

Opening Statement of the Honorable Cory Gardner

Committee on Natural Resources

Subcommittee on Water and Power

“Water for Our Future and Job Creation: Examining Regulatory and Bureaucratic Barriers to New Surface Storage Infrastructure”

February 7, 2011

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to thank Chairman McClintock, Ranking Member Napolitano, and my other colleagues on this committee for allowing me the opportunity to participate in this hearing.

The issue before this committee today presents many challenges to all members of Congress and especially members from the west. Water is arguably our most valuable resource. By 2050, my home state of Colorado will need an additional 1 million acre feet of water to meet all of our agricultural and municipal demands. Conservation alone cannot meet these demands. We have an obligation to prepare this country’s future generations by storing water. This hearing is critical to understanding the federal barriers that inhibit local communities and states from developing new dams, reservoirs and storage systems.

Water is an economic driver. In order to attract more growth to the western United States – either in business or agriculture – every industry depends upon an ample water supply. If our economy is going to expand and create jobs, it is going to need more water. As we work to attract more jobs to the West, the people who work those jobs are going to need water. If agriculture is to remain vibrant, it too must have water.

My congressional district is the 11th highest producing agricultural district in the United States. Farmers and ranchers know the importance of water. Lack of supply has caused sales and leases to become increasingly more expensive. The additional water storage that Colorado requires can only be realized by rethinking the way the Federal government works. Whether through adverse permitting requirements, the NEPA process, ESA restrictions or costly litigation – the federal government keeps pushing the problem down the road and inhibiting our states from doing what they need to do. If we do not act fast, many farms will suffer from agricultural dry-up costing jobs and ruining our communities. Throughout the West there are periods of dismal precipitation and prolonged drought. New water storage infrastructure can alleviate the burden placed on agriculture during these periods.

One project in particular I would like to bring to the attention of the committee is the Northern Integrated Supply Project or NISP. NISP would construct a water storage reservoir off stream of the Poudre River in Colorado. This proposed project would ensure the river flows year round by diverting water to a reservoir during periods of high flow and sending water back to the river during periods of low flow. The project is popular with the people of the Front Range of Colorado. Yet, NISP is still stuck in the permitting process at the Army Corp of Engineers and continues to be delayed because of the regulatory barriers that water projects go through. Not to mention, NISP has received a barrage of attacks from outside interest groups. One of the most recent attacks was the rumor that it would hurt agriculture in Northern Colorado, yet every major agricultural organization in the state supports NISP moving forward. This hearing today will

shed light on the misinformation that is circulating regarding water storage projects. Misinformation often leads to costly delays that simultaneously hurt our economic growth and deprive our people of the water they so desperately need.

There is truly enough water for everyone and we can meet both our agriculture and municipal usages. I am tired of seeing farmers sell their water rights because of the scarcity in our water supply. We need to rethink the Federal government's role in water storage and redefine the missions of the various agencies from the Army Corp of Engineers, to the Environmental Protection Agency and the Bureau of Reclamation. If the state of Colorado was to build every water storage project on the books today, the state would still fall short our of expected future water needs. This needs to change. I am ready to get to work on this issue. I thank the committee for allowing me to participate, and I thank the witnesses for being here. I yield back the balance of my time.