

STATEMENT OF  
THE WATER RESOURCES COALITION  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON WATER RESOURCES AND THE ENVIRONMENT  
COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE  
HEARING ON  
COMPREHENSIVE WATERSHED MANAGEMENT PLANNING  
JUNE 24, 2008

Madame Chairwoman and members of the Subcommittee, the Water Resources Coalition is submitting this statement for inclusion in the record of your June 24<sup>th</sup> hearing on watershed planning and management. The Coalition was established in 2007 to promote the development, implementation and funding of a comprehensive national water resources policy. With member organizations representing state and local governments, conservation, engineering and construction ports, waterways and transportation services, the Coalition works to ensure that a comprehensive , national water resources policy is developed, implemented and funded to provide a sustainable, productive economy; healthy aquatic ecology; and public health and safety.

Because of the breadth of the Coalition's membership, many of our members have extensive experience with various types of federal, State, and local water resources projects ranging from water supply to environmental restoration, to storm damage reduction and navigation. At the federal level, each of us works closely with both the Corps of Engineers and the Bureau of Reclamation.

Watershed planning is not a new concept. In fact, the Corps sought to implement it in the 1960s. One of the obstacles to the success of this more integrated, holistic approach to water resources is the natural inclination of elected officials at all levels to look at

satisfying their own needs. It is more difficult to have a regional perspective until issues such as droughts force governments within a region to look beyond their own borders.

Another obstacle is the need to achieve close working relationships among agencies at the federal and state levels. For example, implementing watershed planning may require the cooperation of the Corps, EPA, Fish & Wildlife, FEMA, Agriculture and other federal agencies, not to mention agencies at the state level. In such a situation, making this partnership work becomes a daunting, but not impossible, task.

In fact, some states have been aggressively managing watershed issues for long enough such that overlaying federal agencies onto ongoing efforts could be counterproductive unless clear jurisdictional boundaries are established. The environmental and water resource benefits desired by state authorities may run counter to the mission objectives of federal authorities, although each merit equal value on a national and regional level.

The lack of a coordinated federal water resources program is another barrier to watershed planning. Each agency pursues its own goals without an over-arching framework of direction and management. This problem is mirrored by the way Congress divides both oversight and funding for these agencies among various committees.

The Corps of Engineers faces another hurdle: It does not recommend water resources policies. Rather, its mission is to study those projects directed by Congress and construct those projects that Congress authorizes and funds. In this lack of a policymaking mission, the Corps differs from other federal agencies that would be involved in watershed planning.

In addition, Congress appropriates funds to the Corps in categories that create “stovepipes” that can discourage integrated approaches to planning. Projects are funded in categories such as Operations & Maintenance, Construction, and Investigations. Within Corps Districts, these categories are often further subdivided into coastal, inland or other subcategories.

Finally, it is one thing to create a watershed program at the federal level and another to fund it adequately. Many of the problems facing the implementation of the Corps' civil works program in recent years would have been avoided or mitigated had Congress provided adequate funding. Instead, maintenance and new construction have been deferred, while Members of Congress do their best to get funding for projects in their own states or districts.

Having raised these issues, the Coalition is strongly supportive of the watershed or regional approach to the planning and management of water resources and related environmental infrastructure. The United States is facing a number of serious challenges. We are in a period of global warming and increased frequency and severity of storms. Our ports and navigation channels are inadequate to meet the needs of domestic and foreign commerce. More and more of our population is moving into riverine and coastal areas of risk, with development also having increasingly negative impacts on the nation's environmental resources.

To meet these challenges, there is a need for an increased level of collaborative planning. The Coalition recognizes that, even in these times of fiscal limits, the financial resources the federal government has to commit to watershed management are significant. However, the states have a major role in watershed planning. The Corps has extensive expertise it can lend to states to assist in this effort. Because watersheds do not stop at State boundaries, the federal government has a responsibility to promote both watershed planning as well as the management of resources and projects within watersheds among States.

At the beginning of this century, a Corps of Engineers study concluded that "much of present watershed planning starts at the local watershed level, where local interests are not clearly linked to regional and national interests." Within the Corps, there is a need for a clear mandate from Congress to create a watershed planning framework that involves not only government agencies and entities but all relevant stakeholders.

Adopting guidance, procedures and training for Corps personnel will be essential to carrying the successful implementation of that mandate.

Some past and present watershed or regional planning efforts have resulted in studies without resultant projects. The Coalition believes that the science of watershed planning needs to be translated more effectively at all levels of government into project level comprehensive planning. In addition, adaptive management should be one of the essential features of watershed projects so that what scientific models have predicted can be measured against actual performance and adjustments can be made to assure that intended goals are reached.

The Coalition also stresses that data is essential to effective water resource planning. In recent years, budget-cutting originating in the Office of Management and Budget has undermined the Corps' data collection programs. There are now chronological and geographical gaps in that data that make watershed planning more difficult. States and private educational and scientific institutions have data that needs to be integrated with federal data and then shared through open computer architecture so that all who need knowledge can have access to it.

In WRDA 2007, Congress enacted a new regional sediment management (RSM) program (Section 2037). RSM is a sister program to the Corps' watershed planning program. The Coalition would like to work with this Subcommittee to make modifications to the RSM language so that it provides the authority to the Corps to take a collaborative regional approach to sediment management.

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2010, 2013, 2017, and 2033. This patchwork of policies speaks to the need to establish a single authority within the Corps to ensure a comprehensive, yet streamlined, watershed management effort by federal agencies and non-federal partners. In addition to providing a center of knowledge and management, the authority will suit congressional interests by maximizing federal spending and ultimately reducing the amount of time necessary to resolve regional watershed problems.

The Coalition hopes the Committee will give careful consideration to these recommendations and we would welcome the opportunity to further discuss them with the Committee in the future.