

Testimony of Gary W. Darling
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Before the House Committee on Natural Resources
Subcommittee on Water and Power
H.R.2442
The Bay Area Regional Water Recycling Program Expansion Act of 2009
July 21, 2009

Madam Chairwoman, good morning. My name is Gary Darling and I am the General Manager of the Delta Diablo Sanitation District in Antioch, California.

I appreciate the invitation to appear today to present testimony on behalf of the Bay Area Regional Water Recycling Coalition (BARWC), a partnership of Bay Area regional water recycling agencies, in strong support of H.R.2442, the "Bay Area Regional Water Recycling Program Expansion Act of 2009."

At the outset, I want to extend the Coalition's deepest appreciation to Congressman George Miller for his vision and leadership in introducing this much-needed water legislation which will help eight Bay Area communities increase their municipal water supplies through innovative water recycle projects. I also want to commend Representatives Eshoo, Lofgren, Tauscher, Speier, Honda, Stark, McNerney, and Woolsey for being original cosponsors of the bill, which also affects critical projects in their Districts.

Madam Chairwoman, as a matter of background, the Coalition has projects authorized under Title XVI of Public Law 102-575 as amended through the Bay Area Regional Water Recycling Program. This Program is a partnership of Federal, State and local agencies focused on feasible use of recycled water in the San Francisco Bay Area - home to one-sixth of California's population. Since 1999, when our Bay Area Water Recycling Master Plan was completed, our agencies have invested over \$280 million planning, designing and building water recycling projects. With continued State and Federal funding assistance, including the President's American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, we can continue to successfully develop recycled water projects that provide new sustainable dry weather supplies to the Bay-Delta area, benefitting not only our region, but also the State of California and the nation.

I last appeared before this Subcommittee in May 2007. At that time, as spokesperson for BARWC, I sought support for H.R.1526, which was signed into Public Law 110-229 in May 2008. This resulted in authorization of seven new projects and subsequent funding for five of these. I want to commend you, Madam Chairwoman, for your leadership in that effort. You have always taken a personal, direct interest in California's water supply issues, and many recognize your invaluable contributions.

I'm proud to report that our Coalition's objective of working together in collaboration rather than pursuing individual agency interests is successfully producing water reuse projects focused on creating long-term sustainability and drought-tolerant water supplies. Reuse projects with regional and statewide benefits have received priority funding and implementation support.

To give you a brief example, one of the projects where the Subcommittee's support has made a difference is the Redwood City Recycled Water Project, which recently completed construction of recycled water treatment, storage, pumping and distribution facilities, providing recycled water for landscape irrigation, commercial, and industrial uses. Through this authorized BARWC project, Redwood City is currently saving approximately 50 million gallons of drinking water per year. The City is currently seeking authorization for a new project to meet its goal of saving 300 million gallons of drinking water by 2010. This is just one project in the BARWC.

There is still much work to be done around the important issues of water efficiency and conservation. We have an urgent need to address the issues of water stress and scarcity which plague much of the western region of our great nation.

According to the Natural Resources Defense Council, water will be one of the major environmental issues of the 21st century. It's a natural resource that is already in short supply across parts of the United States and the world – and it will become even scarcer as our population grows and our climate changes.

As you are already aware, California has serious water supply challenges. Currently two-thirds of the San Francisco Bay Area's water supply is imported. In February, Governor Schwarzenegger warned that "California faces its third consecutive year of drought and [it] must prepare for the worst - a fourth, fifth or even sixth year of drought."

As our State's need for water continues to grow, so too does our responsibility to secure long-term sustainable water options. An increasing population coupled with decreasing precipitation and Sierra snowpack make it imperative that we actively seek conservation and water recycling programs to withstand the effects of climate change and drought.

Water recycling and reuse enables us to address these challenges. Research indicates recycled water could meet thirty percent of the projected increase in 2030 regional water demands. Water sourced from storage reservoirs is equivalent of up to five times more than that which is produced by water recycling. Using virtually drought-proof recycled water for irrigation, landscaping and industrial purposes dramatically reduces dependence on freshwater.

However, water sourcing is only one component of the challenge we face. As you correctly point out on your website Madam Chairwoman, "Our nation's water infrastructure is aging and deteriorating. Huge quantities of water that could be recycled are instead flushed out to sea." Lack of adequate infrastructure remains one of our biggest obstacles to offering more recycled water, faster and more efficiently across our communities. Installation of designated "purple" pipeline remains one of the largest costs associated with recycled water.

Our Coalition is actively working to implement viable water recycling programs. Projects have been undertaken by Coalition members resulting in over 22,000 acre feet of recycled water being supplied to Bay Area communities and businesses. And there are many more opportunities for us to be active leaders in addressing the growing issues of water conservation and reuse.

But we can't do it alone. Federal funding and support is the strongest foundation we have to guarantee the successful adoption and implementation of water-efficient technologies and practices. Federal support enables us to stretch limited water supplies and protect precious ecosystems to the benefit of citizens in a far broader geography than simply the communities our agencies serve.

As Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar indicated during his visit to the Delta this past April, “It is time to modernize, it is time to make hard choices and it is time for the Federal government to reengage in full partnership with the 21st century water system for the State of California.” Water recycling and reuse technology must be a large component of this new system.

Today I’m asking your support for H.R.2442 which builds on the success of last Congress by making six additional recycled water projects eligible for a 25% federal cost-sharing investment. This will enable more cities across the Bay Area to connect with the recycled water network by installing new pump stations, piping and storage tanks. This will directly result in reduced demand from six Bay Area communities on scarce fresh water from the Bay-Delta.

These six new projects will generate over 8,000 acre-feet per year of new sustainable water supply. That’s over 2.6 billion gallons per year or 7.2 million gallons per day. That’s enough to meet the needs of nearly 24,000 homes. It will reduce wastewater discharges to aquatic environments, and reduce the demand for limited fresh water from our fragile Bay-Delta system.

Water recycling is a responsible water supply option that is less energy-intensive than almost all other water supply options. As there is a steady supply of wastewater, recycled water is virtually drought-proof. However, without Federal partnership providing vital 25% capital, we risk these valuable projects not being developed. H.R.2442 will enable us to build six new projects and fully fund two more. It will allow for valuable financial support in these difficult economic times to public agencies being challenged with decreasing revenue and increasing expenditures. Without these cost sharing measures, many of our projects risk not being completed or may fail to get started at all.

These six innovative water recycling projects covered under H.R.2442 answer President Obama’s call to ensure the safety of our environment and to rebuild our economic vitality and investments now for future generations. Because when we protect our resources, we protect our future.

California’s water supply continues to be precious, but limited. In the San Francisco Bay Area, our Coalition is actively undertaking unprecedented collaborative water recycling projects which answer the challenge of ensuring we have sufficient freshwater supplies to maintain a good quality of life and sustain our much needed economic growth – not just for today or tomorrow, but in the future as well.

I’m here today to ask the Subcommittee to join with our Coalition once again to lead a new direction of water recycling initiatives which can directly benefit millions of Californians and the Bay-Delta ecosystem. These projects offer the Federal government an opportunity to leverage Federal funds for significant benefit. These projects help achieve the objectives of the Central Valley Project Improvement Act and the Bay Delta Conservation Plan. Investing in the work being undertaken by our Coalition will result in advanced technologies which protect the health of our communities and environment, while providing long-term economic benefits.

Your support for H.R.2442 will build on an already progressive and proven partnership between the Federal government and local communities to expand the successful regional water recycling program across the San Francisco Bay Area.

Accordingly, the Coalition urges support for H.R.2442. Thank you.