

**Testimony of Bennett W. Raley
Trout, Raley, Montañó, Witwer & Freeman, P.C.
Before the House Committee on Natural Resources,
Subcommittee on Water and Power, Concerning
The "Bureau of Reclamation Surface Water Storage Streamlining Act"
House of Representatives, Washington, D.C.**

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Chairman McClintock, Ranking Member Napolitano, Members of the Subcommittee, it is an honor to be before you today to discuss the "Bureau of Reclamation Surface Water Storage Streamlining Act." In summary, the National Water Resources Association and the Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District support this legislation because it will provide for a streamlined and more effective process for the development of new Reclamation water supply projects. Congress recently provided similar authorities to the US Army Corps of Engineers in the 2014 Water Resources Reform and Development Act, P.L. 113-121. We are very hopeful that this legislation will enjoy similar broad bipartisan support.

The National Water Resources Association, more commonly known as NWRA, represents state water associations, irrigation districts, cities, towns and other water providers that share a common interest in the development and management of reliable irrigation and municipal water supplies in the western states. NWRA members provide water to millions of people, agricultural producers and other businesses throughout the United States. For more than eighty years NWRA members have worked to provide water in a manner that provides both economic and ecosystem benefits to communities.

The fact that Reclamation processes can be improved is illustrated by Northern Water's experience in developing water supply projects. Northern Water is the repayment entity for the Colorado-Big Thompson Project, which is one of the most successful federal reclamation projects in the West. Approximately 860,000 people live within the boundaries of Northern Water and its Municipal Subdistrict. Northern Water and its Municipal Subdistrict provide year-round water supplies to over 40 municipalities and domestic water supply districts. Northern Water also delivers water to more than 120 ditch, reservoir, and irrigation companies that serve thousands of farms and more than 640,000 acres of some of the most productive farmland in the Western United States.

The original Colorado-Big Thompson Project was completed by Reclamation in 1957 and is now operated by both Reclamation and Northern Water. C-BT Project Water is allocated by Northern Water to agricultural, domestic, municipal and industrial uses on the Eastern Slope of Colorado. In recognition of the fact that Northern Colorado includes both vibrant cities and some of the most productive agricultural lands in the nation, in the late 1960's and 1970's growing Northern

Colorado communities elected to develop the Windy Gap Project rather than rely solely on the transfer of water from existing agricultural uses to meet future municipal demands. The Windy Gap Project was completed in 1985. However, the continued growth of Northern Colorado has created the need to develop additional municipal water supplies. As a result, Northern Colorado is the project sponsor for the Northern Integrated Supply Project (“NISP”), and Northern’s Municipal Subdistrict is the project sponsor for the Windy Gap Firming Project. Both NISP and the Windy Gap Firming Project are designed to meet future municipal water demands in Northern Colorado in a way that protects existing agricultural water users in Northern Colorado.

The Northern Integrated Supply Project is a regional water supply project being developed by Northern Water on behalf of 15 Northern Colorado water providers that are faced with a 60,000 acre-foot water supply shortfall by 2060. NISP will supply participating water providers with approximately 40,000 acre-feet of additional water supply annually. NISP will include two new “offstream” reservoirs with a combined capacity of approximately 215,000 acre-feet of water, and two water pumping stations and related pipelines. NISP will also include appropriate environmental and related mitigation elements. The Army Corps of Engineers is the lead federal agency for NISP compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act. The Corps issued a draft Environmental Impact Statement for public comment in April 2008. In February 2009, the Corps decided to prepare a supplemental DEIS to include additional studies primarily centered on hydrologic, streamflow, and impacts modeling. The supplemental DEIS is scheduled to be completed and released for public comment in early 2015, and a final EIS is anticipated in late 2015.

The Windy Gap Firming Project is a collaboration between 13 Northern Colorado water providers that are projected to have a water supply shortfall of 64,000 acre feet in 2030 and 110,000 acre feet by 2050. The Windy Gap Firming Project will, when combined with conservation, water reuse, and the development of other supplies, be an important component of the strategy to supply this future demand. The Windy Gap Firming Project includes a new 90,000 acre-foot East Slope “off-channel” reservoir. Reclamation is the lead federal agency for the Windy Gap Firming Project. A final Environmental Impact Statement was completed in 2011, and the Municipal Subdistrict is in the process of negotiating a contract with Reclamation for the use of C-BT Project capacity by the Windy Gap Project. The Windy Gap Firming Project includes a wide range of environmental mitigation and enhancement measures, including a state-approved fish and wildlife mitigation plan that also addresses stream temperature considerations, increased flushing flows to clean sediment in the Colorado River, nutrient removal to offset water quality impacts to the C-BT Project, a voluntary enhancement plan to fund future stream restoration and habitat-related projects, and additional water for local communities that will also benefit downstream aquatic habitat.

The point of the discussion of this history is that Northern Water and its Municipal Subdistrict have substantial experience with the development of water supply

projects. While it is conceptually possible that the Windy Gap Project, NISP, and Windy Gap Firing Projects could have been federal reclamation projects, faced with the complexity, cost, and uncertainty of the process for new federal reclamation projects, Northern Water and its Municipal Subdistrict and the cities and towns who will rely on these water supplies have elected to proceed with these Projects as non-federal projects subject to federal permitting and other requirements.

Northern Water is not alone in working to develop water supply opportunities that are sensitive to environmental needs without triggering the complex, costly and time-consuming processes for federal water supply projects. Water providers throughout the West are seeking similar non-federal solutions. However, given the importance and prominence of Reclamation facilities in many regions, a non-federal project approach is not always available, and meeting the needs of the future will likely require that existing federal reclamation projects throughout the West be optimized to allow additional storage or that unused capacity in existing Reclamation projects be made available to provide to better manage available non-federal water resources. The "Bureau of Reclamation Surface Water Storage Streamlining Act" would provide welcome improvements in the effectiveness of the process that will be required to provide additional storage in a manner that fully complies with the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act and other federal laws.

NWRA and Northern Water thank you for this opportunity to testify, and for your attention to the critical water supply issues facing our nation. We look forward to working with the Committee on this important issue.