

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

Legislative Hearing  
April 29, 2026, | 2:00 p.m. EDT

Witness Testimony of Kurt Pfeifle  
Executive Director  
Dakota Mainstem Regional Water System

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

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Kurt Pfeifle, and I serve as Executive Director of the Dakota Mainstem Regional Water System.

I would like to begin by thanking South Dakota Congressman Dusty Johnson for his leadership in advancing this legislation and for his continued focus on long-term water planning in our region.

Dakota Mainstem is a multi-state, regional effort representing communities, rural water systems, and other public entities across eastern South Dakota, southwest Minnesota, northwest Iowa, and northeast Nebraska. Today, Dakota Mainstem includes more than 50 members, reflecting a growing recognition that water supply challenges are regional in nature and require coordinated, long-term solutions.

Across much of our region, many communities rely on groundwater sources that are under increasing pressure. In some areas, aquifers are declining. In others, water quality issues such as salinity, nitrates, and regulatory burdens are increasing treatment costs and creating uncertainty about long-term reliability. In addition, South Dakota and the northern Great Plains are highly prone to drought, including periods of severe drought, which further stress both groundwater and existing surface water supplies.

Dakota Mainstem takes its name from the Missouri River Mainstem system of dams. Four of the six Mainstem dams are in South Dakota, including Oahe, Big Bend, Fort Randall, and Gavins Point Dams. These dams and their corresponding reservoirs represent a reliable and well-managed water supply that has long supported the region. The question before us is how to responsibly evaluate the use of that resource to help meet future needs.

Dakota Mainstem recently completed an appraisal-level study that examined regional water demand and potential supply options. That work identified the Missouri River as the most reliable long-term source and confirmed that a regional, multi-state approach warrants further evaluation consistent with federal planning standards.

The next step is a detailed feasibility study conducted in partnership with the Bureau of Reclamation, consistent with its established planning framework and requirements.

Authorization of this feasibility study is essential. Specifically, we are requesting authorization for the Bureau of Reclamation to participate in and provide technical and financial assistance for a

feasibility study only. This authorization would allow the Bureau to apply its technical expertise and planning standards to fully evaluate the project, including engineering, environmental considerations, and economic feasibility.

It is important to note that this request is limited to feasibility study authorization only and does not seek or imply authorization for construction. The purpose of the study is to determine whether the project is feasible, how it could be structured, and whether it should be recommended for any future federal action.

Dakota Mainstem is committed to being a responsible partner in that process. We are leveraging state support and local member contributions to position ourselves to meet non-federal cost-share requirements. We are also maintaining coordination with other regional efforts to ensure a thoughtful and informed approach as this work progresses.

We also recognize the importance of Native American Tribal engagement in this effort. Dakota Mainstem has conducted outreach to Tribal governments across the region and is proud to include one Tribal nation in our current membership. We are committed to continuing that outreach and ensuring Tribal perspectives and interests are appropriately considered as this work moves forward.

Water infrastructure requires long planning horizons. Projects of this scale take years, and often decades, to study, design, and construct. That is exactly why it is important to begin this work now, and to do so in a manner that aligns with Bureau of Reclamation requirements from the outset.

Reliable water supplies are foundational to rural communities. They support homes, healthcare systems, agriculture, and local economies. They allow communities to grow, attract investment, and remain viable for future generations.

This request is about taking the next responsible step. It is about gathering the information needed to make informed decisions and ensuring that the region has a path toward long-term water security.

We respectfully ask for your support in authorizing the Bureau of Reclamation feasibility study for the Dakota Mainstem Regional Water System.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I would be happy to answer any questions.