

# The Western Coalition of Arid States

## WESTCAS



Testimony

of

Larry Libeu

President

Western Coalition of Arid States (WESTCAS)

Submitted (for the record) to the Committee on Appropriations

Subcommittee, Interior & Related Agencies

Regarding FY08 Environmental Protection Agency Budget

March 16, 2007

***The Voice of Water Quality in the Arid West***

5335 Wisconsin Ave. N.W., Suite 440 • Washington, DC 20015-2052  
(202) 966-2190 • Fax: (202) 966-2191

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The Western Coalition of Arid States (WESTCAS) is submitting this testimony regarding the Presidents FY 2008 budget request for the United States Environmental Protection Agency. My name is Larry Libeu and I am President of the organization.

WESTCAS is a coalition of approximately 125 water and wastewater districts, cities and towns and professional organizations focused on water quality and water quantity issues in the States of Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon and Texas. Our mission is to work with Federal, State and Regional water quality and quantity agencies to promote scientifically-sound law, regulations, appropriations and policies that protect public health in the environment of the arid West.

Most citizens of the United States consider the public safety departments to be police and fire. Yet when these people come into their lives it is usually do to a personal catastrophe or problem. Yet water service providers are their every day. It is a service that is taken for granted until it is not available. People providing water services truly are a part of public safety and the Environmental Protection Agency provides the rules, regulations, tools and often funding to ensure that this public safety item is one which the residents of the United States can trust.

State Revolving Funding programs provide low cost loans and grants to ensure drinking water and wastewater regulations are met. The needs surveys indicate that funding needs are increasing, not decreasing. The proposed reduction of more than \$200 million from the Clean Water State Revolving Loan Fund program will cause a dramatic reduction in infrastructure programs. The current Clean Water Needs Survey provided to Congress identifies billions in need that directly affect water safety. WESTCAS supports increasing the SRF program funding to over the FY06 level.

The State and Tribal Assistance Grants (STAG) are EPA's Compliance and Enforcement program that funds grants to states, tribes, inter-tribal consortia, territories and multi-jurisdictional organizations as a way of strengthening and building relationships with them, while helping to build their capacity to implement our nation's environmental laws and regulations. The 19 percent decrease from FY06 actuals will seriously hamper the ability for States and Tribes to improve their implementation of water quality protections. At the same time, the FY08 budget has an increase of \$9 million for EPA enforcement programs. Since the States do most of the enforcement activities, WESTCAS supports funding STAG grants at the FY06 actuals level to increase State and Tribal abilities for enforcement and does not support the increase in EPA enforcement program funding.

Providing clean, safe water services to citizens is not just a function of the members of WESTCAS it is the mission of each and passion of each of its members. The proposed decrease of 18 percent from FY06 actuals in the Clean and Safe Water Goal funding could greatly impair the ability of State, Local and Regional representatives to support EPA's strategic objectives of protecting human health by reducing exposure to

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contaminants in drinking water, protecting the quality of rivers lakes, and stream, and conducting leading edge sound scientific research to support the protection of human health.

WESTCAS supports the budget initiatives to implement EPA's plan to move forward on a scientific foundation for an integrated assessing, listing, and reporting water quality condition; research on nutrient responses in based on geographic region (particularly important to arid states); and to provide more efficient monitoring and diagnostic tools. WESTCAS is particularly concerned that the effort to advance the development of new methods for deriving water quality criteria does not have an emphasis on arid climate conditions.

Ensuring that drinking water aquifers are protected provides security to all residents. Leaking underground storage facilities, illegal dumping and mismanagement of land application products can lead to contamination of this vital resource. WESTCAS therefore urges increases to the Hazardous Substance Superfund (7% decrease from FY06 actuals) and Leaking Underground Storage Tanks (16% decrease from FY06 actuals) funding levels.

Budget development and allotment of funding is a challenge and one which requires a great deal of introspection within the organization. WESTCAS appreciates the opportunity to provide testimony on this complex task.

Thank you for considering our request.

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