

Committee on Resources

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TESTIMONY OF BRIAN BRADY

PRESIDENT OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

IRVINE RANCH WATER DISTRICT

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SUBCOMMITTEE ON WATER & POWER

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Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman, Congressman Cox, and the other distinguished Members of this Committee. My name is Brian Brady and I serve as President of the Board of Directors of the Irvine Ranch Water District. I appreciate the opportunity to testify before you today on H.R. 1598, the Irvine Basin Groundwater and Surface Water Improvement Act of 2003. First, let me express my sincere gratitude to Congressman Cox for introducing this legislation, and also thank Senator Diane Feinstein who has introduced an identical piece of legislation in the Senate.

If I may, I'd like to briefly describe the role that the Irvine Ranch Water District plays in our community and the context within which our project is proposed. The Irvine Ranch Water District provides domestic water service, wastewater collection and treatment, water reclamation, and urban runoff treatment for the city of Irvine and portions of four surrounding cities as well as the County of Orange. In total, the District serves a resident population of over 266,000 with a daytime population of approximately 500,000. We employ approximately 275 well-qualified employees who are committed to the mission of providing a safe, reliable water supply to our customers without sacrificing the environment. In fact, because of our outstanding staff, the District has been recognized with numerous regional, statewide and national awards for our leadership in developing innovative ways to provide water while protecting the environment. The District's General Manager, Paul Jones, is with me here today to assist in answering any technical questions that the Members of the Committee may have about the projects that would be authorized by this legislation.

We are extremely excited about this legislation, as it will allow the Irvine Ranch Water District to even better serve the community and the environment. The Irvine Basin Surface and Groundwater Improvement Act would authorize the Bureau of Reclamation to participate in the design and construction of projects that will enhance the environment of a large portion of Orange County. This partnership would be a tremendous help to the District as we work to develop new groundwater supply projects and to protect the San Diego Creek watershed and Upper Newport Bay.

Before I talk about the specifics of our proposed project, it is important to discuss the regional context and approach used by water and wastewater agencies in San Bernardino, Riverside, and Orange Counties to address water resource and urban runoff issues. Contemporary surface and groundwater resource management relies heavily on addressing issues on a "watershed-wide" basis. The Southern California coastal plain and its watersheds extend from the mountains to the ocean. One watershed, that of the Santa Ana River, extends 96 miles from the San Bernardino Mountains to the Pacific, between Huntington and Newport Beaches. In terms of management, the Santa Ana Watershed Project Authority, or SAWPA as it is known, provides watershed-wide coordination of water resource management projects through a joint powers agreement among five regional agencies. These agencies have worked to develop numerous water reclamation, brackish desalting and water quality wetland projects in the three-county region.

In the lower portion of the Santa Ana River system in Orange County, Orange County Water District, one of the five SAWPA members, manages the groundwater basin, and as discussed later, is a key partner in the groundwater component of the proposed project.

With respect to coordination of surface drainage, or "urban runoff" issues, the County of Orange, in collaboration with the cities and agencies within the County, are developing new, innovative methods to treat contaminated surface runoff, including another component of this proposed project referred to as the Natural Treatment System. Larry Mc Kenney of the County of Orange is here today and will be providing testimony regarding the County's watershed management efforts, and the role the proposed Natural Treatment System component of the proposed project plays in those efforts.

All these aforementioned partnerships provide the basis for, and examples of, collaborative water resource management using a comprehensive "watershed-wide" approach.

This brings us to the San Diego Creek watershed, which encompasses over 120 square miles in central Orange County. The San Diego Creek watershed's boundary is approximately the same as Irvine Ranch Water District's and includes the City of Irvine and portions of the Cities of Lake Forest, Newport Beach, Orange, and Tustin, as well as unincorporated areas of the County. Surface drainage or urban runoff containing fertilizers, pesticides, sediment, and pathogens, flows through the San Diego Creek watershed and into the Upper Newport Bay, severely impacting the water quality of the watershed and the Bay. As a result of these water quality concerns, EPA has identified San Diego Creek and the Upper Newport Bay as "impaired water bodies."

In order to protect the water quality of the San Diego Creek watershed and Upper Newport Bay, the largest marine estuary in Southern California, Irvine Ranch Water District, in collaboration with the County of Orange and the aforementioned cities, is proposing to develop and maintain a system of man-made wetlands throughout the area that will utilize natural processes to capture unwanted sediment and remove nutrients, pathogens and other contaminants from the runoff, thus helping to ensure that the dry weather and "first flush" flows and reaching the Bay meet federal clean water standards. The Natural Treatment System portion of the project will provide a cost effective method to help the community protect the water quality and beneficial uses in San Diego Creek and the Upper Newport Bay, and will also provide additional neighborhood open space and wildlife habitat.

In addition to completing the San Diego Creek Watershed Natural Treatment System, the proposed legislation would authorize Bureau of Reclamation assistance in developing a related component of the project to treat and reuse impaired groundwater within the groundwater basin. This will be built in conjunction with the local groundwater management agency, the Orange County Water District, and with financial assistance from of the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California.

This portion of the project, known as the Irvine Desalter, will consist of a well system and water purification plant that will remove salts and nitrates caused by natural geology and past agricultural drainage from a portion of the groundwater basin underlying the San Diego Creek watershed. The project will employ reverse osmosis technology to create a new, highly reliable local drinking water supply at a cost to Irvine Ranch Water District comparable to imported water supplies from the San Francisco Bay-Delta Estuary and the Colorado River. The project is consistent with the Bureau of Reclamation's objectives of reclaiming impaired water for beneficial uses.

The final component of this project will be a regional brine line. In Orange County, just as it is throughout California, wastewater reclamation for reuse is a critical component of the region's current and future water supply portfolio. Our region enjoys one of the most advanced systems of wastewater treatment, distribution and reuse in the world. Currently, brines are disposed in the sewer from industrial sources and existing or proposed impaired groundwater treatment facilities. This method of disposal is problematic as it dramatically increases the costs of treatment and impairs local water and wastewater agencies' ability to implement additional wastewater reclamation. To alleviate this problem, Irvine Ranch Water proposes to construct a Regional Brine Line that consists of a separate system of pipes to segregate brine from sewage and dispose of the brine directly into the ocean where salinity is not a concern.

Providing new, local water supplies such as those created by the Irvine Desalter, and facilitating additional reclaimed water development through projects such as the regional brine line, are important strategies in reducing Southern California's reliance on imported water supplies from the San Francisco Bay-Delta Estuary and the Colorado River. In fact, both the CALFED program for the San Francisco Bay-Delta Estuary and the California 4.4 Plan for the Colorado River assume aggressive development and implementation of local water resource projects. Under the CALFED program, the fundamental objective of the Water Management Program Element is to: "Reduce the mismatch between Bay Delta water supplies

and current and projected beneficial uses dependent on the Bay Delta system" through a strategy to "Increase the utility of available water supplies and by making water more suitable for uses and reuses." As noted earlier, the Irvine Desalter portion of the proposed project makes unused water resources suitable for use, while the regional brine line promotes additional water reuse through reclamation.

Similarly, for California's consumers of Colorado River water to stay within the state's 4.4 million acre feet of entitlement, numerous new local water supply and reclamation projects will need to be implemented in urban southern California. A report recently completed by the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California entitled: "Report on Metropolitan's Water Supplies: A Blueprint for Water Reliability," identifies a 32% increase in local supply project yield, from 2.2 million acre feet 2005, to 2.9 million acre feet in 2025, as a key component in reducing reliance on imported water from the Colorado River. As such, the proposed project is consistent with these local supply development strategies and will incrementally help southern California meet its water supply management goals on the Colorado River.

The total cost of the projects to be authorized in H.R.1598 is slightly under \$80 million. As you know, the Bureau of Reclamation's Title XVI program allows the Bureau to contribute to 25% of the costs of planning, designing, and constructing projects like the ones that would be authorized by H.R. 1598 up to a limit of \$20 million. To date, the District has spent over \$2 million toward completing comprehensive project development work including feasibility analyses, master plan and project engineering report preparation, water quality and groundwater modeling, environmental documentation, cost estimates, design plans and specifications. In total, our District and other local sponsors are committed to providing over \$60 million toward the construction of these important projects.

Mr. Chairman, Congressman, thank you again for allowing me the opportunity to share my testimony with you. The Irvine Ranch Water District is committed to serving its customers in the most efficient, cost-effective and environmentally responsible manner. I am proud to serve as President of the Board for such an outstanding public agency. We are looking forward to working with the Bureau of Reclamation to make this project a success. Again, thank you for your time and consideration of my testimony. I will be glad to answer any questions you may have at this time.

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