

TESTIMONY
(SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD)

OF

PETER CARLSON

VICE-PRESIDENT, STRATEGIC PLANNING
NATIONAL URBAN AGRICULTURE COUNCIL

BEFORE THE

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMITTEE ON RESOURCES
SUBCOMMITTEE ON WATER AND POWER

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NATIONAL URBAN AGRICULTURE COUNCIL
1015 18TH STREET, N.W. SUITE 600, WASHINGTON, D.C. 20036
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Mr. Chairman, Members of the Subcommittee:

My name is Peter Carlson, Vice-President for Strategic Planning, for the National Urban Agriculture Council (NUAC). NUAC is a national nonprofit organization established as a center for the promotion and implementation of effective water management in the urban landscape.

I would like to express our support for your efforts to establish the Twenty-First Century Water Policy Commission. NUAC would like to offer a few specific suggestions to improve H.R. 3561 and would like to work with the Subcommittee as this bill moves forward in the legislative process.

The comments that we offer are not only from the experience of our organization, but also encompass my own personal knowledge from working on water resource issues in Washington, D.C. for the past twenty-seven years.

I believe the Subcommittee is already aware of the past history and documents from previous water policy commissions. My most recent experience with work in this area, and a structure, report and experience that I believe would be worthwhile for the Subcommittee to review as you move forward, was the National Drought Policy Commission. This was a Commission created by Congress in July, 1988 (P.L. 105-199) with a Federal and Non-Federal Co-Chair to provide advice and recommendations on the creation of an integrated, coordinated Federal policy designed to prepare for and respond to serious drought emergencies. I served as the staff person for the Urban Water Commissioner.

I bring this effort to your attention because it worked. It took about two years, with involvement of all of the Federal water agencies through an Interagency Contact Group, and had a staff of approximately a dozen members. As drafted, H.R. 3561 does not provide for such a process and the necessary staffing to carry out the work of the Commission.

A review of the duties of the Commission also leads me to suggest that before you engage in a water policy an effort be made to undertake a needs assessment for the future. The EPA produces a similar document for their programs. Parallel efforts exist in the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Department of Agriculture, but none yet exists for the Bureau of Reclamation which serves the 17 Western states. In addition, few states have up-to-date state water plans. I believe the same holds true for our Native American community.

I believe this is an important first step because it will help you sort through the issue of financing options. I am concerned with the reference in the legislation to "implementation of user fees". Most public projects have some level of local/state cost-share associated with their projects - typically from 15-50%. Congress has decided what is the appropriate cost-share for these projects, depending on the agency and the nature of program. Knowing what the future dollar needs are for meeting the water needs in the country is key to figuring out future financing. This was one of the major omissions of the Western Water Policy Review Commission report.

Another important element is making sure such a water policy looks at future water research needs. There is an abundance of water research taking place in this country at the Federal, state, local and academic level, as well as in the private sector. But it isn't coordinated and used in an effective policy manner. In a recent report from the National Research Council "Envisioning the Agenda for Water Resources Research in the Twenty-First Century", a major recommendation was the creation of a National Water Research Board by Congress. This would provide for a relatively simple, centralized system for setting research priorities and coordination of what is presently taking place in the water resource arena.

As part of this effort, another loose end to tie up is how the strategic plans that agencies are required to develop under the Government Performance Results Act (GPRA) relate to the development of future water policies. The interest in having such a Commission develop recommendations that eliminates duplication and conflict among governmental agencies would seemingly tie into the GPRA. I would hope that such an examination would take place given the efforts that have been made by the Federal agencies to reach out to their stakeholder organizations for ongoing examinations of their performance.

The Commission also needs to look at the issues associated with the aging of the infrastructure, as well as the aging of the people involved in the system and their understanding of the policies associated with having such a system. How do we bring in and keep people in government so that as a nation we don't end up with a system that no one knows how to run. From a personnel standpoint, what are the personnel needs of government and the role of public educational institutions in making sure that we have an adequate and dependable supply of fresh water to meet the needs of the United State for the next 50 years?

NUAC appreciates this important first step in getting people to the table to focus on the need, the make-up and the charge for such a Commission. In order for this Commission to work, I believe it does need to be expanded, be geographically spread, have the Native American Community with their own representatives, and state government with their own representatives and be modeled along the lines of the National Drought Policy Commission.

We stand ready to work with you and look forward to the creation of such a Commission and the policies developed by such an important effort that will prepare us for the future.