

**STATEMENT OF DAVID L. BERNHARDT  
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BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTERIOR, ENVIRONMENT AND RELATED  
AGENCIES  
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS  
ON  
FISCAL YEAR 2018 HURRICANE SUPPLEMENTAL FUNDING  
NOVEMBER 30, 2017**

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member McCollum, Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss the Administration's Supplemental Funding request in response to this season's devastating hurricanes. This is my first appearance before you since I was confirmed to serve as Deputy Secretary at the Department of the Interior, and I look forward to working with each of you during my tenure.

Before I begin discussing the Department's Supplemental request, I want to recognize all of our thoughts, prayers and hearts are with the victims of Hurricanes Harvey, Irma and Maria. The Secretary and I have both travelled to the hurricane zones. Between us, we have seen first-hand the devastation in Texas, Florida, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. The personal and private sector loss is jaw dropping.

I would be remiss, if I did not tell you what a privilege it is to work with the dedicated individuals who volunteered to be deployed as part of incident management teams. Interior deployed 560 employees on 31 Federal Emergency Management Agency mission assignments in the immediate response.

We also deployed National Park Service and Fish and Wildlife Service incident management teams with heavy equipment, watercraft, fuel, and water to nearby communities to secure our facilities and ensure our employees were safe.

The U.S. Geological Survey deployed staff to take important disaster response measurements and provide mapping information to affected communities.

The Office of Insular Affairs worked with the U.S. Virgin Islands government to closely monitor the situation and assist with governmental outreach.

Many of our employees who were hurricane victims themselves helped to serve not only the immediate needs of Interior's mission, but even more importantly they supported their communities. For example, on the island of Vieques, off the coast of Puerto Rico, Fish and Wildlife Service employees coordinated an airdrop of food and water for 4,600 residents, and the National Park Service served as points of distribution for Federal Emergency Management Agency supplies.

We are moving quickly with the help of volunteers and partners to reopen our facilities. These areas provide important economic support and, in many cases, are integral to the fabric of neighboring communities.

Last week, Secretary Zinke joined with Governors Rosello and Mapp, to announce the reopening of portions of the San Juan National Historical Site and Virgin Islands National Park, as well as Christiansted National Historic Site and Buck Island Reef National Monument on St. Croix.

As of today, all national wildlife refuge and national park areas in the continental United States are open with either full or limited hours and site closures. All refuges in the Caribbean islands were closed as of last week but are starting to partially reopen areas for public use. Portions of San Juan National Historic Site remain closed, but key areas such as portions of El Morro Castle are slated to reopen this week.

As the Department developed its Supplemental request, we were mindful that supplemental funding is limited and agencies must consider whether funds might be better spent directly helping the people who have been so impacted. At the same time, the facilities we administer must be addressed to be made safe and functional.

We are also optimistic that by using the funds we requested we can positively contribute to the communities we operate within. I have already seen some of this first hand. Two weeks ago, I was in the U.S. Virgin Islands inspecting a site on Saint John that had just been opened, and the public had flocked there to take advantage of the open beach and facilities operated by the National Park Service.

Our Supplemental Funding request for the Department of the Interior is \$468.7 million, which reflects the magnitude of damages experienced. Hurricanes Harvey, Irma and Maria impacted roughly 150 Interior managed facilities. The Supplemental request is needed to rebuild and address damages at 41 refuge and 21 national park sites, in 7 States and Territories. The request includes \$393.2 million for construction needs of the National Park Service and the Fish and Wildlife Service. This funding is needed to repair buildings such as visitor centers, infrastructure such as water control structures and systems, roads and bridges, campgrounds, and employee housing. Funds will also support the removal of debris and hazardous materials associated with the hurricanes. An additional \$25.0 million is requested for National Park Service incident management response activities.

The request includes \$17.5 million to support rebuilding efforts by expediting permitting associated with historic preservation requirements. All federally funded projects, including those receiving Federal Emergency Management Agency and Housing and Urban Development grants, are required to follow the regulations related to the National Historic Preservation Act, and affected States will see a huge increase in project review requirements. This additional funding will be allocated to State and Tribal Historic Preservation Offices to expedite permitting in areas covered by Federal Emergency Management Agency disaster determinations.

The request includes \$32.9 million to enable the U.S. Geological Survey to repair critical equipment and support rebuilding efforts with the collection of high resolution elevation data. The USGS sustained damages to over 200 stream, groundwater, and precipitation gages, seismic monitors, and reef monitoring equipment. The request includes \$12.9 million to repair this

equipment, which provides data for accurate and timely forecasts which protect lives and property and which help in management of water supplies and electric power production.

An additional \$20.0 million is requested in the U.S. Geological Survey to provide geospatial information in coordination with other Federal agencies, and State and local partners in critical storm impacted coastal areas. Accurate, updated and accessible geospatial data are crucial for effective hurricane response and recovery. Post-storm elevation data are also critical to recovery efforts for the design and planning of cost-effective and durable post-storm rebuilding efforts. Frankly, after being in Puerto Rico and visiting with U.S. Geological Survey staff, this might be the single most important component of our request.

The Department of the Interior plays an important role with the U.S. Virgin Islands and provides much needed technical assistance, and infrastructure grants for small projects throughout the Territories. I have seen firsthand the devastation to the U.S. Virgin Islands, and I recognize the Federal Government will need to do more. However, this request does not include funding for Office of Insular Affairs programs. The scale of the rebuilding effort for Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands is likely to be very significant and require Federal coordination across many agencies, and the needs of the areas are still being assessed.

The Administration has indicated the response to the devastation of these recent hurricanes will continue beyond this Supplemental request with a future request to address recovery costs for these areas. Full detailed assessments of the needs for communities in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands are not yet available. The Administration will continue to identify, refine, and articulate additional emergency funding requirements working with the governments of Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on the Administration's Supplemental request for Hurricane recovery. I look forward to any questions you may have.