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**Testimony
Natural Resources Committee
Subcommittee on Water and Power
Tuesday, September 25, 2007**

Thank you Madam Chair for that very kind introduction.

Chairwoman Napolitano, Ranking Member McMorris-Rodgers, and other members of the subcommittee, I appreciate the opportunity to appear today on behalf of the 165, 000 residents of Santa Fe Springs, Pico Rivera and Whittier and the additional 2,000,000 residents served by the Central Basin Municipal Water District (appendix A).

Thank you for being such strong advocates and fighting for clean and safe water for the residents of the San Gabriel Valley. I would also like to recognize Art Aguilar, General Manager of Central Basin Municipal Water District and Al Cablay, Deputy Director of Public Works for the City of Pico Rivera.

For nearly 30 years, the federal government and local water agencies have been working to address an underground plume of contaminated water that has been slowly moving southeast from the Upper San Gabriel Valley region, which is a Superfund site (appendix B). The contamination resulted from the release into the soil of volatile organic compounds such as chemicals used for degreasing, dry cleaning and metal cleaning.

The goal of Central Basin and the cities it represents, including Santa Fe Springs, Pico Rivera and Whittier continues to be clean up and containment of the compounds. We very much appreciated your efforts during the 106th Congress when we initially received authorization to fund containment efforts in the San Gabriel Basin and Central Basin. That legislation initially provided \$10 million to fund the Central Basin Water Quality Protection Project (WQPP), I have attached for your review a brief summary of how that money was spent over the past six years (appendix C) but approximately \$6.5 million went toward construction with the remainder of the money going toward operations. That funding was critical to protecting over 2 million people from the potential contamination migrating south from the upper San Gabriel Valley region. But our mission is not over and we respectfully request you consider including us for additional funding of \$11.2 million as this subcommittee considers HR 123. Our proposed use of these additional funds is detailed in appendix D and would fulfill the recommendation made by the EPA in their 2001 design report.

According to the United States Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA), the initial discovery of contamination occurred in 1979. EPA began investigating groundwater in

the Whittier Narrows area of the San Gabriel Superfund sites in the late 1980s. A remedial investigation was completed in 1992, and from 1997 to 1998, increasing levels of volatile organic compounds led to additional fieldwork by EPA.

Design of a remedial facility in the Whittier Narrows area was completed by USEPA in 2001 and construction of extraction wells, conveyance pipelines, and a treatment plant began in 2001 and was completed in May 2002. The purpose of the treatment facility was to clean up contamination in the Whittier Narrows and to prevent contaminated groundwater from moving into the Central Basin.

However, even before construction of the Whittier Narrows plant began, groundwater monitoring data showed that the level of PCEs (tetrachloroethylene) exceeded the maximum contaminant levels in wells south of the Whittier Narrows Dam. Also, the underground plume of contaminated water had already migrated past the site of the Whittier Narrows extraction wells. Moreover, the Whittier Narrows treatment plant did not become fully operational until December 2005.

The San Gabriel and Rio Hondo Coastal Spreading Grounds are located south of the Whittier Narrows Dam and are adjacent to the cities of Pico Rivera, Whittier, and Santa Fe Springs. These spreading grounds, operated by Los Angeles County, utilize storm water, imported water and recycled water to replenish the groundwater supply in the Central Basin. Thus, we have been concerned for many years that the source of drinking water for these cities as well as the entire Central Basin service area could be contaminated by the underground plume of contaminated water migrating south from the Whittier Narrows area.

In response to concerns over the contamination, the Southeast Water Coalition (SEWC), a joint powers authority was formed, in part, by local cities and the Water Replenishment District (WRD) to advocate for the protection of the regional water supply. The Cities of Pico Rivera, Whittier and Santa Fe Springs are still members of SEWC. SEWC was then, and is now, very concerned about the migration of the underground plume into the Central Basin and the Montebello Forebay service areas.

SEWC approached Central Basin Municipal Water District (CBMWD) in 2001 and requested the District's assistance regarding the issue. Subsequently, the \$10 million appropriation we received through the Bureau of Reclamation for the WQPP meant that local cities and consumers were not penalized for the contamination by being required to pay for the WQPP.

The WQPP was constructed to monitor and intercept water entering the Central Basin from Upper San Gabriel Valley region. Central Basin designed and constructed two extraction wells, a treatment facility, and distribution lines, all located in the City of Pico Rivera. We work closely with our contract operator and test lab firm to conduct monthly testing and we are pleased that over the past two years contamination we are seeing is below the maximum contaminant level. However, the plume is north of the WQPP which puts us in a position to safeguard the water quality if for any reason the Whittier

Narrows remediation facility becomes inoperable for any reason. I have attached for your reference data with containment reads from 2004 to March of this year (appendix E). Notwithstanding what we have seen over the last two years, the unpredictability and location of the contaminant plume continues to be a matter of great concern to the Cities of Santa Fe Springs, Pico Rivera and Whittier. As our three cities are located at the northern edge of the Central Basin service area, we are literally on the front line in this battle.

In 2001 the three cities entered into agreements with Central Basin regarding purchase of the treated water from the WQPP project. Under the agreement, the Cities agreed to convey a certain amount of their water rights to the Central Basin, which pumps the conveyed rights from the extraction wells and treats the pumped water. Collectively, the three cities have made a commitment to take up to 4600 acre feet of water annually from the WQPP. This represents a financial commitment of approximately \$870,000 by the cities.

In October 2004, Central Basin received its domestic drinking water permit and the facility went into operation in and began to distribute in December 2004 the treated water to the cities of Pico Rivera, Santa Fe Springs and Whittier.

In May 2007, after nearly three years of operating the WQPP, Central Basin announced that it was considering taking the WQPP out of service. Central Basin cited two reasons for the stoppage in production: the levels of volatile organic compounds that were originally cited to be a concern had not exceeded allowable levels for the last two years; and, operating costs were much higher than expected. Central Basin met with the three impacted cities and it was evident they were concerned about the potential threat to groundwater in the Central Basin. In order to keep the facility in service, the cities and Central Basin agreed to work together regarding formation of a joint powers authority (JPA).

Groundwater monitoring data from the WQPP shows that allowable levels of volatile organic compounds have not been exceeded during the last two years; however, the cities and Central Basin believe the prudent course would be to continue operating the WQPP due to the potential harm to Central Basin and the Montebello Forebay from the underground plume of contaminated water. The original 2001 design report for the WQPP recommended continuous pumping would be required for up to 7 years assuming that EPA begins operation of the containment extraction wells in the Whittier Narrows within 2 years. However, the Whittier Narrows treatment facility did not become fully operational in 2003 as anticipated; as stated previously, that occurred in December 2005, after the WQPP became operational. As a result of this delay, the continuous pumping recommendation made by the EPA would carry our operation into 2014, which is why we are requesting additional funding by amending HR 123 to include us.

Again, given the substantial federal investment in both Whittier Narrows and WQPP, if the WQPP facility is shut down, and maximum contamination levels are exceeded in the

future in the area south of Whittier Narrows Dam, it would leave the cities with no recourse and would threaten water quality in the Central Basin.

Therefore, on behalf of the cities of Santa Fe Springs, Pico Rivera and Whittier, we strongly urge the subcommittee to include \$11.2 in additional funding in HR 123 for continued operation of the WQPP. The cities and Central Basin believe this funding is critical to the continued protection of water quality for the more than 2 million people living in and around the impacted cities.