



# United States Department of the Interior

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY  
Washington, DC 20240

December 21, 2021

The Honorable Ron Wyden  
Chairman, Subcommittee on Water and Power  
Committee on Energy and Natural Resources  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Wyden:

Enclosed are responses prepared by the Bureau of Reclamation to the questions for the record submitted to Assistant Secretary of the Interior Tanya Trujillo following her October 6, 2021, appearance before the Subcommittee at a hearing regarding the status and management of drought in the western United States.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this material to the Committee.

Sincerely,

for Christopher P. Salotti  
Legislative Counsel  
Office of Congressional and  
Legislative Affairs

Enclosure

cc: The Honorable Cindy Hyde-Smith, Ranking Member

**Questions from Chairman Joe Manchin III**

**1. How is Reclamation using the authorities of the SECURE Water Act to provide short-term drought relief?**

**Response:** Reclamation has implemented the Drought Response Program using the SECURE Water Act and other authorities, including the Reclamation States Emergency Drought Relief Act of 1991, to provide assistance for drought planning, actions that build resiliency to drought, and emergency response actions. The program includes financial assistance for applicants to develop drought contingency plans or to update existing plans intended to help recognize drought in its early stages and identify ways to prepare for drought conditions proactively. Reclamation also makes funding available for drought resiliency projects – mitigation actions such as infrastructure improvements, development of decision support tools, or projects to benefit fish and the environment.

In addition to the Drought Response Program itself, Reclamation uses the SECURE Water Act authorities to make funding available to carry out water efficiency improvements (through programs such as WaterSMART Grants) to help water managers take actions to increase flexibility during drought and other times of shortage. So far this year, Reclamation has selected over 230 new WaterSMART projects, including 29 new Drought Resiliency Projects (\$26.4 million total), 5 new Drought Contingency Plans (\$800,000 total), and 55 new WaterSMART Water and Energy Efficiency Grants (\$42 million total).

**2. How can Reclamation utilize the new statutory authorities for WaterSMART (included in title XI of division FF of Public Law 116-260) to invest in water projects that include climate resilience measures?**

**Response:** On August 5, Reclamation announced three WaterSMART grant opportunities—Drought Resiliency Projects, Water and Energy Efficiency Grants and the new Environmental Water Resources Projects—as part of an overall plan to implement amendments to the SECURE Water Act. These programs will help communities throughout the West by increasing water supply sustainability and drought resiliency.

The Environmental Water Resources Projects is a new funding category under WaterSMART and is aligned with changes to the statutory authority for the program. Projects that benefit plant and animal species, fish and wildlife habitat, riparian areas, and ecosystems directly influenced by water resources management are eligible. Project may include water conservation and efficiency projects to improve the environment through quantifiable and sustained water savings, mitigation of drought-related impacts, and watershed management or restoration projects with a nexus to water resources or water resources management. Projects under this new category may be eligible for up to 75 percent federal funding.

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Applicants for funding under all three WaterSMART categories are prioritized in part based on how their proposed projects address the impacts of climate change and strengthen water supply sustainability.

Applications for WaterSMART Drought Resiliency Projects are currently under review. Applications for Water and Energy Efficiency Grants and Environmental Water Resources Projects were to be submitted during November and December, respectively. Additional information on Reclamation's Drought Resiliency Projects and other proactive drought activities Reclamation is undertaking can be found at <https://www.usbr.gov/drought/index.html>.

**Questions from Ranking Member John Barrasso**

**1. Issues posed by aging infrastructure are of primary concern to WY. The Goshen Irrigation District tunnel collapse in 2019 highlighted the need to get a better handle on aging infrastructure throughout the state in general. This includes ways to work with the Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) to identify opportunities to address needs on shared works.**

- a. Knowing this is a pervasive issue throughout the West, how are you approaching working with states and water users to continue tackling this issue?**
- b. Are you aware of any programs and/or Reclamation resources that are available for Wyoming and other states?**

**Response:** Reclamation continues to engage with stakeholders through formal and informal discussions at the local and regional levels on implementation of infrastructure needs and financing options in compliance with the Reclamation Transparency Act.

Reclamation has programs in place for regular inspections of dams and powerplants it owns and operates, as well as irrigation and other features owned by Reclamation but operated by others such as irrigation districts. These inspections are conducted at no expense to irrigation districts. The inspections result in recommendations to make repairs where deficiencies are identified. In addition, the President's Fiscal Year 2022 budget included \$1 million for the recently created Aging Infrastructure Account.

**2. Will you commit to ensuring that in the future Reclamation provides technical assistance to states, including my home state of Wyoming, when necessary?**

**Response:** Yes, the Department is committed to providing technical assistance where it is needed, including in the State of Wyoming.

On the local level, Reclamation routinely provides technical assistance to irrigation districts through inspections of Reclamation-owned and district-operated infrastructure. The time and expenses of the Reclamation technical staff for the inspections are not reimbursable by the districts. These inspections result in recommendations to the districts for repairs or replacements of infrastructure. Reclamation also has a variety of specialized technical assistance available at its Technical Service Center in Denver that is available at a cost to districts upon request.

**3. Reclamation and other agencies in DOI are involved in large-scale ecosystem restoration initiatives in the western United States, including initiatives in the Salton Sea, Platte River, Lake Tahoe, and the Lower Colorado River Basin. Section 1109 of P.L. 116-260 authorized \$15 million for Reclamation to provide assistance to states, state-based entities, tribes, and non-**

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**profits, among others, for the design, study, and construction of aquatic ecosystem restoration and protection projects for the benefit of fish and wildlife. This program, which has not received funding to date, is Reclamation's first broad-based authority to support ecosystem restoration projects. Some assert that Reclamation should have additional authority to conduct restoration to complement its water management activities. Others oppose the expansion of Reclamation's authority insofar as it may be seen as taking resources away from Reclamation's core water management activities.**

- a. What are your views on further expanding Reclamation's budget authority and authorized activities for ecosystem restoration?**
- b. What role does Reclamation play in restoring ecosystems associated with water management and conveyance projects?**
- c. What ecosystem services would protect water supplies from the effects of drought in the West?**

**Response:** Reclamation currently leads or co-leads river restoration programs with federal, state, and Tribal partners and stakeholders including along the Columbia-Snake Rivers in the Pacific Northwest, the Trinity River, San Joaquin River and Sacramento Bay-Delta in California, the Colorado River and Middle Rio Grande in the desert southwest and the Platte River in the states of Nebraska, Wyoming, and Colorado. The goals of these programs are to operate and maintain Reclamation projects, consistent with their authorized purposes, while satisfying ecosystem and river restoration requirements and objectives defined in the settlement agreements or reasonable and prudent alternatives from a biological opinion issued by the regulatory agencies.

As noted in your question, the Aquatic Ecosystem Restoration Program authorized in P.L. 116-260 provides \$15 million/year for five years, for broad authority for Reclamation to fund fish passage improvements and aquatic habitat enhancement, including removal of dams or other aging infrastructure if such projects are supported by a broad multi-stakeholder group, and if it maintains water security for all involved. Reclamation has requested \$1 million for this new program in FY 2022, which, if approved, will provide initial funding for the restoration and protection of aquatic ecosystems to improve the health of fisheries, wildlife, and aquatic habitat. The program is intended to help ensure water supply resiliency by supporting fish, wildlife and habitat management and restoration. As part of the implementation of this new program, Reclamation will be considering the most effective methods to identify ecosystem restoration activities that help make water supplies more resilient.

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**Question from Senator Mark Kelly**

- 1. Please provide specific examples of how the Department of the Interior and the Bureau of Reclamation would use funding from the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act to improve the drought situation at Lake Mead and Lake Powell.**

**Response:** The investments in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, P. L. 117-58 enable Reclamation and our partners on the Colorado River to directly improve drought resiliency on the Colorado River. The Act addresses drought resilience, expanded conservation, infrastructure modernization, dam safety, rural water, and tribal trust. It includes over \$300 million to implement the Colorado River Basin Drought Contingency Plan with \$50 million going to Drought Contingency Plan for the Upper Colorado River Basin (Basin). Additionally, the investment of the remaining \$250 million includes opportunities for desalination studies and construction to build the nation's drought resiliency as the West faces ongoing water shortages.

Other programs and funding would also be available to help encourage water conservation and resiliency in the Basin. For example, the new authority relating to large scale recycling projects, which received \$450 million under the Act, may be of interest to water providers within the Basin. Reclamation also received \$400 million for the WaterSMART program with \$100 million of these funds focused on improving the condition of natural or nature-based features and \$250 million for desalination studies and construction. Each of these programs will work to address the drought situation across the West and may be of interest to those within the Basin. Reclamation is working swiftly to understand how this funding can be applied to ensure it is available to address the West's immediate infrastructure needs.



THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR  
WASHINGTON  
DEC 27 2021

Ms. Lisa K. Mills  
1240 Jackson Street  
Missoula, Montana 59802

Dear Ms. Mills:

I am pleased to appoint you as a member of the Theodore Roosevelt Genius Prize Advisory Council (Council), the *Protecting Endangered Species Board*, the *Nonlethal Management of Human-Wildlife Conflicts Board*, the *Management of Invasive Species Board*, and the *Reducing Human-Predator Conflict Board* to provide your expertise in business development and management. These appointments are effective the date of this letter and will continue through December 31, 2023.

Your involvement with the Council and Boards will help the Department of the Interior, through the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service), to implement the six Theodore Roosevelt Genius Prize competitions. The competitions encourage technological innovation with the potential to advance the mission of the Service in the following areas of concern: 1) preventing wildlife poaching and trafficking, 2) promoting wildlife conservation, 3) managing invasive species, 4) protecting endangered species, 5) managing nonlethal human-wildlife conflict, and 6) reducing human-predator conflict. A copy of the Council's charter and enabling legislation is enclosed for your reference.

Under applicable ethics laws and regulations, your appointment carries with it the status of "special Government employee." This means that you will be subject to many of the same ethics requirements and obligations that apply to Federal employees, including the avoidance of conflict of interest. As a special Government employee, you are required by law to file confidential financial disclosure forms and complete ethics training. An ethics official within the Departmental Ethics Office will contact you regarding your financial disclosure and ethics training requirements. If you have any ethics questions in the interim, please contact the Departmental Ethics Office at (202) 208-7960 or [doi\\_ethics@sol.doi.gov](mailto:doi_ethics@sol.doi.gov).

Ms. Stephanie Rickabaugh, Designated Federal Officer, will provide information on Council and Board activities. If you have any questions, Ms. Rickabaugh can be reached at (703) 358-2214 or at [Stephanie\\_Rickabaugh@fws.gov](mailto:Stephanie_Rickabaugh@fws.gov).

I look forward to your valuable and active participation on the Council and Boards and appreciate your willingness to serve.

Sincerely,

Deb Haaland

Enclosures