma City to purchase raw water from its Atoka Pipeline that crosses the northern end of Lake Thunderbird as it transports water from Atoka / McGee Creek Reservoirs to Lake Stanley Draper, an Oklahoma City owned lake within its city limits. Per a draft agreement, the District would tap the Oklahoma City pipeline and construct a diversion from the pipeline to Lake Thunderbird and secure a permit to divert 4800 acre-feet of raw water during an extended drought. However, the District cannot proceed with finalizing a contract until the District obtains congressional authorization allowing the District to import and store non-project water in Lake Thunderbird.

It is imperative that HR 3263 be approved to provide adequate water supplies during an extended drought. Therefore, the District respectfully requests approval of HR 3263 by the Water & Power Sub-committee at its committee hearing on December 2, 2011.

Sincerely,

Randy Worden
District Manager