

United States House of Representatives
Committee on Resources
Water and Power Subcommittee Hearing
Washington, DC
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H.R. 5987

To Provide for a Feasibility Study of Alternatives to Augment the Water Supplies of the Central Oklahoma Master Conservancy District and Cities Served by the District.

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Chairman Radanovich and Members of the Committee:

The citizens of Norman, Oklahoma, along with all other Oklahomans realize the importance of their water supply. Regardless of their needs, everyone understands their future depends on reliable amounts of water. Everyone desires a future with adequate water supplies.

Norman, Oklahoma, along with Midwest City and Del City rely upon Lake Thunderbird as their primary source of drinking water. This reservoir was constructed by the United States Department of the Interior Bureau of Reclamation in the early 1960's. The three cities share the responsibility of its operation through the Central Oklahoma Master Conservancy District (the District). Each city holds rights to a portion of the water supply provided by Lake Thunderbird. No additional rights are currently available to others.

Into the early 1980's Lake Thunderbird provided an adequate supply source of water for the District. Midwest City and Del City had abundant supply reserves within their portion of the District but during this time Norman began to draw near to their allotted capacity. In 1988 Norman exceeded their allocation of the District for the first time. Since then, Norman's allocation has been exceeded a total of 14 times. This threshold has been crossed the last 9 consecutive years with no projected future demands below our legally allocated amount.

As Norman's demands upon Lake Thunderbird grew, it was understood that additional supplies were needed. Beginning in the early 1980's Norman started drilling new water wells into the naturally occurring aquifer beneath its city boundaries. This aquifer was the supply source prior to the construction of the lake and was relied upon again to meet Norman's needs. Wells drilled over the last 25 years help meet an ever growing demand in Norman. Lake Thunderbird and the District's supply capabilities have been relied upon continuously throughout this period.

In 1999 the City of Norman, facing the now common supply shortfall from the District, built a waterline connecting to the City of Oklahoma City's treated water supply system. This line serves as an emergency supply source only. Norman voters have not approved a water rate structure capable of relying upon this high priced water. This alternative supply shortfall reflects Norman's desire to rely upon the District and its supply capabilities over the long term.

Norman's decision to rely, long term, upon the District is the beginning of the process that has led to this testimony today. In 2003 the 108 th Congress provided funding through the Energy and Water Appropriation Bill to begin the process of achieving additional long term water supplies for the District and the possibility of an even larger public benefit. The *Norman Project, Oklahoma, Water Supply and Augmentation Enhancement – Appraisal Investigation* was initiated with the 2003 approval. The final report was delivered in August 2005. A copy of this report is included for the record as Attachment No. 1.

It has long been the idea to bring water into the District from some outside source to help meet long term demands. The idea of out of basin water is a good idea but is not allowed under the existing State of Oklahoma water permit for the District. A purpose of the *Appraisal Investigation* was to formally introduce the idea of using Lake Thunderbird to assist with the redistribution of the waters of the State of Oklahoma to the metropolitan area citizens. This was considered in the initial report and will be further pursued in the *Feasibility Study*. The State of Oklahoma Water Resources Board is participating in this study and supports the option of augmenting the waters in Lake Thunderbird while protecting the rights of all parties potentially impacted.

The *Appraisal Investigation*, completed by the Bureau of Reclamation, reports four possible scenarios to help meet the District's ability to continue to meet their member's long term water supply needs. This document completes the appraisal-level assessment of alternatives and opportunities that could be implemented to meet present and future water needs of

the District and Central Oklahoma.

The purpose of completing this investigation was to determine the desirability of proceeding to a *Feasibility Study* of the project. This series of investigations, each looking in defined levels of detail, review the validity of the District's needs. The Appraisal Study, Feasibility Study, and the concluding Final Design Report are the series of events that must be completed by the Bureau of Reclamation before taking formal action to construct or modify any federal projects. Lake Thunderbird is a federal project and the District is pursuing this series of events to continue their ability to meet the water service expected of them.

Four options were considered in the *Appraisal Investigation* report. These options centered on the replacement of key pieces of infrastructure and supply availability. Broad cost projections were completed for each option and detailed in Attachment No. 1. The conclusion of this initial review is the foundation for starting the *Feasibility Study*. The *Feasibility Study* begins to look in detail at very specific items for consideration. Implementing any project in the future to help the District with its ability to serve the public better will involve more than just water. Augmenting the water supplies of Lake Thunderbird could impact water rights, water quality, and instream uses for fish and wildlife as well as recreation. Associated studies to address these items would need to be completed during the *Feasibility Study*. This effort, if approved and funded, would determine actual environmental impacts and any mitigation actions that may be required.

On July 28 th, 2006 Congressman Tom Cole of Oklahoma introduced H.R. 5987 which was referred to the Committee on Resources. This bill, if approved, will lead towards solving the District's long term water needs to occur. H.R. 5987 will provide for a *Feasibility Study* of alternatives to augment water supplies of the District and the cities so served. The *Central Oklahoma Master Conservancy District Feasibility Study* is the next step towards serving adequate water supplies long into our future. A copy of H.R. 5987, as proposed, is included for the record as Attachment No. 2. In addition, Senator Inhofe of Oklahoma has also introduced S. 3619 to address this issue. The combined involvement of Congressman Cole and Senator Inhofe as well as Committee on Resources member Congressman Dan Boren reflects the need to address the water supply issues faced by the District and the citizens of Oklahoma.

Completion of the *Central Oklahoma Master Conservancy District Feasibility Study* is required in order to consider using Lake Thunderbird as an enhanced long term water supply source. Without it, the District will not have the means to advance toward using Lake Thunderbird beyond its original design parameters. The original design parameters will soon be insufficient to meet the District's long term needs. The amount of water available to Norman is an example of the problems faced. Much more water will be needed in our future.

In looking towards the future in the *Feasibility Study*, if approved, a review of region wide water needs will occur. Many municipalities within the region have noted interest in gaining waters from Lake Thunderbird if its supply capabilities were to be enhanced as a result of this process that we are discussing today. If this were to happen, an even greater public good would result from this study and the needed steps that follow. Approval of H.R. 5987 is the second step of many to be taken towards providing long term water supplies to the almost 200,000 persons served by the District.

Thank you for your time and effort in representing the public and in your role within the committee addressing of the natural resource needs of our great nation. I greatly appreciate the opportunity to present this testimony on behalf of the City of Norman and the Central Oklahoma Master Conservancy District.