

**Statement of
The Honorable Eddie Bernice Johnson
Subcommittee on Water Resources and Environment
Hearing On
“Watershed Management and Planning”
June 24, 2008**

The United States is a country with very diverse water resource needs. Watershed planning and management provides a means for Federal and local governments to identify water resource conflicts and find potential solutions. In fact, comprehensive watershed management and planning has been raised in several contexts before this Committee over the past year.

At present, several regions of the country face significant water resource challenges ranging from droughts in the Southeast and Southwest to the recent flooding in the Midwest. Watershed planning and management can be an important tool to help make better decisions in resolving these water resource needs.

Last year during a hearing on H.R. 135, the Committee received testimony from experts that highlighted the need for a comprehensive watershed approach to water resource planning; one that is not limited to just water supply needs, but takes a comprehensive view of all the water resources activities in a watershed including local, state and Federal roles and activities in water supply, flood control, and environmental restoration. The experts also advised taking into account the impacts of global climate change on water resource capacity and future needs.

WRDA passed last year for the first time in seven years and included provisions to reinvigorate broader watershed planning authority, including a Federally funded assessment of water resources needs for the river basins and watersheds of the Southeastern United States, and a region wide study to review drought conditions in the Southwestern United States. These region-wide assessments are especially critical to the southeastern U.S., including the states of Georgia, Alabama, and Florida, which are experiencing the ever-increasing challenge of balancing water needs during a record drought.

My home state of Texas has had long experience in water resource planning. Following the drought of the 1950s, Texas began its initial efforts in statewide water planning. In 1957, the Texas legislature created the Texas Water Development Board.

The Board has prepared and adopted eight state water plans. Early efforts focused mostly on describing the state's water resources and then evolved into a focus on developing plans addressing water supply, conservation, and environmental issues.

The drought of 1997 was a watershed event for Texas. This devastating drought caused nearly \$5 billion in losses for agriculture and related industries, and caused widespread loss and anxiety over water supply shortages. As a result of this statewide event, Texas totally changed its approach to water planning and moved from a very centralized approach to a decentralized process that put primary responsibility for water planning at the regional and local government levels.

The new process greatly increased public participation and implemented a bottom-up local and regional planning process. This new effort emphasized conservation and increases in environmental protection.

Texas recently released its 2007 Water Plan, which is one of the most comprehensive state water plans produced. I am very pleased that we have William Mullican, Deputy Executive Administrator for Planning, of the Texas Water Development Board here today to tell us more implementation of this latest plan.

I also look forward to hearing suggestions on how to better develop watershed planning activities from our panel of experts today.