

## **Stimulus Provides Money for Water Infrastructure...Let's Put those Dollars to Work**

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The newly enacted economic stimulus package provides a much needed boost to (finally) start to address the critical condition of aging water infrastructure in the Western U.S.

In the American West, water supply systems are essential components of communities, farms, and the environment. These facilities are an integral part of the nation's food-production system and their consistent operation helps ensure our farmer's ability to provide a reliable and secure food supply for our own citizens and the rest of the world. But much of this infrastructure is decades old and in dire need of rehabilitation. In addition, population growth and environmental demands are placing an unprecedented strain on water storage and conveyance systems designed primarily for agricultural use.

Many Western water users – such as those served water by the Klamath Irrigation Project here in Siskiyou County- rely on the federal water supply facilities of the Interior Department's Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation). Others look to the Agriculture Department's resource conservation programs for advice and assistance in the maintenance and development of local water supply systems.

The economic stimulus funding presents a unique opportunity to make the investments necessary to secure a more reliable water supply infrastructure for the West, while creating jobs and opportunities in economically distressed rural areas.

Seizing this opportunity will require that federal agencies quickly identify actions that will yield the greatest benefits to water supply security, then move decisively to carry them out. I hope the Department of the Interior and the Agriculture Department (via the Natural Resources Conservation Service, or NRCS) will heed a few suggested recommendations as they prepare to use stimulus funding for western water supply infrastructure rehabilitation and enhancement.

The rehabilitation and upgrading of Reclamation's water management and delivery infrastructure in the West should be the top priority for the use of funds made available by the stimulus package. Within that priority, first attention should be given to repairing or improving aging project features whose operation or safety are currently, or soon will be, impaired.

In Northern California, Red Bluff Fish Passage Improvement Project is a prime example of a "shovel-ready" project. Environmental documents have already been completed by the project sponsor – Tehama-Colusa Canal Authority. This project is critical to preservation of the regional agriculturally based economy, and will also provide great benefit to endangered and threatened fish species in the Sacramento River. The completion of this project will benefit water users statewide by providing near-term benefits to the fishery resource, thereby helping to resolve

some of the regulatory issues that are crippling the ability to effectively manage water in California.

Reclamation should allocate a substantial amount of stimulus funding to over-subscribed existing cost-shared programs for improvements to water infrastructure that provide management improvements and promote increased efficiencies. In Northern California, for example, Solano Irrigation District has “shovel-ready” projects to address aging infrastructure, include a canal lining project nearing completion. The District has demonstrated that it can meet the work performance goals and demonstrate significant water conservation. In addition to creating jobs, this project would also impart a significant beneficial economic multiplier impact due to purchase of related materials and services.

NRCS can use stimulus funding to support previously authorized programmatic actions and activities, such as the Agricultural Water Enhancement Program (AWEP). Priority should be given to those AWEP projects that are most likely to improve water quality or water conservation, involve multiple partners, maintain agricultural production, minimize administrative costs, and involve the highest percentage of producers in a watershed. Water associations and irrigation districts should be viewed with priority as potential partners, since they will be critical players in any successful regional water project.

Finally, the slow pace of the federal regulatory process is likely to be a major obstacle to actual implementation of projects that could employ stimulus funding. The goals of the economic stimulus legislation – job creation, renewed economic activity and an improved national infrastructure – could well be stymied by a protracted, duplicative and overly-complex regulatory process. The Departments of Interior and Agriculture must work on an urgent basis with other federal agencies to streamline the regulatory process into one that is efficient, fair and effective.

Success of the economic stimulus legislation is important to the family farmers and ranchers of our membership. Decisive action by Reclamation and NRCS will help ensure that federal stimulus dollars are used as effectively as possible.