

Testimony of Ron Thompson, General Manager

Washington County Water Conservancy District

St. George, Utah

Before the House Science Subcommittee on Energy and

Environment

October 30, 2007

2:00 PM

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee, Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Ron Thompson. I have been the General Manager of the Washington County Water Conservancy District in Washington County, Utah for the past 25 years.

I appreciate this opportunity

- To familiarize you with the efforts our District is putting forth to make water conservation a way of life;
- To share with you some ideas on what you can do to help those of us who deal with the everyday task of water conservation; and
- To give you my thoughts on the draft bill authored by Rep. Matheson of Utah.

Washington County is located in the extreme southwest corner of Utah. The area averages only 8 inches of precipitation per year and is part of the northern reach of the Mojave Desert. In addition to a limited amount of water, we have 300 days of sunshine annually, a long growing season and a robust tourism industry that brings in approximately 3.5 million visitors each year. Water conservation is *not* optional for us; it is a way of life that each of our citizens must embrace.

Water Conservation Program

In the past eleven years, the per capita water use in our county has dropped 24%. In 2008, the District will review its Water Conservation Plan and set new goals to achieve an *additional* 25% water savings. Washington County has achieved this 24% reduction in water use by utilizing several measures:

- All cities have time-of-day watering restrictions.
- Each city has a block rate structure for water pricing so those using more water pay more.
- The District has implemented a county-wide impact fee for all new construction based on the size of the irrigable portion of the lot.
- Each city that purchases water from the District must have a water conservation plan in place.
- A telemetry project has been initiated that monitors diversions along the Santa Clara and Virgin rivers to minimize water loss and enhance precision in measuring water right allowance.
- Canal systems have been converted to pressurized irrigation systems thereby eliminating water loss from seepage and evaporation.

Water saving programs have been implemented which include:

- Ultra low flush (ULF) toilet rebates;
- *WaterSense* dishwashers and clothes washer rebates;
- An astro-turf rebate program - athletic fields and public facilities that have turf receive a rebate for up to ½ of the cost to convert it to astro-turf;
- County-wide free water checks;
- Smart Irrigation Controller rebates;
- State Water-Wise Plant List and Tagging program;
- Distribution of new arrival water survival kits;
- Water-efficient landscape workshops; and
- Training for and certification of professional landscapers in the use of water wise plants.

Education of the public is a key component to water conservation:

- The District publishes a quarterly newsletter which highlights water conservation;
- Articles and editorials are submitted to local newspapers;
- Annual water fairs are sponsored;
- A water conservation demonstration garden has been completed to educate the public about Xeriscape® principles;

- Various media venues are utilized;
- Education of the media is a priority; and
- Presentations are given to local organizations.

In addition to all these conservation efforts, the District is a member of the Governor's Water Conservation Team, a statewide program that encourages an ethic of conservation and water use efficiency.

We have made *great* strides in the conservation of this resource, but we have a long way to go. We will continue to provide water saving programs and to further educate the public on the value of this resource and how they should approach its use. But we need to go beyond this. Right now our District is looking at such conservation projects as waste water reuse and agricultural conversion to residential water systems.

These efforts to encourage water conservation and implement conservation projects do not come easy and they do not come cheaply. Hours of staff time are devoted just to this one component of a water district's mission. We were the first Water Conservancy District in Utah to submit a water conservation plan to Utah

State. We were the first Water Conservancy District to partnership with EPA in the *WaterSense Program*.

The EPA's *WaterSense Program* has been influential in several ways and has helped us with our conservation mission in Washington County:

- It has encouraged manufacturers and distributors to produce high-efficiency water products
- It has encouraged consumers to look for products that will save water
- Most of all – it has given the public some practical methods for saving water. People want to save water and they want to do it in a way that will not be totally disruptive of their lifestyle. They oftentimes, however, do not know how to go about it. Education is the key. The *WaterSense Program* is educational and practical.
- Most of all, it puts the issue of conserving water on a national level, allowing both the public and private sectors to synergize their expertise in promoting the efficient use of water.

We need your continued support if we are to make further strides in water conservation. I encourage you, our elected representatives, to continue leading the

charge on water conservation. Help us in Washington County meet our next 25% water reduction goal. We are working to:

- Require that secondary water systems be in place before a new housing development proceeds.
- Require government facilities to build and landscape in a water-wise manner. If government will reduce its water consumption, the public may be motivated to reduce theirs.
- Continue and enhance grant funding for water conservation measures and incentives.
- Continue funding for water conservation projects such as wastewater reuse and reverse osmosis treatment facilities.
- Provide grants to assist business such as restaurants and car washes to install water efficient technology.
- Legislate and implement tax credits for those who install high efficiency appliances.
- Provide grants for educational campaigns encouraging water conservation and the practical means to reach conservation goals.
- Provide grants to schools to enable them to initiate a water conservation curriculum. Future generations will be dealing with limited water resources and a growing demand.

We support and commend Congressman Matheson's water conservation legislation because it recognizes the challenges facing our nation today with regard to water resources:

- Our population is rapidly growing
- Extreme water shortages are forthcoming; and
- Severe droughts will be long lasting.

It is imperative that our leaders map out a strategy that will focus efforts on water reuse, water storage, water distribution, water conservation and water education. This can only be accomplished with well-funded programs dedicated to

- Research which will give birth to technologies that will help us increase our water efficiency, and to
- Practical implementation of this research.

All the research and all the technology in the world, however, will not make a dent in our water issues if we do not educate and inform the public on the need for conservation and the methods which they can adopt to meet conservation goals.

The objective of this bill is a major campaign to educate the individual states, the water districts and the general public on the manner in which water resources are to be utilized and preserved. The English born biologist and philosopher, Herbert Spencer said “*The great aim of education is not knowledge, but action.*” We must take action and we must encourage our constituents to take action required to become totally committed to the wise use of our water resources.

Water development, management, and stabilization are the major responsibilities of a water district. Water conservation, on the other hand, is the responsibility of each and every citizen. This message needs to be driven home time and time again. It is imperative that we all come to understand that water conservation is not ordinance driven, but morally driven. We here in this room have a moral obligation to take the lead in conserving this great resource. Education of the public will give them the tools to follow suit. Thank you.