REPORT ON PARTICIPATION IN THE CONFERENCE OF THE UNIVERSITIES COUNCIL ON WATER RESOURCES

Rutgers University, New Brunswick, N.J., July 29-Aug. 1, 1979

by Clare A. Gunn, Recreation and Parks Department

GENERAL:

The several speeches, by both state and federal representatives emphasized three problems in university water resources research, especially that by the Institutes of water research: (1) lack of relevance to important local, state and national water issues, (2) lack of communication between researchers and implementers, especially at the federal level and (3) federal funding is likely to dry up.

The "success" story examples were varied and convincing. Some were better documented than others. They demonstrated the great variety of problems within the several states. While the general reaction to these was favorable, suggestions for improvement were made: the constituents and users of the research, not academicians, should have reported on such success; the institutes are more concerned with fragmented projects than with relevant programs.

About ninety delegates were in attendance. The rapport between the delegates was good and there seemed to be constructive committee action. The host carried out all arrangements very well.

SPECIFIC:

Perhaps the highlight of the conference was the very pointed presentation by Hon. Guy R. Martin, Assistant Interior Secretary of Land and Water Resources, Department of Interior. His position commanded attention and his outlook was not bright for the future of federally supported water research. Among his key points were the following:
1. There is much greater competition for funding. All new budgets are more carefully scrutinized in Washington.

2. We are entering an era of much less (not more) government support for water research.

3. Other demands for funds have an increasingly higher priority.

4. Only broad-based critical water issues, not the opinion of a researcher, will be supported for research in the future.

5. OWRT has been severely questioned and there seems little defense for its operation, partly because of poor leadership in the past. It has been given one more year to prove itself.

6. UCOWR support is needed but is too weak at present. There is strong congressional criticism of research performance; the users of the research are confused and local constituencies are not supportive.

7. The quality of matching funds research was very low.

8. Success of Institute supported research has not been well communicated to Congress; the shared state role has not been clear to Congress; progress at the researcher level has not been well known in Washington.

9. Among the many problems:

   (a) Institutes have not taken advantage of opportunity to assert a leadership role;

   (b) Institutes have ignored opportunity to set priorities (he received only three letters when he was setting priorities).

   (c) Reasons for supporting Institutes have not been forthcoming.

   (d) Quality control has been poor; little screening of projects before they come to OWRT.
(e) Reporting has been poor.

10. Martin recommends:

(a) Reach out and collaborate with other institutions in state.
(b) Choose only relevant research topics.
(c) Identify research that is especially useful to policymakers.
(d) Become involved in policy, both federal and state levels.
(e) Much better federal policy could emerge if the Institutes--the experts--took control and made their influence known.

J. S. Cragwell, U. S. Geological Survey, stressed the federal priorities and the need for stronger institute influence. The top federal priorities in water research are in the areas of: energy, food, supply. He observed that it is virtually impossible to fund "basic" research; must be mission oriented.

The paper prepared by Jean Williams of Camp Dresser McKee, Inc., was read by someone else due to her illness. This paper described the 6-state study, assisted by universities, that expands upon the "input-output" model developed in Texas. Needed is better (1) operational models for managing water and (2) better information, especially on perceptions of people who are impacted by water problems.

Wendell Inhoffer, General Manager, Passaic Valley Water Commission gave a hard-hitting, non-nonsense talk (he's an ex-football player) on the need for more pragmatic research that the water managers can use. He cited the many water problems being created by federal legislation--that he spends most of his time fighting. His water source, the Passaic River, is fed from 115 sewage discharges upstream and is further complicated by industrial waste. He stated that there are no credible standards for quality and that the judgement of the manager is the only useable criterion at present. He made a plea for water researchers to do something of value to his field.
Dr. Warren Viessman, Congressional Research Service, made several pointed remarks concerning what he believed to be weaknesses of both UCOWR and the Institutes. He stated that too often the research performed is not on topics that congressmen can relate to very well; that the research is not reported in ways that congressmen can read and understand, quickly and easily; that there is virtually no effort on the part of the Institutes and UCOWR to alert congressmen on their findings or to react to proposed legislation. He made a plea for everyone involved in university research to take on a new objective—to do relevant research and make every effort to communicate results to congressmen.

The business meeting followed the attached agenda. All the attached resolutions (with some minor modifications) were approved except no. 6. This was on the grounds that UCOWR resolutions are for external influence and action, not internal. Therefore, a letter will be sent instead. The item of incorporation of UCOWR was discussed and approved. This was brought about by the need for UCOWR to have a tax-exempt status from IRS. This also requires revision of the Bylaws.

The 1980 meeting will take place (dates not set) in Moscow, Idaho. Invitations, preferable in the South, are open for the 1981 meeting.

Regarding my presentation, I shall have a draft of a paper soon. This was a 12-minute slide presentation on the panel, "Examples of Effective Institutional Success Stories in Research," and was labeled, "Aesthetic Improvement of Metropolitan Rivers." The response was generally favorable. Several indicated progress (or lack thereof) in their home states regarding waterfront beautification and redevelopment. Several indicated that such sociological and recreational research was as important as engineering and technological studies but that UCOWR and OWRT has not shown much interest in them. The only negative response to the entire panel was that the success
stories were well presented but would have had much more clout if presented by the users rather than academicians.

I appreciate this opportunity of representing the Texas Water Resources Institute, the Recreation and Parks Department and Texas A&M University at this important conference.