

# The Western Coalition of Arid States

## WESTCAS

January 30, 2007

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Representative Eddie Bernice Johnson  
Chair, Subcommittee on Water Resources  
and Environment  
Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure  
B-376 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Re: Support for the Water Quality Financing Act of 2007

Dear Madam Chair:

The Western Coalition of Arid States (WESTCAS) is pleased to provide the following comments supporting the introduction of Congressional legislation amending the Clean Water Act regarding the financing of Clean Water Infrastructure and that introduced legislation being passed by the Subcommittee and taken up by the full Transportation and Infrastructure Committee. It is our understanding that the proposed legislation is modeled after legislation from a previous Congress and that the Subcommittee has worked diligently to solicit information and comments from agencies, publicly-owned treatment works, various non-profit organizations, and associations, e.g. the Water Infrastructure Network (WIN) of which WESTCAS is a contributing member.

WESTCAS is a non-profit organization focused on water quality and quantity issues in the Arid West. WESTCAS advocates wise use of water resources by promoting scientifically-sound laws, regulations, appropriations, and policies that protect public health and the environment in the Arid West. For the past 15 years, WESTCAS has represented Arid West water providers and wastewater agencies, including approximately 130 members located in the eight western states of Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, and Texas.

WESTCAS supports the concept of new Federal legislation that provides significant increases in funding for the Environmental Protection Agency Clean Water State Revolving Loan Program We support the proposed authorization of at least \$20 billion over the next five (5) years, and legislation that commissions an expedited study by the Government Accounting Office (GAO) to determine a longer-term funding strategy for the creation of a Clean Water Trust fund.

*The Voice of Water Quality in the Arid West*

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WESTCAS appreciated the opportunity to provide testimony for the January 19<sup>th</sup>, 2007 hearing by the Subcommittee, where we provided our views on how important this issue is to the Arid West. WESTCAS strongly advocates the inclusion of language in the proposed legislation that establishes technical assistance programs, State management assistance, and watershed pilot projects that are aimed at addressing non-point source pollution issues. In addition, WESTCAS favors specific set-aside funding for rural communities with populations less than 10,000 individuals as well as for Native American programs, and recommends increase in these set-aside funds. All of the above-mentioned aspects of the proposed legislation are especially germane to the Arid West, a large geographic area of the United States that is characterized by a significant number of small towns, rural villages, and Native American communities.

Throughout the Arid West, issues related to non-point source (as contrasted with point source discharge) water pollutants account for the vast majority of water quality issues on a state-by-state basis. Thus, proposed legislation targeting watershed pilot projects will greatly enhance the Western state's on-going efforts to manage issues stemming from non-point source pollution. Moreover, due to the geographic and hydrologic characteristics of the Arid West, WESTCAS would recommend a larger emphasis regarding funding that is related to water conservation, recycling, and the re-use of reclaimed water. Throughout the Arid West, given the finite water supplies, and the current impacts of a long-term drought, publicly-owned wastewater treatment facilities are advocating water conservation, recycling, and the re-use of reclaimed water. Consideration should be given in the funding legislation to encourage states to prioritize funding for those applicants that optimize the aspects of conservation, recycling, and water re-use.

The Arid West is a geographically large and unique part of the United States. Due to the warmer climate and "wide-open spaces" this part of the country has been subject to intense population growth during the past decade, and continues to attract substantial influxes of new residents. Many of the newcomers are of retirement age, and are often on fixed or limited incomes. Thus, major municipalities like Phoenix, Tucson, El Paso, Albuquerque, and Las Vegas, to name a few, continue to experience population growth and the demand for new water and wastewater connections. Although the entire Arid West is attempting to plan and manage water and wastewater infrastructure using the intent and application of the Environmental Protection Agency's "Four Pillars" principles, this area of the United States should not be unduly penalized for the vagaries of regional demographics and population growth, through legislative language that "handcuffs" State Revolving Fund (SRF) programs by prohibiting Clean Water funding for "new growth". Rather, decisions regarding the priorities and mechanics related to urban and regional planning should be left to the respective state and local government jurisdictions. Any legislative proposals that limit Federal funding in regional areas subject to population growth, (labeled by some as new communities, new lots or subdivisions, or newly developed urban areas), those areas likely prone to concomitant regional planning issues, should be dismissed as not being well conceived and conducive to the broader goals of the Clean Water Act, i.e. the goals of protecting public health and the environment.

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Finally, WESTCAS recommends that any proposed Clean Water Act funding legislation contain a research and development title that authorizes funding for basic research in the broad areas of water resource management, water and wastewater treatment, re-use and recycling, watershed management, new and emerging water contaminants, and other research issues related to water quality. Unless a significant funding commitment is made through amendment of the Clean Water Act to water research, new and innovation solutions to this country's water resource issues will not be readily forthcoming, due to the lack of alternative funding sources.

We look forward to working with the Subcommittee and Full Committee Members as this legislation moves forward during the 110<sup>th</sup> Congress so the funding gaps can begin to be closed with regard to Clean Water Infrastructure. Thank you for providing this opportunity for WESTCAS to provide support for the proposed legislation.

Sincerely,



Larry Libeu  
President

cc. Rep. Richard Baker, Ranking Minority, Subcommittee  
Chairman James Oberstar  
Rep. John Mica, Ranking Minority Full Committee  
WESTCAS Board of Directors

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