Testimony of Susan Mulligan
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Before the House Committee on Natural Resources
Subcommittee on Water and Power
H.R. 2522
To Raise the Ceiling on the Federal Share of the Cost of the
Calleguas Municipal Water District Recycling Project
July 21, 2009

Chair Napolitano, members of the Subcommittee, and staff, good morning and thank you for the opportunity to testify today on this very important issue.

My name is Susan Mulligan and I am the Manager of Engineering for Calleguas Municipal Water District, which provides water to about 75 percent of the population of Ventura County, or 650,000 people, about 50 miles northwest of Los Angeles, California.

I want to thank you for holding this hearing on H.R. 2522, which proposes to raise the ceiling on the Federal share of the cost of the Calleguas Municipal Water District Recycling Project which funds the construction of a 35 mile brine line.

I also want to thank Congressman Elton Gallegly for sponsoring this important bill that will provide much needed additional water supplies to our region and improve the quality of our natural resources.

Calleguas Municipal Water District (Calleguas) is a public agency created in 1953 to provide southeastern Ventura County with a reliable supply of high quality supplemental water. The District serves an area of approximately 350 square miles that includes the cities of Camarillo, Moorpark, Oxnard, Port Hueneme, Thousand Oaks, and Simi Valley, as well as surrounding unincorporated areas. Calleguas' service area faces serious water supply and water quality challenges.

Calleguas' imported water supply is dwindling. Calleguas imports about 120,000 acre-feet per year (AFY) from the State Water Project (SWP), a system of reservoirs, aqueducts, and pumping facilities that conveys water from the Sacramento-San Joaquin Bay-Delta in northern California to southern California. The ability of the SWP to convey reliable water supplies has been hampered by an on-going drought and regulatory decisions which have mandated that significantly more water remain in the Bay-Delta for habitat needs. Climate change is expected to further reduce available supplies as precipitation decreases and less water is stored in snowpack. Calleguas needs to develop additional water supplies if it is to reliably sustain its existing residents, businesses, and agriculture. Water conservation alone cannot provide sufficient savings to avert potential future water supply shortages.

The quality of the region's local water supplies is deteriorating. Calleguas' service area generally overlies the Calleguas Creek Watershed. Calleguas Creek and many of its tributaries are listed as "impaired" for salinity under the Clean Water Act. The Calleguas service area has experienced increasing salinity levels since its water supplies were first put to use by farmers in the 1880s. Contributing factors include naturally occurring minerals, agricultural runoff, and

lack of surplus water to flush salts from the environment. Salinity levels have increased with each cycle of urban use for municipal and industrial purposes. Groundwater over-draft along the coastline has led to seawater intrusion into coastal groundwater basins, impairing the quality of freshwater aquifers. Much of the local groundwater is too saline for use as drinking water and is harmful to the County's billion dollar a year agricultural industry, primarily for sensitive crops like berries and avocados. High salinity levels in soils and surface water can also be detrimental to sensitive habitat. Without a means of removing salt, the area will continue to experience long-term increases in salinity levels as the salts are cycled and concentrated.

Solutions to these supply and quality problems are being implemented through a collaborative process. Beginning in 1996, a broad coalition of local property owners, water and wastewater agencies, environmental groups, agricultural parties, governmental entities, and other private interests joined together to develop the Calleguas Creek Watershed Management Plan, which is centered around implementation of the Calleguas Municipal Water District Recycling Project (Project).

The Project will improve water supply reliability and reduce dependence on imported water supplies by making it possible to put local brackish water supplies to beneficial use. The only way to remove salinity from water is through a membrane treatment process, such as reverse osmosis, which produces a highly saline waste concentrate which must then be managed and disposed. If the concentrate were to be discharged to wastewater or creeks, it would perpetuate the cycle of salt build up.

The Project is a regional pipeline that will collect salty water generated by groundwater desalting facilities and excess recycled water and convey that water for reuse elsewhere. Any surplus supplies will be safely discharged to the ocean, where natural salt levels are much higher. The Project is being built incrementally in phases, as shown on the attached map. Phase 1 is largely complete, with one pipeline section and an ocean outfall currently under construction. Once complete, the cost for Phase 1 will cause Calleguas to reach the $20 million cap in their federal authorization.

Much of the local wastewater is treated to a high level of bacteriological quality but is too saline for discharge to local creeks. The Project will either provide a means for that wastewater to be demineralized for use as a high quality irrigation supply or a means of conveying that wastewater to potential users near the coast which can tolerate saline water. Potential uses include wetlands restoration, irrigation of salt-tolerant crops (such as sod), and coastal game preserves.

The use of this non-potable water source will help reduce groundwater pumping and imported water use. The Project will also export salts out of the watershed to help achieve compliance with regulatory requirements for salts in local groundwater and surface water resources. Additionally, the Project will facilitate the development of new, local water supplies through treatment of brackish groundwater.

The Project is vital to the region's water reliability as imported supplies become increasingly vulnerable to drought, climate change, catastrophic levee failures from flood and/or seismic events, and regulatory shutdowns of pumping facilities for habitat protection.

The Project will improve surface water and ground water quality by moving salts out of the watershed. Salt will be removed from groundwater and the concentrate from the treatment

process sent to the Project. Tertiary treated wastewater which is too saline for discharge to local streams will be sent to the Project during wet periods when it is not needed for irrigation. Ventura County has abundant sources of groundwater, but much of the water is too high in salts for municipal and agricultural use. By treating groundwater to remove salts and moving those salts away from surface waters and groundwater, water agencies in Ventura County solve a water quality problem, while improving local water supply reliability.

In addition to its water supply and water quality benefits, ***the Project will also benefit the environment*** by improving the quality of flows in local creeks, reducing greenhouse gas emissions by using less energy-intensive local water resources instead of imported sources which require substantial pumping, and reducing dependence on imported water from the sensitive Bay-Delta ecosystem in Northern California.

Phase 1 of the project was authorized by P.L. 104-266, Section 2, and will be completed at an estimated cost of $83.858 million (maximum Federal share of $20 million). Phase 1 includes 48 inch diameter pipe extending nine miles through the cities of Oxnard and Port Hueneme and unincorporated areas of Ventura County, and also includes a 30 inch diameter ocean outfall extending 4,500 feet into the ocean. Phase 1 will facilitate the reclamation and reuse of about 15,000 acre-feet per year of water.

H.R. 2522 will authorize Bureau of Reclamation support for Phases 2 and 3 of the Project, which will extend the 18-inch through 30-inch diameter pipe an additional twenty-six miles through the cities of Simi Valley, Moorpark, and Camarillo, and unincorporated areas of Ventura County. Completion of Phases 2 and 3 of the Project will facilitate the reclamation and reuse of about 43,000 acre-feet per year of water. Federal support for these phases of the project through the Bureau would be limited to the lesser of $40 million or 25 percent of the construction costs.

The Project is the only truly reliable, environmentally-sensitive, and cost-effective solution to the water supply and water quality issues in the Calleguas service area. Implementation of the Project will facilitate recycled water use, reduce the demand on imported water, remove existing salts, reduce salinity loadings, facilitate restoration of coastal wetlands, help sustain important agricultural operations in Ventura County, and provide overall benefits to Ventura County and the State of California.

Calleguas Municipal Water District takes its role as water supply manager for the County very seriously. Calleguas, local cities and retail water agencies, and the local community, are all looking for water supply and water supply reliability solutions. Local brackish groundwater and recycled municipal wastewater are good solutions. HR 2522 can be the tool that enables us to achieve this water supply and we very strongly urge your support for this legislation.

Thank you again, Madame Chair, for your time and consideration and I am here ready to answer any questions you may have.