

**STATEMENT OF  
THE HONORABLE JAMES L. OBERSTAR  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON WATER RESOURCES & ENVIRONMENT  
HEARING – EFFORTS TO CONTROL URBAN STORMWATER RUNOFF  
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2167 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING**

Fifteen years after EPA promulgated its Combined Sewer Overflow rules, and over eight years since this Congress codified that policy, CSOs remain a significant source of water impairment throughout the United States. The continued direct discharge of untreated sewage and stormwater into our nation's waters strikes at the very heart of the modern Clean Water Act: protecting our rivers, lakes, and streams from discharges of pollutants. Over 740 communities, most located in New England, around the Great Lakes, along the Ohio River, and in the Pacific Northwest, use combined sewers. Amazingly, not all of these have finalized their CSO Long Term Control Plans that will lead these cities to mitigate these harmful CSO events. As a result of these events, pathogens and toxins continue to impair our waters, unchecked.

On a number of fronts, we are in a place of opportunity to address these blights on our waters. We have a new administration that is showing renewed commitment to addressing water pollution problems. And the Economic Recovery Act and, as we look towards the future, H.R. 1262, the Water Quality Investment Act

of 2009, will provide desperately needed financial resources for states and communities to address their CSO needs.

The traditional manner by which many CSO communities have attempted to reduce CSO events is by reengineering their sewer and stormwater systems. Some cities have chosen to separate their combined sewer lines. Instead of running both sewage and stormwater in the same line, they are separated into two distinct pipes. The sewage, per usual, is conveyed to the wastewater treatment facility where it is treated and eventually discharged. The stormwater is conveyed to a waterbody, and directly discharged. This system, known as a separated stormwater sewer system, has the advantage that it does not result in the discharge of raw sewage into rivers and streams, but it has the distinct disadvantage of discharging all stormwater in an untreated manner. This means that all pollutants that are picked up by stormwater from city streets – chemicals, metals, sediment, oil, grease – will all enter local waters untreated.

Some municipalities are choosing to deal with their CSO discharges by building very large, deep tunnels. These tunnels are designed to temporarily hold billions of gallons of stormwater and sewage during wet weather events – before being released into the wastewater facility to be treated. This approach has the advantage of treating all forms of wastewater in the conveyance system.

Both of these traditional, or ‘grey,’ infrastructure approaches can provide remedies for damaging CSO discharges. However, they are very cost intensive, and can be very long term projects. For example, in Chicago, the project construction lifespan of their deep tunnel will be over forty years by the time it is completed in 2019. It is expected to cost the city \$3.4 billion. Portland, Oregon’s tunnel is expected to be completed in 2011, and will have taken 20 years to complete, at a price-tag of \$1.4 billion. In this time of financial distress, and economic uncertainty municipalities are hard-pressed to dedicate their precious fiscal resources to these types of projects – as important as they may be.

Stormwater may be an issue of which we cannot dig our way out using traditional tools. Population dynamics in the United States are resulting in more of the population entering urban and suburban areas. As these regions grow, the amount of impervious surface will increase. As a result, the volumes of stormwater will intensify. This is especially the case in areas in which there is more urban sprawl. As a result, the total area of impervious surface – and therefore stormwater – may increase at a faster rate than that of the national population. This will place increasing costs, for stormwater control, on municipal governments. In addition, we can expect some regions of the country to have more frequent and more intense rainfall as a result of climate change. These communities will be under increasing stress – financial and

environmental – in dealing with stormwater in the years to come. As a result, the traditional approach of developing more traditional infrastructure to deal with stormwater may not be the most cost- or environmentally-effective solution.

One promising alternative approach is the adoption of green infrastructure, or low impact development, approaches and technologies. These approaches turn the whole notion of stormwater mitigation on its head. Instead of assuming that the volume of stormwater is fixed, and creating engineered solutions from there, green infrastructure approaches use natural processes to try to decrease the amount of stormwater that even enters the stormwater conveyance system. If less stormwater enters the system, municipalities will be able to construct smaller conveyances to contain stormwater discharges. This means less financial expenditures for communities, and jobs that can be completed more quickly.

Central to all green infrastructure technologies and approaches is the use of the natural environment to manage stormwater by capturing and retaining water, infiltrating runoff, allowing for evapotranspiration, and trapping and filtering constituent pollutants. Examples of these technologies or approaches include: green roofs; downspout disconnection programs; urban tree planting; adding green space; permeable pavements; and curb cut-outs. Green infrastructure approaches can also yield additional ancillary benefits including the reduction of air pollution and urban

heat island effects, the insulation of buildings in both cold and warm weather, and adding to the visual aesthetics of a city. While the installation of green infrastructure for stormwater control, especially in already-developed areas, can be expensive, the costs-savings as a result of these ancillary benefits can make the incorporation of these technologies and approaches a worthwhile endeavor for many communities.

Today's hearing will explore the utility of a number of these stormwater control approaches. In addition, I look forward to hearing about ways in which these technologies and approaches might be integrated into the CSO Long Term Control Plans both under development and already permitted in many of the nation's CSO communities. It is imperative that our nation's water quality be protected and improved. Not only have we not achieved this goal with regards to stormwater, I fear we are losing ground. These new approaches offer a way to get us out of the stormwater box – approaches to better protect water quality, and to also save our municipalities' precious resources.