



News from the Committee on Natural Resources

Rep. Nick J. Rahall, II - Chairman

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
February 5, 2009

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Omnibus Public Lands Package Brings Relief to Drought-Stricken West

Washington, D.C. – As California braces for what is projected to be its worst drought in modern history, House Natural Resources Committee Chairman Nick J. Rahall (D-WV) and Subcommittee on Water and Power Chairwoman Grace Napolitano (D-CA) today announced that the U.S. House of Representatives is poised to act next week on a comprehensive legislative package containing key water provisions intended to bring timely relief to the drought-stricken West.

“Water is the lifeblood of communities and economies throughout the West, but drought conditions, climate change, and conflicts over allocation are undermining the reliability of water supplies for municipal and agricultural use,” Rahall said. “This omnibus package will bring much-needed relief to California and other drought-stricken states by implementing innovative approaches and allowing local water managers to tap into federal resources that were allowed to run dry during the Bush Administration.”

The **“Omnibus Public Land Management Act of 2009” (S. 22)**, passed by the Senate on January 15, 2009 with a bipartisan vote of 73-21, contains 30 separate authorizations for the Bureau of Reclamation and the U.S. Geological Survey. Rahall and Napolitano helped shepherd many of these proposals through the House Natural Resources Committee and ultimately to House passage during the last Congress. The projects in the package – nearly evenly split between bills sponsored by Democrats and Republicans – would help address the major water issues facing the West, including drought management, aging infrastructure and regional water reuse projects.

Fifteen of the Bureau of Reclamation project authorizations are meant to directly benefit California. Once completed, the seven water reuse and water recycling projects, and the two groundwater recharge proposals will produce almost half a million acre-feet of reclaimed reuse water and added storage capacity, lessening the dependence on imported water for Southern California. To put this in perspective, one acre-foot is 325,851 gallons, or roughly enough water for a family of four for one year.

“Assistance to our nation’s water conservation and recycling projects are vital to the long term economic future and for the drought preparedness of our communities. A clean and reliable supply of water will allow businesses to prosper and help consumers to avoid long term rate increases,” Napolitano said. “S. 22 includes 30 pieces of water-related legislation, with seven Title XVI water recycling projects. Much of this legislation was introduced and passed by the House several times in previous years, only to be stalled in the Senate. This is our best chance to pass critical water legislation this Congress.”

The proposed Santa Margarita Conjunctive Use Project will provide a water supply for Camp Pendleton and the Fallbrook Public Utility District and resolve a long-standing water rights dispute between the United States and the District. The project, as proposed, will develop 16,000 acre-feet of water annually, with 9,600 acre-feet used by Camp Pendleton and 6,400 acre-feet by the District. This legislation has passed the House for the last four Congresses.

The legislative package would also authorize the San Gabriel Restoration Fund, a program that remediates contaminated water in the San Gabriel Basin. The Basin can hold an estimated 1 million acre-feet of water. When treated, this serves as the region’s water supply for 2 million residents. In addition, the bill authorizes the Lower Colorado River Multi-Species Conservation Fund, a program that helps protect the environment and alleviate environmental conflicts related to water deliveries.

“With the long term threat of drought in the West, especially in my home state of California, we must act on this legislation,” Napolitano said. “Directing funds to innovative shovel-ready projects will help to ensure new and sustainable water supplies for the West.”

The California water provisions introduced during the last Congress included in S. 22:

- H.R. 1803: Rep. Duncan Hunter (R-CA) – *“The San Diego Water Storage and Efficiency Act of 2007”*
- H.R. 1855: Rep. George Radanovich (R-CA) – *“Madera Water Supply Enhancement Act”*
- H.R. 1725: Rep. Mary Bono-Mack (R-CA) – *“Rancho California Water District Recycled Water Reclamation Facility Act of 2008”*
- H.R. 29: Rep. Darrell Issa (R-CA) -- To authorize the Secretary of the Interior to construct facilities to provide water for irrigation, municipal, domestic, military, and other uses from the Santa Margarita River, California, and for other purposes.
- H.R. 31: Rep. Darrell Issa (R-CA) – *“Elsinore Valley Municipal Water District Wastewater and Recycled Water Facilities Act of 2007”*
- H.R. 236: Rep. Mike Thompson (D-CA) – *“North Bay Water Reuse Program Act of 2007”*
- H.R. 813: Rep. Gary Miller (R-CA) – *“Santa Ana River Water Supply Enhancement Act of 2008”*
- H.R. 1175: Rep. Loretta Sanchez (D-CA) -- To amend the Reclamation Wastewater and Groundwater Study and Facilities Act to increase the ceiling on the Federal share of the costs of phase I of the Orange County, California, Regional Water Reclamation Project.
- H.R. 1139: Rep. Ken Calvert (R-CA) – *“Riverside-Corona Feeder Water Supply Act”*
- H.R. 1737: Rep. Lois Capps (D-CA) – *“City of Oxnard Water Recycling and Desalination Act of 2007”*
- H.R. 2614: Rep. Ken Calvert (R-CA) -- To amend the Reclamation Wastewater and Groundwater Study and Facilities Act to authorize the Secretary of the Interior to participate in certain water projects in California.

- H.R. 3323: Rep. Lois Capps (D-CA) – “*Goleta Water Distribution System Conveyance Act of 2008*”
- H.R. 123: Rep. David Dreier (R-CA) -- To authorize appropriations for the San Gabriel Basin Restoration Fund
- H.R. 2515: Rep. Dean Heller (R-NV) – “*Lower Colorado River Multi-Species Conservation Program Act*”
- H.R. 4074: Rep. Jim Costa (D-CA) – “*San Joaquin River Restoration Settlement Act*”

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