



# Lower Rio Grande Valley Development Council

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**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**  
Kenneth N. Jones, Jr.

# RECEIVED MEMORANDUM

APR 21 2011

COUNTY JUDGE

**TO:** Local Governments, Irrigation Districts, Drainage Districts, Water Supply Corporations, Economic Development Corporations, Chambers of Commerce, and Interested Individuals

**FROM:** Kenneth N. Jones, Executive Director

**DATE:** Wednesday, April 20, 2011

**SUBJ:** LETTER OF SUPPORT

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The Rio Grande Regional Water Authority (RGRWA), as you know, is our Regional Water Authority serving the six (6) counties of Cameron, Hidalgo, Willacy, Starr, Zapata and Webb. Recently, the RGRWA submitted a Letter of Intent (attached) to apply for funding to the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (USBOR) to complete an Alternative Regional Water Supply Feasibility Study. With the initial requirements being met, the USBOR has asked the RGRWA to prepare and submit a full proposal within the next few weeks, which must include "Letters of Support" from through-out the Region. This is a competitive process therefore; on behalf of this Regional effort I am requesting your consideration to submit a letter in support of this important project prior to Monday, May 9<sup>th</sup>. For your convenience I have attached a sample letter for utilization, however please feel free to modify as needed.

Thank you for consideration of this "Time Sensitive Request" and please feel free to contact me or Marcie Oviedo, LRGVDC Director of Planning, should there be any questions.

# **RGRWA**

**RIO GRANDE REGIONAL WATER AUTHORITY**

**BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

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Municipal*

*\*\* = Executive Committee*

**March 15, 2011**

**Mr. Kip Gjerde, P.E.  
US Bureau of Reclamation  
Great Plains Regional office – USBR  
P.O. Box 36900, Mail Code: GP-4500  
Billings, MT 59107-6900**

**RE: Commonwealth Utilities Corporation – Statement of Qualifications**

**Dear Mr. Gjerde,**

On behalf of the Rio Grande Regional Water Authority (RGRWA), please accept this letter expressing the Authority's interest in partnering with the United States Bureau of Reclamation under its WaterSMART Basin Study Program to perform the Alternative Regional Water Supply Project Feasibility Study. Generally, the scope of work and ultimate goal is to provide a diversity of water resources to a three-county area in South Texas that is dependent upon the Rio Grande, a water source that is shared with Mexico, over allocated and vulnerable to drought. By 2060, the area population is projected to grow from 1.6 million to 3.9 million, increasing municipal water demands to 331,000 acre-feet per year.

The following descriptions provide an overview of the project and address USBR requirements for the selection process:

- **Cost share and program eligibility** – The total project cost is \$400,000. The RGRWA is prepared to provide a 55% share of the total costs of the study. The study meets the requirements of the WaterSMART program as it address water imbalance in the Rio Grande Valley and includes the development of adaptation and mitigation strategies.
- **Geographic focus of the study** – the focus of the study will include the counties of Cameron, Hidalgo and Willacy in the lower Rio Grande Valley. It will also address the water availability in the upper reach toward Laredo and Eagle Pass along the Rio Grande. While it may not be feasible for the regional approach of physical facilities, the impact of developing new resources would free up additional water supply in the upper portion of the Rio Grande.

F O R T H E R I V E R ~ F O R T H E F U T U R E

- **The water supply challenges that will create or lead to imbalances in supply and demand** – The Rio Grande is the main supply source along the Texas boarder. This supply is also shared with the Mexico via the 1944 Treaty. In the Rio Grande Valley, current use is over 80% for irrigation and 16% for municipal use. As urbanization occurs over the next 50 years, usage is expected to change to 59% irrigation and 38% municipal. This puts an increased demand on a water supply system that is over allocated and decreasing as sediment buildup occurs in the reservoir system. The reduced dependency on the Rio Grande with increase use of brackish and seawater desalination and reuse will play a major role in expanding the region's water resources.
- **The risks to water supplies from changes in snowpack, timing and quality of runoff, groundwater recharge and discharge** – The Rio Grande is partially dependent on snow melt for its supply. As conditions change, effecting snowpack, the conditions for decreasing water supply will be even more critical in coming years. The area is currently not affected by groundwater recharge as it relates to runoff from snowpack.
- **General Scope of Study** - The primary objective of the Study is to identify the feasibility and cost effectiveness of creating a regionalized approach to a long term alternative supply in the three county areas that includes Cameron, Hidalgo and Willacy counties with beneficial secondary impact to upper Rio Grande Valley counties. Regional supply alternatives would include local brackish groundwater desalination, seawater desalination and importation of fresh groundwater from sources outside the regional study area.

The RGRWA is interested in looking at the feasibility of one or more of the options mentioned to reduce the dependency on the Rio Grande in the future. There are currently several brackish groundwater desalination facilities in the area that are successfully operating. These range in size from 0.25 MGD to 7.5 MGD and there are plants located in each county. It is recognized that the Rio Grande is limited and subject to drought with increasing demands, as witnessed in 2002 where reservoir capacities reached critical capacity.

The existing brackish facilities have demonstrated an investment in alternative supplies by various entities. One of the key portions of this study is to generally determine the availability of brackish groundwater, based on the most recent data, on a long-term basis. Once the availability of the groundwater is determined, the 25% to 40% of 2050 demands will be projected, and if inadequate, seawater desalination and/or importation of fresh groundwater from outside the area will be evaluated.

Brackish groundwater treatment and distribution along with local participation will be evaluated to determine. The cost of the new supply and determine if the construction of regional brackish plants and a regional distribution system is the most practical option. This evaluation will include initial capital and operational cost projections. A review of potential operational scenarios would be included.

One of the main goals is to protect and manage the groundwater resources in the area. Any withdrawal significant from the aquifer(s) has impacts on other suppliers in the area collaboration amongst water providers in the area working together on the same source should be beneficial.

The study would include the evaluation of risk associated with the impact of climate change on the available water resources in the area.

Another facet of long term supply planning should address future impacts on irrigation systems in the Valley. Part of this study would be to look at the impact on irrigation districts relative to water rights conversion, urbanization and water sales to municipalities.

- The level of stakeholder interest in the study - RGRWA intends to commit at least \$220,000 in cash and in-kind services for its portion of the study. By virtue of the memberships, the level of stakeholder interest is high in this project. The Authority is directed by a board of 18 members representing interests from six Rio Grande Valley counties: Cameron, Hidalgo, Starr, Webb (excluding Laredo), Willacy, and Zapata.

The Authority has a complex structure designed to fairly represent the diverse interests of the region. Twelve of the 18 directors are appointed by the governor: nine representing irrigation districts and one representing each of the public, municipal class entities, and water supply corporations. Additionally, each county must be represented, and no more than three members can come from a single county. These directors serve four-year terms.

- A list of potential cost-share partners – the RGRWA is a regional water authority representing the interests of all groups. The funding will come through assessments to member entities proportionate to their ownership/control of water rights in the basin.

The RGRWA is composed of representatives from all water sectors in the region, including municipal and agricultural interests, both public and private. Additionally, county representatives provide a voice for the general public. Due to the region

primarily using the Rio Grande for water supply, addressing water challenges and developing future alternative supplies will ensure the economic and environmental needs of the region continue to be met. Reducing the potential for conflict amongst users when Rio Grande supply is strained is a priority for members of the authority and all users in the region. Developing a thoughtful approach to meeting future needs, based on sound planning and community input is expected to result in the most beneficial improvement plan.

- Resources that non-federal study partners would be available for the study, including staff, technical expertise and applicable data and models - As a regional water authority, the RGRWA works closely with other local utilities and districts and the Texas Water Development Board. While developing this project, the Authority will solicit input and support from these and additional interested parties. Potential cost share partners could include local and state NGOs, state agencies, and individual irrigation districts, utilities, or water supply corporations. Only eligible cost share partners will be included in the non-federal cost share.

As previously mentioned, the Authority is composed of members representing a range of local interests in the future water security of the region. RGRWA intends to work with these member entities to collect operating data and planning information when completing the study, as well as the in-depth planning efforts already undertaken by the Rio Grande Regional Water Planning Group (of which the Authority and its members are an active participant) and the Texas Water Development Board. This data could include research studies and models performed during previous planning studies. Additionally, local consultants will be utilized for their expertise on addressing regional water needs.

If you have any questions or need additional information please contact me at (956) 682-3481.

Sincerely,



Kenneth N. Jones, Jr.  
Executive Director

April 20, 2011

Mr. Jim Darling, President  
Rio Grande Regional Water Authority  
c/o Lower Rio Grande Valley Development Council  
311 N. 15<sup>th</sup> Street  
McAllen, TX 78501

RE: Letter of Support

Dear Mr. Darling:

On behalf of \_\_\_\_\_, I offer this letter in support of the Rio Grande Regional Water Authority (RGRWA) proposal submitted to the United States Bureau of Reclamation (USBOR) to fund an "Alternative Regional Water Supply Feasibility Study". This effort is initially important to this region to identify alternatives to our surface water supply from the Rio Grande.

Thank you for submitting this proposal to the USBOR for funding and for the RGRWA's continued efforts to ensure our economic sustainability.

Sincerely,

Name



# United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF RECLAMATION

Great Plains Region

P.O. Box 36900

Billings, Montana 59107-6900



IN REPLY REFER TO:

GP-4500

ADM-13.00

APR 11 2011

Mr. Kenneth N. Jones  
Executive Director  
Rio Grande Regional Water Authority  
311 N. 15<sup>th</sup> Street  
McAllen, TX 78501-4705

Subject: Fiscal Year (FY) 2011 Basin Study Studies – Lower Rio Grande Basin Study

Dear Mr. Jones:

Thank you for submitting a letter of interest proposing a study for consideration under the Bureau of Reclamation's Basin Study Program. Your proposal was among those selected to proceed to the proposal-development stage. In this phase, our Oklahoma-Texas Area Office (OTAO) will work with you to develop a short (10 pages maximum) study proposal by May 16, 2011, for consideration by a Reclamation-wide application review committee (ARC).

The ARC will prioritize Basin Study proposals based on the selection criteria set forth in the Basin Studies – Selection Process Overview, and will make a recommendation to Reclamation's Commissioner regarding which studies will receive funding in FY 2011. The Basin Studies – Selection Process Overview document can be found at <http://www.usbr.gov/WaterSMART/basin.html>.

We expect to announce the study selections and funding amounts in June, pending final FY 2011 appropriations. Basin Studies will not be awarded if FY 2011 appropriations are insufficient to support new awards.

We look forward to working together with you to develop a joint proposal. If you have not already been contacted by a representative from OTAO regarding the next steps, please contact Kip Gjerde, Regional Study Coordinator, at 406-247-7750.

Sincerely,

Michael J. Ryan  
Regional Director