

Subcommittee on Water and Power
Committee on Natural Resources
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Legislative Hearings on
*“H. R. 123, to Authorize Appropriations for the San Gabriel Restoration Fund,
H. R. 2498, to Provide for a Study Regarding Development of a Comprehensive
Integrated Regional Water Management That Would Address Water Planning
in Four General Areas etc., and
H. R. 2535, the Tule River Tribe Water Development Act”*

Tuesday, September 25, 2007, 10:00 a.m.
Longworth House Office Building, Room 1324

TESTIMONY OF
MICHAEL L. WHITEHEAD
Director of the San Gabriel Basin Water Quality Authority

Good afternoon Madam Chairwoman, Committee members, and staff. My name is Michael Whitehead, and I am a member of the Board of Directors of the San Gabriel Basin Water Quality Authority. Let me first express my appreciation to you Madam Chairwoman, as well as Representatives David Dreier, Hilda Solis, Adam Schiff, Gary Miller, Lucille Roybal-Allard, and Linda Sanchez for your unwavering support and assistance in helping to restore the San Gabriel Groundwater Basin.

The San Gabriel Basin Water Quality Authority was created and authorized by the California State Legislature in 1993 to address the critical need for coordinated groundwater cleanup programs in the San Gabriel Basin after harmful amounts of contaminants were detected in the region’s groundwater. The Water Quality Authority is committed to protecting public health and safety by prioritizing, facilitating, and coordinating groundwater cleanup and supply programs with local water suppliers and the U.S. EPA, while minimizing local financial and economic impacts, including impacts on consumers who rely on local groundwater supplies from the San Gabriel Groundwater Basin.

The San Gabriel Basin underlies 167 square miles of the San Gabriel Valley. The San Gabriel Basin holds hundreds of thousands of acre-feet of local, renewable, public drinking water supplies. In fact, the San Gabriel Basin is capable of providing a reliable, local drinking water supply for the more than one million people who reside and work in the San Gabriel Valley—as long as we are able to implement effective groundwater cleanup to remove the contaminants.

In December of 2000, thanks to the leadership of Representative Dreier and the other members of the San Gabriel Valley Congressional Delegation, Congress enacted the San Gabriel Basin Water Quality Initiative in Congress. Representative Dreier and his colleagues moved to establish the Restoration Fund as a means of expediting the remediation of groundwater contamination caused by industrial solvents and rocket fuel contaminants such as perchlorate. The Restoration Fund, which is administered cooperatively by the Water Quality Authority and the Bureau of Reclamation, uses Federal and non-Federal monies contributed to the San Gabriel Restoration Fund to design, construct, and operate facilities to contain and treat the spreading groundwater contamination in the San Gabriel and Central Groundwater Basins.

The Water Quality Authority has benefited tremendously from the Restoration Fund by enabling us to continue the collaborative approach of merging cleanup with water supply and allowing us to leverage Federal dollars and local funding to bring all parties to the table and work in a manner that addresses multiple issues at the same time. The Restoration Fund has provided an incentive for the Responsible Parties in the San Gabriel Basin to participate in the cleanup and to reach funding agreements with affected water suppliers. It has also allowed the Water Quality Authority and the affected water suppliers to fund projects even before Responsible Parties could be identified or when Responsible Parties are no longer viable, cannot be located, or are recalcitrant. Without this Federal funding the likelihood for additional well closures would be great, leaving only the option of turning to costly and already overburdened imported water supplies.

Since the Restoration Fund was made available to the Water Quality Authority, we have received \$71.5 million through the Bureau of Reclamation's construction account. The Water Quality Authority has allocated the use of these funds to 32 projects throughout the Basin, 21 of which have been completed, with another 8 currently under construction. To date these efforts have helped to remove over 20 tons of contaminants, and treated nearly 313,000 acre-feet of groundwater.

For example, with the completion of four major groundwater cleanup projects developed and implemented through the Water Quality Authority with the cooperation of local water suppliers, participating Responsible Parties, and the U.S. EPA, we remove perchlorate and other toxic chemicals from groundwater at the rate of 24,000 gallons per minute on a 24/7 year-round basis. These projects will continue to provide safe drinking water to residents and businesses in Baldwin Park, La Puente, West Covina, the City of Industry, and surrounding areas for decades to come without burdening the public with higher water bills. Even so, a great deal more effort and cleanup is still required.

Earlier this year, in recognition of the tremendous success of the Restoration Fund and the need to continue the local cleanup efforts, Congressman David Dreier and his colleagues in the San Gabriel Valley Congressional Delegation introduced HR 123. This legislation would increase the authorization ceiling on the Restoration Fund by \$50 million from its current level of \$85 million. This additional funding would allow us to continue the progress we've made and avoid costly litigation that only serves to slow down the cleanup.

Without future Federal assistance for the treatment facilities, local water suppliers would be forced to shut down water wells due to migrating contamination. The closures would force purveyors to become reliant on imported water, which would come mainly from the Colorado River and the State Water Project. And as you may know, California's water allotment from the Colorado River is being cut back, and deliveries from the State Water Project are seriously restricted. This would severely impair our ability to provide water for the residents and businesses in the San Gabriel Basin. With your help we have the opportunity today to make certain these closures don't occur, while ensuring our water suppliers have a safe, abundant, and sustainable water supply to draw from in the years to come.

Water from wells in the San Gabriel Valley is relatively inexpensive to pump and supply to homes and businesses in comparison to imported supplies from the Colorado River or northern California. The current price for an acre-foot of treated, ready-to-drink Colorado River water in the high-demand summer period is \$549, subject, of course, to its availability. The typical cost to pump and treat an acre-foot of local San Gabriel Basin groundwater is \$65 to \$250 depending on the levels and types of contamination being treated.

It is vital that we continue our efforts to restore the San Gabriel Basin aquifer. Once we are able to remediate the contamination, it is our belief that the local groundwater basin will be able to meet all of the San Gabriel Valley's water needs. Removing harmful contaminants from our communities' groundwater supply will allow local water suppliers to better meet the needs of local residents at affordable rates and make certain that the Basin is able to meet the water supply needs of future generations. The Federal assistance provided by the Restoration Fund allows us to carry out our mission of facilitating groundwater cleanup and providing a clean, reliable, drinking water supply for the over one million residents of the San Gabriel Basin.

Thank you for allowing me to testify on the successes and on-going progress of the cleanup of the San Gabriel Basin today and the importance of HR 123 to our future. I would be happy to answer any questions to that you may have.

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