

Opening Statement

Thank you for joining us today. We're here today to discuss current drought conditions in the Klamath River Basin and examine opportunities to advance durable solutions for the Basin's ecosystem and water supply challenges.

For today's hearing, the Klamath Basin is represented not just by today's witnesses, but also by the Chair and Ranking Member of this subcommittee. I am glad to chair this hearing alongside Ranking Member Bentz, whose district includes the Klamath communities upstream from my district.

Since last year, we've seen some of the worst drought conditions in the Klamath Basin in decades. Unfortunately, breaking these kinds of records is starting to become a regular occurrence across the West due to climate change.

We'll hear today about the effects of these changing climate conditions in the Klamath Basin and the consequences on the ground for tribes, agriculture, fish and wildlife, and fishing communities.

Recently, we've seen devastating effects from a lack of water for fish and wildlife, including for instream flows and flushing flows to prevent fish disease. Limited flushing flows have contributed to yet another year of rampant fish disease and infection that is killing off tribal fisheries.

We'll hear more today from our witnesses about how tribal treaty rights, fishing rights, and water rights are currently not being satisfied. The tribes joining us have lived along the Klamath River and fished the once-abundant salmon since time immemorial. The salmon runs are *integral* to the tribe's traditions and ceremonies, and many tribal families rely on the fishery to pay basic bills.

We must finally and fully honor tribal water rights and fishing rights and work for durable solutions to support healthy ecosystems in the Klamath Basin.

That's why I worked to secure major federal investments for these needs through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, or the B-I-L. The B-I-L includes measures from a bill I've worked on since last Congress called the FUTURE Western Water Infrastructure and Drought Resiliency Act, or FUTURE Act. The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law includes hundreds of millions in appropriations for FUTURE Act programs.

These programs include a new Aquatic Ecosystem Restoration Program and a Watershed Health Program to allow the Bureau of Reclamation to support projects that restore aquatic ecosystems and improve the health of fish and wildlife. It is crucial that Reclamation work expeditiously to set up these and other new programs to help address some of the major challenges we'll hear about today. These and other new resources can go a long way to benefit communities, fish, and wildlife in the Klamath Basin.

One solution that could emerge from these investments are projects to modernize Trinity Dam to help control temperatures on the Trinity River, which is the largest tributary to the Lower Klamath River. Addressing temperature must be included in any plan to improve salmon numbers on the river.

I also look forward to discussing investments to advance *voluntary* water transfers to support water for Klamath wildlife refuges, which will be critical to supporting waterfowl and migratory bird habitat during times of water shortage.

And another key policy solution that we'll hear about today is the removal of the four lower Klamath River dams. These dams fuel massive algae blooms every summer, disrupt sacred ceremonies, and sicken the fish at the very heart of tribal cultures and coastal communities.

We've had some positive news on the FERC process lately, with the recent release of a draft Environmental Impact Statement that is a major step towards removal of these aging dams. Removing these dams will provide permanent, significant benefits for water quality, river temperatures, and the survival of fish species that tribes and fishing communities depend upon.

I look forward to hearing more about these and other opportunities to advance solutions in the Klamath Basin.

Today, we will also hear testimony on impacts to farming communities, including those upstream in Ranking Member Bentz's district. Upstream communities are also facing major hardships and challenges to their livelihood. There are significant resources in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law to support farming communities as well. Most of these programs were authorized in the western water package that was enacted in December 2020, which I also negotiated and supported.

As I've said previously, I am committed to working in a problem-solving spirit across the aisle, as I've done before, to address our challenges in the Klamath Basin and across the West.

Many of the stakeholders in the Klamath Basin have been engaged in litigation over water use for decades. It is time to find a path forward that breaks the status quo of litigation, risk, and uncertainty over water that plagues all sides year after year. I stand ready to work with Ranking Member Bentz and others in the Basin to find long-term solutions that provide water certainty for the entire Basin.