

House Committee on Natural Resources
Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife, and Fisheries

Legislative Hearing
April 29, 2026 at 2:00pm

Witness Testimony of Troy Larson
Executive Director, Lewis & Clark Regional Water System

Chairman Hageman, Ranking Member Van Hoyle, and Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on the critical role the Lewis & Clark Regional Water System (Lewis & Clark) plays in delivering safe, reliable drinking water to communities across southeast South Dakota, northwest Iowa and southwest Minnesota. Lewis & Clark is a federally authorized, locally governed, tristate water system that demonstrates how federal, state and local partnerships can solve complex infrastructure challenges in a cost-effective and sustainable manner.

And thank you to Congressman Dusty Johnson and the entire delegation of members that represent us, including Representatives Feenstra of Iowa, Fischbach of Minnesota, and Finstad of Minnesota. We are grateful for their leadership in sponsoring the legislation we are discussing today.

Like our namesake explorers, Lewis & Clark is a trailblazer. It's the first of its kind water project involving the partnership of the federal government, three states and 20 local entities. We are a wholesale provider of water to our 20 member cities and rural water systems, and will benefit an estimated 350,000 people in the tristate region.

Lewis & Clark was incorporated in 1990 in response to recognition by local leaders that they could not meet the future drinking water demands of a rapidly developing tristate region on their own. Congress authorized the project in 2000, assigning construction oversight to the Bureau of Reclamation—a critical partnership because Reclamation does not otherwise operate in Iowa or Minnesota.

Over more than two decades, Reclamation engineers and staff have provided essential expertise in system design, construction oversight, environmental compliance, and cost control. Their involvement has ensured the project is built efficiently, responsibly, and in compliance with all federal and state requirements. It is important to note federal investment is limited to construction under the Reclamation's Rural Water Program. Lewis & Clark covers

100 percent of its operations and maintenance expenses through water rates, so it is completely self-sustaining.

Lewis & Clark began operating in 2012 when the first 11 members were connected. The last member was finally connected in 2024, but construction of the authorized system will not be completed until 2028 – a full 28 years after the project was authorized.

Reliable access to high-quality water is foundational to economic development and quality of life, particularly in rural areas. Water from Lewis & Clark that our members put to beneficial use supports existing manufacturers, food processors, healthcare facilities, and agricultural businesses while enabling future economic growth that simply would not be possible without a dependable water supply.

While Lewis & Clark was designed to meet near-term demand, population and economic growth make it clear that additional capacity will be needed in the coming decades. Water infrastructure requires long planning horizons, as Lewis & Clark has demonstrated. To ensure our communities can support new housing, attract employers, and remain competitive in the future, we are already planning for the members' water needs for the next 40 years, which is the time horizon required by Reclamation.

To that end, Lewis & Clark is seeking congressional support to authorize Reclamation to participate in a feasibility study that will examine projected growth, future demand, and infrastructure options to ensure the region can continue to thrive, while maintaining responsible stewardship of federal, state and local investments.

In conclusion, Lewis & Clark reflects Congress' vision that strategic, collaborative infrastructure investments can deliver lasting value. The project provides safe drinking water, supports economic growth, strengthens regional resilience, and does so through a model that maximizes efficiency and local responsibility.

As Lewis & Clark approaches completion of its authorized system, continued federal partnership is essential to ensure the region is prepared for the water demands of the future. Proactive planning today will help avoid far greater costs tomorrow, and ensure communities across three states remain strong and vibrant.

Thank you.

