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FY 2018 Written Testimony for the Record
U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Energy and Water Development
April 20, 2018

Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Kaptur, members of the Subcommittee, thank you for giving the Columbia Basin Development League (the League) the opportunity to submit testimony on the Bureau of Reclamation's budget for fiscal year 2019. This testimony is submitted on behalf of the League its members, and stakeholders. The League is made up of farmers, businesses, civic and economic groups and individuals that recognize the importance of completing the Bureau of Reclamation's Columbia Basin Project (CBP). Since 1964, the League has supported the CBP, which delivers essential water supplies to highly productive agricultural land in Washington State.

The Columbia Basin Project is an existing line in the Bureau of Reclamation's budget and we are writing to encourage you to increase this line item so that additional resources can be dedicated to the completion of the Columbia Basin Project. Completing this federal irrigation project would be a capstone infrastructure achievement.

The League's long-term goal is full development of the Columbia Basin Project and the League strongly encourages Congress to recognize the importance of this critical water infrastructure project. Completion of the Columbia Basin Project would create jobs in both the near and long term, increase agricultural production, and fulfill a federal commitment decades in the making by providing improved access to the critical resource of water.

In the near term, the League is focused on addressing the challenges posed by the declining Odessa Aquifer. The Odessa Aquifer lies on the eastern most side of the CBP in a region authorized to receive water. The State of Washington issued ground water permits in the 1960's and 1970's so agricultural and economic development could begin in the area while local communities waited for the federal government to build out the CBP. Unfortunately, the CBP has not yet been fully constructed. This has led to a severe decline in ground water levels in the Odessa region.

Since 1980, ground water levels in the Odessa have dropped approximately 200 feet. In some cases ground water must be pumped from wells as deep as 2,400 feet. Pumping water from this depth requires significant resources, and water found at this depth is of poor quality, has high sodium concentrations, and often must be treated before use. Already numerous farmers, and some municipalities drawing from the same aquifer, have wells that are no longer productive, or produce water of a quality that is not useable. As the aquifer continues to decline well failures will increase.

Aquifer decline, and the well failures associated with it, have dire economic consequences. Studies examining the economic impact of aquifer decline have reported that 3,600 jobs and \$840 million in annual revenues could be lost if action is not taken. Preventing economic hardship and preserving the remaining ground water for domestic supplies is of the utmost importance.

Many parts of the United States are dealing with declining aquifers. Groundwater supplies in the Odessa, unlike many other areas, can be replaced with a sustainable supply of surface water. The water and associated water rights are available and already secured. However, the water delivery infrastructure necessary to secure an entire region's economic vitality needs to be completed. The state of Washington has recognized the vital importance of finding a sustainable water supply and has contributed nearly \$75 million in funding for projects to supply water to the Odessa region since 2005. This is a significant state investment in a federally owned project. Local landowners are also investing in this project through the repayment of municipal bonds secured by the East Columbia Basin Irrigation District. In fact, the local community will ultimately carry a significant share of the costs for this effort. However, the federal government also has an important, enduring role to play in this effort.

The 2012 Odessa Subarea Special Study Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) provided a preferred alternative, to supply surface water from the CBP to irrigate land currently using groundwater. However, the Bureau of Reclamation has yet to include the Odessa Groundwater Replacement Project (OGWRP) in its budget request. We respectfully request that Congress fund the OGWRP at \$10 million for FY2019. Funding for OGWRP presents an excellent opportunity for federal investment in an innovative infrastructure project in rural America. Without the OGWRP, the aquifer will continue to decline at an unsustainable rate, jeopardizing agricultural water supplies as well as the domestic water supply of many rural communities and private households.

We understand that federal funding is limited but we also believe that an investment in our nation's water infrastructure is a responsible, necessary investment in the nation's economy. Allocating an additional \$10 million to the Bureau of Reclamation for the OGWRP will protect annual economic activity of \$840 million. This includes \$630 million in regional agricultural associated sales that contribute to food security and \$211 million in regional income.

Allocating additional funding will help complete expansion of the East Low Canal, an important component of the continued development of the Columbia Basin Project. The Columbia Basin Project is authorized to irrigate more than a million acres of land. However, because the project has never been completed it currently only irrigates 671,000 acres. Leaving hundreds of thousands of acres without a reliable source of irrigation water keeps a vast economic resource untapped. Additional federal investment in the infrastructure needed to complete the Columbia Basin Project would unleash a great economic engine that would fuel job creation and help feed our nation.

We appreciate the Bureau of Reclamation's efforts to manage infrastructure. However, we are concerned that recent budget requests from the Bureau of Reclamation are not sufficient to meet our nation's infrastructure needs. The Bureau of Reclamation's FY 2019 request was approximately 20 percent less than the FY 2018 budget enacted by Congress.

The League applauds the Committee for recognizing the importance of funding water infrastructure and for supporting additional funding to water projects in FY 2015, FY 2016, FY 2017, and FY2018. We encourage the Committee to again consider increasing overall funding to the Bureau of Reclamation to match the commitment made by Congress over the last few years.

The League recognizes the House Committee on Appropriations, and the Subcommittee on Energy and Water Development face numerous challenges as a part of the FY 2019 appropriations process. We greatly appreciate the efforts of the Appropriations Committee as it works to address these challenges. We also greatly appreciate the support and work of the Bureau of Reclamation, the State of Washington, and Washington's congressional delegation. Their efforts are integral to meeting current and future water supply needs. The League could not ask for better champions.

Chairman Simpson and Ranking Member Kaptur, thank you again for giving the League the opportunity to provide testimony and thank you for your efforts to fund our nation's water infrastructure. Please let us know if the League and its members can be of assistance to you during this process.

Respectfully,
Vicky Scharlau, Executive Director, Columbia Basin Development League