

Committee on Resources

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**Statement of Mark Limbaugh
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U.S. Department of the Interior**

On
H.R. 4650
before the House Committee on Resources
Subcommittee on Water & Power

July 8, 2004

Mr. Chairman, I am Mark Limbaugh, Deputy Commissioner of Reclamation, and I am pleased to present the Administration's views on H.R. 4650, Representative Tiahrt's bill to authorize the Equus Beds Division of the Wichita Project. Although the project has some merits, for reasons I will discuss the Administration cannot support the bill at this time.

The Equus Beds Division would recharge the groundwater in the Equus Beds Aquifer. The project would provide significant new water storage capacity for municipal and industrial water customers in the city of Wichita, Kansas without inundating large surface areas. This project would enhance the storage and supply capability of the Wichita Project, an above-ground reservoir built and owned by the Bureau of Reclamation. As a supplement to the existing Reclamation project, the Equus Beds Division is in line with our current Reclamation mission. The fact that H.R. 4650 caps the ultimate federal cost at 25% or \$30 million, whichever is less, limits Reclamation uncertainty as to the ultimate federal share of the costs.

However, the Administration at this time is not in a position to support adding another project that will require additional funds from our already tight budget. Reclamation has the responsibility of continuing to support the operation, maintenance, and rehabilitation of our existing projects with a limited budget. Consequently, our current budget could not carry out H.R. 4650 in fiscal years 2004 or 2005.

We note one area in the proposed bill where we believe some clarification is desirable. We believe that any new project should be subject to the Principles and Guidelines that the Bureau of Reclamation uses in preparing feasibility level project studies. We would therefore suggest amending the section of the bill titled "Plans and Analyses Consistent with Federal Law" to make it clear that such Principles and Guidelines would be applicable. Furthermore, the Committee should be aware that the Administration cannot support any project authorization, or appropriation of funds, even if it is for the expansion of an existing project, until it goes through the established procedures of Administration review to ensure that it is in the best interest of the taxpayers, and that it complies with the standards embodied in the Principles and Guidelines.

Mr. Chairman, that, in effect, is how Reclamation would propose to carry out that section's requirements and we believe that doing so will add value to the project. This process would utilize much of the work already performed by the city and would include formal review of the city-prepared environmental impact study, and review of the city's least-cost alternative analysis.

Having partnered with the City of Wichita on an earlier groundwater recharge demonstration, Reclamation is familiar with the current proposal to recharge the groundwater in the Equus Beds Aquifer. It turns out that recharging the Equus Beds Aquifer is a highly efficient alternative to expanding surface water storage because it significantly reduces losses due to surface evaporation. In addition to the City's already-prepared environmental impact study on the project, the City of Wichita is currently developing a hydro-biological monitoring plant to further detail potential environmental effects. At this time we know of no significant adverse environmental impacts associated with the project.

For water management purposes, H.R. 4650 would authorize this project as a division of the existing Wichita Project. The City would be required to pay 75% of the cost of development and 100% of operations and maintenance costs. The federal government would not hold title to the facilities.

Water rights for this project have also already been resolved. In 1998 the State issued the City of Wichita a conjunctive use water right permit that replaced and combined two previous permits, one for the Wichita Project, the other for the Equus Beds Groundwater Aquifer. By combining the permits the City can more effectively manage water from these two resources, and by combining the two water resources into a single, integrated operation the City may more effectively and economically deliver municipal and industrial water to homes and industrial customers.

Mr. Chairman, throughout the City's planning process, including extensive public involvement with input from State and Federal agencies, no significant opposition to Equus Beds surfaced. The project is well conceived and planned and the proposed cost-sharing formula is in line with past Reclamation projects. That the project effectively adds significant new water storage capacity for Wichita without inundating large surface areas, thereby avoiding substantial evaporation, is commendable. However, given Reclamation's already tight budget, we are not in a position to support the addition of this project to the long list of unfunded projects already authorized and waiting for Federal funding.

Mr. Chairman, that concludes my testimony. I am pleased to answer any questions the Committee may have.