



League of Women Voters of Chicago

Natural Resources/Chicago Water Briefing, November 12, 2016

Natural Resources Position of LWVUS – in brief

The League of Women Voters of the United States believes that natural resources should be managed as interrelated parts of life-supporting ecosystems. Resources should be conserved and protected to assure their future availability. Pollution of these resources should be controlled in order to preserve the physical, chemical and biological integrity of ecosystems and to protect public health.

Resource Management

Resource management decisions must be based on a thorough assessment of population growth and of current and future needs. The inherent characteristics and carrying capacities of each area's natural resources must be considered in the planning process. Policy makers must take into account the ramifications of their decisions on the nation as a whole as well as on other nations.

To assure the future availability of essential resources, government policies must promote stewardship of natural resources. Policies that promote resource conservation are a fundamental part of such stewardship. Resources such as water and soil should be protected. Consumption of nonrenewable resources should be minimized. Beneficiaries should pay the costs for water, land and energy development projects. Reclamation and reuse of natural resources should be encouraged.

The League believes that protection and management of natural resources are responsibilities shared by all levels of government. The federal government should provide leadership, guidance and financial assistance to encourage regional planning and decision making to enhance local and state capabilities for resource management.

The League supports comprehensive long-range planning and believes that wise decision-making requires:

- adequate data and a framework within which alternatives may be weighed and intelligent decisions made;
- consideration of environmental, public health, social and economic impacts of proposed plans and actions;
- protection of private property rights commensurate with overall consideration of public health and environmental protection;
- coordination of the federal government's responsibilities and activities;
- resolution of inconsistencies and conflicts in basic policy among governmental agencies at all levels;
- regional, interregional and/or international cooperation when appropriate;
- mechanisms appropriate to each region that will provide coordinated planning and administration among units of government, 46 governmental agencies and the private sector;
- procedures for resolving disputes; • procedures for mitigation of adverse impacts;
- special responsibility by each level of government for those lands and resources entrusted to them;
- special consideration for the protection of areas of critical environmental concern, natural hazards, historical importance and aesthetic value;
- special attention to maintaining and improving the environmental quality of urban communities.

Water Resources

The League supports:

- water resource programs and policies that reflect the interrelationships of water quality, water quantity, ground-water and surface water and that address the potential depletion or pollution of water supplies;
- measures to reduce water pollution from direct point-source discharges and from indirect nonpoint sources;
- policies to achieve water quality essential for maintaining species populations and diversity, including measures to protect lakes, estuaries, wetlands and in-stream flows;
- stringent controls to protect the quality of current and potential drinking-water supplies, including protection of watersheds for surface supplies and of recharge areas for groundwater.

Proposed Interbasin Water Transfers— Interstate and interbasin transfers are not new or unusual. Water transfers have served municipal supplies, industry, energy development and agriculture.

Construction costs of large-scale water transfers are high and economic losses in the basin of origin also may be high. Environmental costs of water transfers may include quantitative and qualitative changes in wetlands and related fisheries and wildlife, diminished aquifer recharge and reduced stream flows. Lowered water tables also may affect groundwater quality and cause land subsidence.

As we look to the future, water transfer decisions will need to incorporate the high costs of moving water, the limited availability of unallocated water and our still limited knowledge of impacts on the affected ecosystems.

In order to develop member understanding and agreement on proposals for large-scale water transfer projects, state and local Leagues need to work together. The following guidelines are designed to help Leagues jointly evaluate new proposals for large-scale water transfers.

The process for evaluating the suitability of new proposed interbasin water transfers should include:

- ample and effective opportunities for informed public participation in the formulation and analysis of proposed projects;
- evaluation of economic, social and environmental impacts in the basin of origin, the receiving area and any area through which the diversion must pass, so that decision makers and the public have adequate information on which to base a decision;
- examination of all short- and long-term economic costs including, but not limited to, construction, delivery, operation, maintenance and market interest rate;
- examination of alternative supply options, such as water conservation, water pricing and reclamation;
- participation and review by all affected governments;
- procedures for resolution of intergovernmental conflicts;
- accord with international treaties;
- provisions to ensure that responsibility for funding is borne primarily by the user with no federal subsidy, loan guarantees or use of the borrowing authority of the federal government, unless the proposal is determined by all affected levels of the League to be in the national interest.

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