

Committee on Resources

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TESTIMONY OF JOSEPH J. BEAL, P.E.

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LOWER COLORADO RIVER AUTHORITY

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COMMITTEE ON RESOURCES

SUBCOMMITTEE ON WATER AND POWER

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman and other distinguished Members of the Committee. My name is Joe Beal and I am General Manager of the Lower Colorado River Authority, headquartered in Austin, Texas.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on H.R. 1732, the Williamson County Water Recycling Act of 2003. I also want to express my sincere gratitude to Congressman John Carter for introducing this legislation and to Congressman Chet Edwards for cosponsoring this measure. Both Congressman Carter and Congressman Edwards have been very supportive of LCRA and Central Texas, and I appreciate their work on this legislation.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to briefly describe to the committee the mission and role of LCRA in communities throughout Central Texas. LCRA was created in 1934 by the Texas Legislature as a regional conservation and reclamation district in Central Texas. The federal government and LCRA have had a close and beneficial relationship since our creation, when LCRA received federal loans and grants to build six reservoirs that form the Highland Lakes.

These lakes have protected communities from destructive floods, provided a reliable water supply for one of the fastest-growing regions in the United States, produced renewable hydroelectric energy, and created opportunities for parks and water recreation. The federal government's investment has paid a huge dividend to Central Texas and, by the way, LCRA repaid all the loans years ago.

Today our energy and water service areas cover all or part of 58 counties. LCRA generates wholesale electric power for more than 1 million people. LCRA also manages a 600-mile stretch of the Texas Colorado River from West Texas to the Gulf of Mexico, and provides raw water to cities, farmers and industries in the lower Colorado River basin.

LCRA owns or operates 35 water/wastewater systems that serve more than 112,000 residents in 11 counties.

LCRA also provides community services such as parks and recreation, water quality protection, and economic and community development.

But the soul of LCRA is in our water services. We are a leader in Texas in promoting long-term water supply management planning and conservation practices. That is why I am here today to talk to you about water reuse for Williamson County.

In 1997 the Texas Legislature divided the state into 15 regions and mandated that each region develop a 50-year water plan. Through this planning process, water recycling in Williamson County was identified as an alternative water supply that would have three positive outcomes:

First, it would reduce or postpone the need to develop more surface water.

Second, it would delay and reduce the need for costly imports of groundwater from as far as 75 miles east of the county.

Third, it would postpone the need for interbasin transfers of water from the Colorado river to the Brazos River basin.

Studies conducted under the state planning process show that current water supplies will only meet Williamson County's needs through the year 2017. Water reuse, water sharing, and the development of new water sources are necessary to meet the county's long-term water needs.

Mr. Chairman, we strongly support H.R. 1732, and we have committed significant funding to support this project because we believe it will have a major impact on water supply in Williamson County.

Currently, parks, schools and other recreational areas in the county are literally dumping drinking water on the ground. This obviously does not make sense. We welcome the opportunity to partner with the Bureau of Reclamation to design, plan and construct a consolidated system to improve the efficient use of water resources in the county.

There is regional support for the use of recycled water in Williamson County from a number of entities including the cities of Round Rock and Leander, Williamson County and the Round Rock Independent School District. The project will be part of an alliance between LCRA and the Brazos River Authority and will be completed in two phases.

Construction of Phase 1 could begin as early as 2005, will take one year, and will accomplish two goals:

First, two golf courses in the county use about 600,000 gallons of raw and drinking water a day for irrigation. This project would transport effluent from an existing wastewater treatment plant to the golf courses, freeing up drinking water for thousands of homes.

Second, two large regional parks that also use drinking water for irrigation would begin using transported, recycled water. This will end a wasteful use of the county's critical drinking water supply, and will cost city and county governments and ratepayers far less.

Phase II could begin construction in 2006 and will take one year. It would expand delivery of recycled water to meet irrigation needs of several middle schools and high schools, other city and county parks, and at least one more golf course.

The use of recycled water is the most reliable source of irrigation for parks, school athletic fields, and golf courses. We estimate that this project annually will save about 5,000 acre-feet, or 1.6 billion gallons, of raw and treated drinking water.

The total cost of the project authorized in H.R. 1732 is \$29 million. The Bureau of Reclamation's Title XVI program allows the Bureau to contribute up to 25 percent of the cost, with a limit of \$20 million, for planning, designing, and constructing projects like the ones that would be authorized by H.R. 1732. LCRA is ready and able to provide the local cost share of \$21.5 million.

LCRA is very excited about this project and the opportunity to work with the Bureau of Reclamation to ensure its success. We have met with the Bureau to discuss the need for developing a water recycling program in Williamson County.

Mr. Chairman, Members of this Committee, thank you for allowing me to appear before you today. I am happy to answer any questions you may have at this time.

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