

**Statement of Michael Brain
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U.S. Department of the Interior
Before the
Subcommittee on Energy and Water Development, and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
On the President’s Fiscal Year 2025 Budget
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Thank you, Chairman Fleischmann, Ranking Member Kaptur, and members of this Subcommittee for the opportunity to discuss with you the President’s Fiscal Year 2025 budget for the Department of the Interior’s Bureau of Reclamation and Central Utah Project Completion Act office. I am Mike Brain, Interior’s Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for Water and Science, and I am honored to be here today. I appreciate your ongoing support of our programs.

The Department’s 2025 budget totals \$18.0 billion in current authority (\$17.8 billion in net discretionary authority)—an increase of \$575.9 million, or 3 percent, from the 2024 continuing resolution (CR) level. An additional \$360.0 million is accessible through a budget cap adjustment for wildfire suppression to ensure funds are available in the event the regular annual appropriation is inadequate to meet suppression needs. The budget also includes an estimated \$14.8 billion in permanent funding available in 2025.

The 2025 President’s budget for Interior maintains the Administration’s commitments to deliver jobs and economic growth, build up America’s resilience to climate change, advance a transition to clean energy, strengthen the Government-to-Government relationship with Tribal Nations, and expand work with partners to conserve lands and increase access to outdoor recreation. The 2025 budget continues to reflect the importance of science, diversity and inclusion, and the goal to leverage the power of collaboration to support Interior’s important missions.

Bureau of Reclamation (BOR)

The budget requests \$1.6 billion for the Bureau of Reclamation, which helps ensure communities across the West have access to a resilient and reliable water supply by investing in rural water projects, water conservation, development of desalination technologies, and water recycling and reuse projects. The budget complements the nearly \$1.7 billion provided in 2025 for western water infrastructure through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, as well as the nearly \$4.6 billion provided by the Inflation Reduction Act for drought mitigation and domestic water supply projects.

As many of you know, the Bureau of Reclamation is the largest wholesale water supplier and manager in the United States, managing 490 dams and 294 reservoirs. Reclamation delivers water to one in five Western farmers, delivering 140 million acre-feet of water for more than 10 million acres of irrigated land, and provides 10 trillion gallons of water to millions of people for municipal, rural, residential, and industrial uses. The Bureau is also the Nation’s second largest producer of hydroelectric power, generating an average 40 million megawatt-hours of energy per

year. Reclamation's dams, water conveyances, and power-generating facilities provide basic water and power services to millions of customers in hundreds of basins throughout the Western United States.

Effectively managing structures is among the significant challenges facing Reclamation over the next several years. Approximately 50 percent of Reclamation's dams were built between 1900 and 1950, before state-of-the-art design and construction practices were implemented. Reclamation manages 490 dams throughout the 17 Western States, and the Dam Safety program identified 360 dams as high- and significant-hazard dams. Reclamation evaluates dams and monitors performance to ensure risks do not exceed public protection guidelines; the 2025 budget request includes \$211.2 million for the Dam Safety program. The proposed budget includes appropriations for specific projects for Extraordinary Maintenance (XM) activities across Reclamation. Reclamation's XM request is part of its overall Asset Management Strategy, which relies on condition assessments, condition/performance metrics, technological research and deployment, and strategic collaboration to better inform and improve management of its assets and address infrastructure maintenance challenges. The 2025 budget includes \$74.8 million for XM-related activity; additional XM items are directly funded by revenues, customers, or other Federal agencies (e.g., Bonneville Power Administration). Reclamation's budget request for XM activity implementation is further supported by \$3.2 billion in Aging Infrastructure Account appropriations made available through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law.

Another pressing challenge is climate change. Water allocations have recently been at historic lows—in areas such as the Colorado River Basin, California's Central Valley, and the Klamath River Basin—creating an urgent need to address the impacts of drought and develop a long-term plan to facilitate conservation and economic growth. This severe drought situation is the latest manifestation of the pervasive and pernicious impacts of climate change on American communities, making climate resilience an important area of focus. Reclamation's budget request addresses the unprecedented drought in much of the Western United States and combats climate change through the WaterSMART (Sustain and Manage America's Resources for Tomorrow) program, support to secure water supplies for wildlife refuges, and efforts to provide sound climate science, research and development, and clean energy. In the 2025 budget request, Reclamation proposes to fund WaterSMART at \$65.6 million. The components include the Drought Response Program, funded at \$25.0 million; WaterSMART Grants, funded at \$13.7 million; the Basin Study Program, funded at \$15.0 million; the Title XVI Program, funded at \$4.0 million; the Water Conservation Field Services Program, funded at \$2.5 million; the Cooperative Watershed Management Program, funded at \$5.0 million; and the Aquatic Ecosystem Restoration Program, funded at \$500,000. Once completed, projects funded through WaterSMART since 2010, including WaterSMART Grants and Title XVI projects, are expected to save more than 1.8 million acre-feet of water each year.

In the past 3 years, Interior has allocated \$2.43 billion available through the BIL to address Indian water rights settlements enacted by Congress as of November 15, 2021. Indian reserved water rights are vested property rights for which the United States has a trust responsibility. Settlement of Indian water rights disputes helps create conditions that improve water resource management and provides certainty as to the rights of all water users who are parties to the

disputes. Honoring those commitments promptly is especially important to the health, safety, and empowerment of Tribal communities.

In addition to these previous investments, the budget provides \$181.0 million in the Bureau of Reclamation to support the White Mountain Apache Tribe's water settlement agreement within the settlement's statutory completion deadline. The budget also includes \$45.0 million in the Bureau of Indian Affairs to support payments authorized in the Hualapai Tribe Water Rights Settlement Act of 2022.

The Administration proposes legislation to expand the Indian Water Rights Settlement Completion Fund. This proposal will provide \$2.8 billion in mandatory funding over 10 years to help ensure commitments are honored on existing, newly enacted, and anticipated Indian Water Rights Settlements. Included in this total is \$340.0 million in mandatory funding for operations and maintenance costs associated with currently enacted Bureau of Reclamation funded settlement projects.

In support of promoting racial and economic justice, the 2025 budget includes \$29.5 million for Reclamation's Native American Affairs program to work with and support Tribes in the resolution of their water rights claims and to increase opportunities for Indian Tribes to develop, manage, and protect their water and related resources; \$9 million of this amount will support Tribal drought assistance efforts in FY 2025, while \$500,000 will support Departmental and Reclamation efforts for Tribal Co-Stewardship activities. That funding will also help to strengthen departmentwide capabilities to integrate and systematically approach Indian water rights negotiations by considering a full range of economic, legal, and technical attributes of proposed settlements while serving to support Tribal drought assistance.

To make sure all of the important work described above is carried out efficiently and effectively, the 2025 budget includes \$66.8 million in Policy and Administration to support Reclamation's central and regional management. Policy and Administration funds are used to develop, evaluate, and implement Reclamation-wide policy, rules, and regulations and perform functions not properly chargeable to specific projects or program activities covered by separate funding authorities.

Central Utah Project Completion Act (CUPCA)

The Department's 2025 CUPCA budget of \$17.0 million continues progress of prior appropriations, supporting construction of the Utah Lake Drainage Basin Water Delivery System along with associated fish and wildlife conservation measures. As authorized, the completion of the Utah Lake System pipelines will deliver 60,000 acre-feet of municipal and industrial water to Salt Lake and Utah Counties. The completed project will provide increased water security, helping communities adapt to and increase their resiliency under changing climate conditions.

The request provides funding for the construction of the Spanish Fork–Santaquin Pipeline component of the Utah Lake System; the recovery of threatened and endangered species; the implementation of mitigation efforts for impacts to fish, wildlife, and recreation; and the

implementation of water conservation projects. One of the goals of the project is the recovery of the June sucker fish, a critical element of listed species recovery efforts.

The 2025 budget includes \$5.2 million for the Central Utah Water Conservancy District to administer planning and project construction activities; \$1.5 million for water conservation; \$4.4 million for fish and wildlife conservation activities funded through the CUPCA program office; and \$1.9 million for program administration. In addition, the budget includes \$4.0 million for mitigation and conservation activities funded through the Utah Reclamation Mitigation and Conservation Commission.

Conclusion

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of the President's 2025 budget for the Department of the Interior's Bureau of Reclamation and Central Utah Project Completion Act office. I look forward to working with the Committee to implement this budget. This concludes my testimony, and I am happy to answer any questions you may have.