

Opening Statement
Chairman Jared Huffman
Subcommittee on Water, Oceans, and Wildlife
Committee on Natural Resources

Oversight Hearing on “Examining the President’s Fiscal Year 2022 Budget Proposal for the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, U.S. Geological Survey, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.”

Wednesday, July 21, 2021

We are here today for an oversight hearing on the administration’s Fiscal Year 2022 budget requests for the Bureau of Reclamation, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and the U.S. Geological Survey.

The agencies testifying today are responsible for delivering water to millions of people across the West, developing data that help us operate our water systems, understanding changes to our climate and environment, making our coastal communities more resilient, and conserving and enhancing our nation’s biodiversity, fish, and wildlife resources.

Today’s hearing will give us an opportunity to discuss what the administration is doing to address and plan for the threat posed by climate change to our water supply, native fish and wildlife, and ecosystems—and the many communities that depend on these natural resources.

In particular, I look forward to hearing more today about proposed and planned drought response activities now and in the upcoming fiscal year. Federal drought response is essential as extreme drought conditions intensify across the West.

Ninety-five percent of the West is currently in drought. Reservoirs along the Colorado River continue to fall to record lows, plummeting to levels that will likely soon trigger the first-ever shortage declaration in that Basin.

Water supplies are strained across California and iconic salmon runs are being devastated. Temperatures have climbed as much as 17 degrees above normal in the Pacific Northwest, shattering previous records.

And in the Klamath River Basin, Tribes, farmers, and communities in the districts that Ranking Member Bentz and I represent are dealing with some of the most challenging drought impacts in the country.

I look forward to hearing more about Reclamation's strategy to use the legal authorities and funding provided by Congress to respond to these ongoing drought conditions.

At today's hearing, we'll also discuss the administration's plans to use several new water management tools that Congress provided last December, including several programs the administration specifically requested funding for in this year's budget request.

For example, we'll discuss plans for the newly established Aging Infrastructure Account, the Aquatic Ecosystem Restoration program, new WaterSMART grant program authorities, amendments to Reclamation's Cooperative Watershed Management Program, and new authorities for improved snowpack measurement.

Tackling climate change requires that we simultaneously address the current threats—such as extreme drought, wildfires, and heatwaves—while maintaining systems that offset even worse impacts we face in the coming years.

Alongside reducing our greenhouse gas emissions, nature-based solutions are a key tool to mitigate climate change.

Our nation's natural capital can sequester and store carbon and provide critical services that are often overlooked. Blue carbon ecosystems, for example, protect coasts and shorelines, support livelihoods, and sequester 27 million teragrams of carbon - that is equivalent to sequestering emissions from 2.6 million barrels of petroleum.

Of course, our emissions well-exceed what nature can sustain, and the adverse effects of climate change continue to impact ecosystems and wildlife. So I'm pleased to see such emphasis on climate change mitigation and ecosystem monitoring throughout the budgets we will discuss today.

These proposals are timely. A recent report issued by the IPCC emphasized the important role of ecosystems in sustaining our natural carbon fluxes. Climate change cannot be addressed without simultaneous action to resolve the biodiversity crisis.

And as the IPCC report highlights, these systems are complex. Addressing climate change requires a multifaceted approach, many of which are highlighted in the budgets before us today.

Both NOAA and the Fish and Wildlife Service prioritize climate monitoring and protections for carbon-sequestering ecosystems and habitats. The USGS request also includes these important priorities, along with sorely needed biodiversity research and ecosystem services assessments. I look forward to hearing from our witnesses and understanding how these efforts can work collaboratively.

This year, we've already seen the highest levels of carbon dioxide on record, nearly the entire western United States is in drought, hundreds of people have died from extreme heat waves in the Pacific Northwest, and wildfires threaten numerous American communities.

Climate change is here, and it is relentless. We must be as well. This Subcommittee stands ready to work with the administration, and we look forward to today's discussion on how federal budget plans can best advance solutions to tackle climate crisis.