



March 8, 2006

**Testimony in support of H. R. 4545
House Subcommittee on Water and Power**

Dear Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee,

It is a pleasure to be here today to present this testimony to you. My name is Rebecca Drayse, and I am a member of the Board of Directors of the Los Angeles and San Gabriel Rivers Watershed Council, a non-profit organization. We are seeking your support for H. R. 4545 to amend the Reclamation Wastewater and Groundwater Study and Facilities Act by adding the Los Angeles County Water Supply Augmentation Demonstration Project. This demonstration project is part of the Los Angeles Basin Water Augmentation Study led by the Watershed Council in partnership with the Bureau of Reclamation and many local agencies. The purpose of the Study is to examine the potential of capturing and infiltrating stormwater for increasing local water supplies and reducing our dependence on water from Northern California and the Colorado River. Treating urban runoff as a resource can also reduce the amount of pollution it currently carries to local water bodies. Phase 3 of the Water Augmentation Study, the subject of this bill, will use multi-purpose neighborhood-scale demonstration projects to show how existing infrastructure can be retrofitted with low-impact practices that address runoff and flooding, improve water quality, increase local water supplies, and create habitat. Many, if not most, of the country's urban areas face growing water quality and water supply challenges. The approach we're pursuing in Phase 3 and the practices we'll implement will be applicable elsewhere in California and across the country. Reclamation was instrumental in initiating the Water Augmentation Study with the Watershed Council in 2000, contributed the initial seed money, and has been a strong partner since its inception.

A growing Southern California faces increasing uncertainty with respect to both water supply availability and water quality. Urban runoff, from stormwater and overuse of water for irrigation and other outdoor needs, carries pollutants that degrade our waterways. Runoff is subject to increasing regulation; the cost of compliance is a serious concern for local jurisdictions. Our traditional sources of imported water—Northern California and the Colorado River—are constrained by legal and environmental factors, and new alternatives, such as desalination and increased recycling, can only supply a portion of our growing demand.

In the Los Angeles region, urbanization has significantly increased the area of paved surfaces over the past six decades, and the amount of urban runoff has consequently increased tenfold. On average, over 500,000 acre-feet of runoff is wasted to the ocean annually from the Los Angeles basin, an amount roughly equal to one-third of our annual water need. With nearly 2 million acre-feet of unused storage capacity in local groundwater basins, capturing more of this runoff for infiltration could substantially increase local water supplies. Reducing the volume of urban

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stormwater runoff in turn reduces pollutant loads to surface waters and eases demand on the flood management system. Increasing infiltration also helps to restore the natural hydrology and the treatment function of the soil, both largely lost to urban development.

The Water Augmentation Study was initiated to address important scientific and economic questions about water quality and supply by assessing the potential of urban stormwater infiltration to augment water supplies. To date our research has focused on the impacts of infiltration on groundwater quality; we've measured those impacts by monitoring surface runoff and runoff that's percolating through the soil to groundwater. Our results so far indicate that infiltration is reasonably safe, as the soil mitigates most of the pollutants contained in runoff. The overall goals of the Water Augmentation Study are to quantify the benefits, costs, and risks of infiltration, characterize appropriate conditions for infiltration, and provide a comprehensive assessment of the potential for augmenting water supply, reducing water pollution, and providing additional environmental and social benefits through infiltration in combination with other strategies.

We believe that an integrated, comprehensive approach to water management is necessary to maximize benefits and achieve cost-effective solutions. The demonstration project proposed in H. R. 4545 will retrofit a residential neighborhood with a variety of management practices to illustrate methods and opportunities for water conservation, stormwater capture and reuse, habitat restoration, groundwater recharge, flood management, watershed education, and other benefits. Phase 3 is also assessing the overall feasibility of using infiltration techniques to capture stormwater for groundwater recharge, including economic, environmental and hydrogeologic issues. Reclamation has developed a runoff-infiltration model to predict the amount of additional water that could potentially be available for groundwater recharge if infiltration is increased. The bureau is also funding a regional cost-and-benefit assessment to determine the real cost of this new water supply. The results of this project will provide a framework to help decision makers in Southern California and other regions address runoff, water quality and water supply issues in urban areas.

The Water Augmentation Study has enjoyed strong financial support at the federal and local level. Reclamation helped launch the Study in 2000 and provided funds for the initial planning and research. In FY2003, the Study was authorized as a new start in Reclamation's Southern California Investigations Program. President Bush supported the Study by including it in his budget during the next three years. In each of those years (FY04, FY05, FY06), the Energy & Water Appropriations Subcommittee has provided additional funding to Reclamation for the Water Augmentation Study. To date, Reclamation has contributed over \$1.3 million to this partnership. At the local level, our major partners include the public works departments of the city and county of Los Angeles and the city of Santa Monica, many municipal water and groundwater agencies, the Regional Water Quality Control Board, and TreePeople. These partners have also contributed over a million dollars to this Study, as well as their extensive technical expertise.

In addition to serving on the Board of the Watershed Council, I work for TreePeople as program manager for the T.R.E.E.S. Project, which seeks to address the lack of integration in environmental problem-solving in the Los Angeles area. The Water Augmentation Study is a

great example of how agencies can work in partnership to achieve common goals. TreePeople has developed a number of demonstration sites that showcase the benefits of agency cooperation and urban watershed best practices. We've been an active partner in the Water Augmentation Study for the past five years—two of the demonstration sites monitored in the Study's early phases were developed by TreePeople and we have been working closely with the Watershed Council on the concept and design of the neighborhood retrofit. The retrofit is the next critical step in identifying and overcoming roadblocks to the large-scale implementation of local water augmentation projects.

Reclamation's funding for the Water Augmentation Study to date has come from the Southern California Investigations Program, which is its Planning Program. Planning funds have some limitations and do not cover everything we want to accomplish with this project. The technical feasibility studies, for example, can not be done within the Planning Program. H. R. 4545 would create a line item for the Water Augmentation Study outside of the planning budget that would enable Reclamation to increase both its level of funding and its technical assistance for this project. This would also enable future funding to be allocated specifically to this line item in the Southern Area Office, thus making our funding more secure.

Thank you again for the opportunity to speak to you today about the Water Augmentation Study, and special thanks to the bill's sponsors, Linda Sanchez and Grace Napolitano, for their leadership and support for this study. We hope you will all support the bill's passage, and help us to seek continued federal funding for the completion of this important endeavor.

Respectfully submitted,



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