



Chairman Ken Calvert

*Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
House Committee on Appropriations*

**Department of the Interior FY18 Supplemental Hearing
Deputy Secretary of the Interior, David Bernhardt
Thursday, November 30, 2017
Opening Statement As Prepared**

This morning I'd like to welcome to the subcommittee the Deputy Secretary of the Interior, David Bernhardt. Our hearing today will address the Department of the Interior's fiscal year 2018 Hurricane Recovery Supplemental request submitted to the Committee by OMB on November 17th.

As you know, Mr. Secretary, oversight is a critical priority of this subcommittee. As the Appropriations Committee prepares the next Supplemental for consideration by the House, it's important that we closely examine the various Department of the Interior priorities included in the Administration's request.

We look forward to hearing in greater detail from you today—based upon both storm damage assessments conducted to date, as well as from your recent firsthand observations on the ground—about specific hurricane-related needs in the States and territories affected by Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria. We understand that storm damage assessments, particularly in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands, are ongoing. We also hope you can shed some light on when we might expect estimates on any remaining Interior-related needs that may be addressed in a future proposal.

According to information we have received to date, the Fish and Wildlife Service sustained major damage at 41 agency sites (mostly national wildlife refuges). The National Park Service incurred damage at 21 national parks, preserves, and national monuments. The U.S.G.S. sustained damages to over 200 pieces of equipment including stream gages, coral reef monitoring, and seismic monitoring equipment.

The challenges growing out of these hurricane events include cleanup and debris removal; significant infrastructure repairs (including visitor centers, ranger stations, waste water treatment facilities, employee housing, roads, bridges, and campgrounds); and environmental assessment work needed to inform recovery and rebuilding efforts. Our Committee stands ready to assist the Department in responding to these needs.

Overall, the President's fiscal year 2018 Supplemental budget request seeks a total of \$469 million for the Department including \$210.6 million for the Fish and Wildlife Service, \$225.1

million for the National Park Service, and \$32.9 million for the U.S. Geological Survey. Our Committee is examining the Administration's request account-by-account, line-by-line. Your testimony today will help guide this subcommittee's response.

In a subcommittee briefing prior to Thanksgiving, U.S. Virgin Islands Governor, Kenneth Mapp, brought to our attention many of the challenges facing the Virgin Islands. He painted a portrait of a largely damaged infrastructure but of a resilient population of Americans eager to rebuild in the aftermath of these historic hurricanes.

Among many other priorities, Governor Mapp emphasized the importance of the long-term recovery of Caneel Bay on St. John, specifically the need to secure a long-term extension of an agreement between the operator of the Caneel Bay Resort and the National Park Service. He pointed to this as a critical piece to rebuilding the economy and putting 500 people back to work in the Virgin Islands. The Subcommittee would benefit from your perspective on the status of these ongoing negotiations and any potential role Congress might play.

In closing, this subcommittee couldn't do its work without the talented people sitting behind you. Thanks to each of you for all that you do.