

Committee on Resources

resources.committee@mail.house.gov

[Home](#) [Press Gallery](#) [Subcommittees](#) [Issues](#) [Legislation](#) [Hearing Archives](#)

Statement of Don Christiansen

General Manager

Central Utah Water Conservancy District

Before the

House Resources Subcommittee on Water and Power

On the

The Provo River Project Transfer Act

October 30, 2003

Chairman Calvert, Congressman Cannon and members of the Committee. I appreciate the opportunity to testify today in support of the Provo River Project Transfer Act to authorize the transfer of title to certain features of the Provo River Project. You might wonder why the Central Utah District cares about this bill. The Central Utah Project and the Provo River Project have been intertwined and codependent for decades. Both projects have dams for water storage on the Provo River, both projects capture this high quality water and divert it through conveyance structures to water users in Northern Utah and Salt Lake Counties and both Projects share a duty to the recovery of the June sucker in the lower Provo River and Utah Lake.

This bill is important to us at several levels. First, the District is finalizing planning and NEPA review for the construction of the facilities required to distribute the remaining water supply being developed by the Bonneville Unit for use along the Wasatch Front. While we have not selected a proposed action, several of the alternatives being studied contemplate the delivery of new supplies of water to Salt Lake County. Salt Lake presently "drinks" its Provo River supplies through one of three "straws"; the Provo Reservoir Canal, the Salt Lake Aqueduct and the Jordan Aqueduct. Our new Bonneville Unit water must be delivered through one or more of these existing conveyance straws. We believe that the coordinated operation of these three conveyance "straws" will maximize the efficient delivery of water at the least cost. Hence, before title is transferred out of federal ownership to two of these three straws, we believe it is important to advance this dialogue among the various water districts.

Of particular importance to the Central Utah Water Conservancy District are the provisions of the bill authorizing the title transfer for the Provo Reservoir Canal. When the Canal was first planned, there were only a few communities along its right of way, one of which is a beautiful community of Alpine where I lived for twenty five years. Nearly two decades ago while serving as the Mayor of Alpine, I started a campaign to convince the Bureau of Reclamation to replace the open canal with a buried pipeline. I failed then...but my journey led me from Mayor to Chairman of the Board of Trustees and then to General Manager of the Central Utah Water Conservancy District.

My concern then as Mayor was one of safety for the community. This concern remains, just last month two young men drowned in a tragic accident in the Provo Reservoir Canal. In addition to the safety issues of an open canal, which now runs through numerous residential neighborhoods, we estimate that over 8,000 acre feet of water are wasted through evaporation and leakage. The Central Utah Water Conservancy District has offered to pay half of the estimated \$115 million cost to enclose the canal in return for which we would receive the conserved water. This water would then be made available to the Secretary under provisions of the Central Utah Project Completion Act, which enables the water to be applied to in stream flows in the lower Provo River to help recover the endangered June sucker through the recovery program. I want to point out that the obligation to the June Sucker Recovery Program is one that is shared by all of the water users who divert water from the Provo River, including the water districts that operate the storage facilities on the Provo River.

It is our plan to create a Joint Public Agency among the Central Utah District, the Jordan Valley Water Conservancy District, and the Metropolitan Water District of Salt Lake & Sandy to take title to a portion of the capacity in this facility. This is a vital step in order for us to be able to finance the project with tax advantaged bonds which are available only to local public water districts.

Although we have not heard from the Interior Department today, we understand that the Department supports the concept of this title transfer bill but does not believe that the bill should proceed until after all the details have been negotiated to the several agreements that will govern the operation of the facilities. While we agree that these agreements are vital, it is our view that the legislation should proceed simultaneously with the negotiations on the several agreements associated with the title transfer. If we were to wait another six to eight months, the time it will take to conclude our discussions, it will be too late in the legislative process to advance the bill from introduction to enactment. To address the Department of the Interior's concerns, we have built a mechanism into the bill draft that restricts the Secretary's authority to transfer the title to the Provo Reservoir Canal until the Provo River Waters Users Association certifies that the necessary future ownership, financing, operation and transfer agreements have been completed. I want to thank John Carmen and the Metropolitan Water District of Salt Lake & Sandy and Representative Cannon for working with us on this provision. With its inclusion, we urge you to move forward with this bill as soon as your calendar permits. Thank you.