

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HR 630
SUBCOMMITTEE ON WATER AND POWER
COMMITTEE ON RESOURCES

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My name is Charles Flynn. For the past seven years, I have been responsible for the City of Yuma's riverfront redevelopment, which includes riverfront parks, wetlands restoration, and downtown commercial revitalization. I appreciate the Subcommittee's willingness to take my testimony in support of HR 630. I would like to thank our congressional delegation—in particular, Congressman Raul Grijalva and Senator Jon Kyl-- for their bi-partisan leadership on this issue.

Like many American cities in the 20 th Century, Yuma had neglected its river heritage. For the past decade, the Yuma community has worked to reconnect with the Colorado River. The Plan for the Yuma Crossing National Heritage Area includes the reclaiming of a former city dump into a 110 acre riverfront park called West Wetlands and a massive 1400 acre wetlands restoration project just east of Yuma. However, the most ambitious project is the City of Yuma's plan to redevelop 22 acres along Yuma's downtown riverfront.

The City recognizes that this 22-acre commercial redevelopment project is essentially a local responsibility. The challenge has been that the state and federal governments have previously owned large portions of the 22 acre site. Over the past six years, we have assisted in the relocation of a National Guard facility and a Border Patrol Sector headquarters. The City has spent considerable sums to facilitate relocation and assemble these properties.

At the same time, the City has been working with a private sector development partner to implement an \$80 million redevelopment, which includes a riverfront hotel/conference center, Arizona Welcome Center, office buildings, residential condominiums, and retail shops. The developer is intending to begin construction on the hotel/conference center by the end of 2006. A map of this redevelopment plan is included with my written testimony.

There are several elements to this land exchange that are crucial to the success of the riverfront project.

First, within the core area east of 4 th Avenue, there is a patchwork quilt of ownership--which dates from the inception of the Yuma project in 1905 —which needs to be resolved for the benefit of both the City of Yuma and the Bureau of Reclamation. The Bureau of Reclamation would receive title to City-owned land over which their railroad tracks run to the Desalinization Plant. The City would receive title to "orphan" parcels which serve no purpose to the Bureau of Reclamation. These core parcels represent an equivalent exchange.

Second, there are two parcels further to the west which have been used for over 50 years by the Yuma County Water Users Association (YCWUA) for essential functions of the Yuma Project. In 2003, the City of Yuma paid all costs (totaling about \$400,000) to relocate these YCWUA functions.

This commitment by the City freed up these parcels for important local public uses like an Arizona Welcome Center and an ancillary water treatment facility. The urgency of this exchange has increased when the State of Arizona recently appropriated \$2 million to build the Arizona Welcome Center-- *but with the condition that the land involved must be owned by the City of Yuma, not the Federal government.*

For the past six years, City of Yuma and Reclamation staff have worked together to try to make sense of this property situation, and came to an agreement in principle in 2003.

For the past three years, the City has proceeded with all required environmental compliance and, as mentioned, has paid for the relocation of the Yuma County Water Users Association functions. All that remains is for Congress to provide authorization for this exchange.

The Subcommittee also needs to be aware of recent developments in the Senate. In late 2005, we learned that another parcel needed for redevelopment within this area could not be purchased or exchanged administratively with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Senator Kyl therefore amended his legislation to provide for the direct purchase of this parcel by the City of Yuma at fair market value. We support this change in the legislation and ask that the Subcommittee consider amending

HR 630 to support the addition of the US Fish and Wildlife property in the transaction, as reflected in S.1529.

Passage of this legislation will facilitate the riverfront development, including the Arizona Welcome Center and hotel/conference center construction. With the assistance of Congress, Yuma will be able to regain control and ownership of this land and return it to productive use—restoring the Yuma Crossing to its legacy as a hub of riverfront commerce.

Thank you again for the opportunity to speak in support of HR 630 and S.1529.