



washington dc update

February 2, 2010

Release of the President's FY11 Budget Proposals to the Congress

In our democracy, the legislative branch is given “the power of the purse” and that is why the executive branch sent its budget proposals to Congress yesterday. This is accompanied by a flurry of budget briefings around DC. Yesterday this included a 1:00 PM Department of Interior briefing by Secretary Salazar followed by a 3:00 PM briefing by Bureau of Reclamation Commissioner Mike Connor. Over at the Corps of Engineers, Assistant Secretary of the Army Darcey went through the same exercise at 3:00 PM. And so it went all over town.

Today those who monitor Federal agencies are busy sending out reports on yesterday's proposals. And we're going to do the same thing here. But before we start, we encourage WESTCAS members to pull back from looking at individual trees in the forest and consider the forest as a whole. When you do, you will note that the amount of Federal proposed spending for water resources and infrastructure is totally inadequate to meet the challenge.

This is not a criticism of Federal agency personnel who have worked hard the past year to create the FY11 proposed budget. But it is a statement that the Federal resources proposed are not even in the same universe of what is needed to secure our national, much less our Western water resources future. Given the Federal budget crisis which is projected to continue through the rest of this decade, it is important to ask whether the Federal government can be expected to provide the huge funding increases that would enable it to be a true funding partner with local agencies. And if it can't be a financial partner, then will the Federal sector be able to sustain an expanded role as a regulator of local decisions. And last of all, where do we find the funding for future needs?

Before beginning our budget update, here's an exercise recommended by our great friend and teacher, Larry Prather of the Corps of Engineers, before wading into Federal budget matters. It's from Alice in Wonderland:

“Take some more tea,” the March Hare said to Alice, very earnestly.

“I've had nothing yet,” Alice replied in an offended tone, “so I can't take more.”

“You mean you can't take LESS,” said the Hatter.” “It's very easy to take MORE than nothing.”

“Nobody asked YOUR opinion,” said Alice.

And now on to the budget:

- We have attached for your review the FY11 “Red Book” for the Bureau of Reclamation. The Red Book contains budget summaries and breakdowns of proposed project funding for each state.
- The Bureau budget includes \$62 million for the WaterSMART program.
- This amount also includes \$29 million for Title 16 Water Reuse funding, of which just over \$20 million is for new projects. During the year, the Bureau will develop new criteria for agencies who wish to apply for this new funding.
- The Corps of Engineers budget includes a reduction in General Investigation spending from \$160 million in FY10 to \$104 million in FY11 and \$1.7 billion from \$2.0 billion in Construction grant funding.
- The Energy and Water Appropriators almost always increase Corps funding above what is requested by the Administration. But they will have a hard time doing so with the gap created by the FY11 request.

HRA will be sending out additional reports in the coming days providing updates for other Federal agencies with regard to their FY11 budget proposals

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