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U.S. Department of the Interior

Before the
Subcommittee on Water and Power
Committee on Resources

On H.R. 2334, City of Oxnard Water Recycling and Desalination Act of 2005

December 7, 2005

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee, I am William Rinne, Deputy Commissioner of the Bureau of Reclamation. I am pleased to be here today to give the Administration's views on H.R. 2334, the City of Oxnard Water Recycling and Desalination Act of 2005. Due to the reasons I will explain, the Administration cannot support this legislation.

In 1992, Congress enacted the Reclamation Projects Authorization and Adjustment Act (Public Law 102-575). Title XVI of this Act, the Wastewater and Groundwater Study and Facilities Act, authorized the Secretary of the Interior to participate in the planning, design and construction of five water reclamation and reuse projects. The Secretary was also authorized to undertake a program to identify other water recycling opportunities throughout the 17 western states, and to conduct appraisal level and feasibility level studies to determine if those opportunities are worthy of implementation. The Bureau of Reclamation has been administering a grant program to fund these Title XVI projects since 1994.

In 1996, Congress enacted Public Law 104-266, the Reclamation Recycling and Water Conservation Act. This law amended Title XVI of Public Law 102-575 and authorized the Secretary to participate in the planning, design and construction of 18 additional projects, including two desalination research and development projects. Since 1996, Title XVI has been amended several times, and now there are 29 projects authorized for construction in nine states.

H.R. 2334 would amend the Reclamation Wastewater and Groundwater Study and Facilities Act (43 U.S.C. 390h *et seq.*) to authorize the Secretary to participate in the design, planning, and construction of permanent facilities for the Groundwater Recovery Enhancement and Treatment (GREAT) project, which would reclaim impaired water in the area of Oxnard, located in Ventura County, California. It provides for Federal funding of 25 percent of the total project cost or \$20 million, whichever is less.

The City of Oxnard, Port Hueneme Water Agency, United Water Conservation District, and Calleguas Municipal Water District have jointly developed the GREAT project, which consists of three parts: (1) a regional groundwater desalination facility; (2) a recycled water system to serve agricultural water users and to protect groundwater sources from seawater intrusion; and (3) a brine line that will convey desalination concentrates to an enhanced saltwater wetland. Project benefits include local drought protection and reduced dependence on imported water.

Mr. Chairman, the Department supports efforts to increase local water supplies, including brackish groundwater desalination and reclaimed water use, in southern California. However, H.R. 2334 would authorize the design and construction of the project before the feasibility study is completed. Reclamation prefers that feasibility studies be completed first to determine whether this particular project warrants Federal construction authorization. Therefore the Department believes the legislation to be premature and cannot support H.R. 2334 at this time.

The Department also believes that this legislation would likely place an additional burden on Reclamation's already tight budget and would likely delay completion of previously authorized Title XVI projects. With the tremendous backlog of existing Title XVI projects, we do not support the addition of new projects at this time.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my testimony. Thank you for the opportunity to comment on H.R. 2334. I would be happy to answer any questions at this time.