

**Committee on Natural Resources**  
**1324 Longworth House Office Building**  
**March 4, 2020 at 10:00 a.m.**

**Oversight Hearing**  
*Examining the Department of the Interior's Spending Priorities and the President's Fiscal  
Year 2021 Budget Proposal*

**Questions from Rep. Jenniffer González-Colón** for Susan Combs, Assistant Secretary for Policy, Management, and Budget, U.S. Department of the Interior

1. Parks and public lands under the U.S. Department of the Interior's jurisdiction are vital to Puerto Rico's tourism and recreation economy. The San Juan National Historic Site, a National Park Service unit and world heritage site that includes important 16th century fortifications from the Spanish colonial era, generates more than \$100 million in economic activity for the Island each year. In 2016, more than 1.4 million people visited the park, spurring more than \$85 million in visitor spending.

The Fish and Wildlife Service's 5 National Wildlife Refuges in Puerto Rico are also important economic engines for our communities. According to the Service, nearly 338,000 visitors had a quality outdoor experience at one of the Island's refuges in 2018.

However, these benefits are threatened if we fail to address the deferred maintenance backlog, which totals over \$40.1 million in the San Juan National Historic Site and over \$7.2 million across Puerto Rico's National Wildlife Refuges.

Could you discuss how the FY 2021 budget request seeks to address the deferred maintenance backlog across the National Park Service and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service?

2. I now want to turn to the FY 2021 budget request for the U.S. Geological Survey. In Puerto Rico, we know first-hand how valuable this agency's work is. USGS, in conjunction with the Puerto Rico Seismic Network, provided life-saving information and data following the earthquakes that impacted the southwestern region of the Island earlier this year.

I am therefore interested in learning more about how the FY 2021 budget request supports USGS's Earthquake Hazards program. In particular, how would the request prioritize and strengthen the Nation's earthquake monitoring and reporting capabilities? How does it support the Advanced National Seismic System and the several regional seismic networks operated across the country, such as the Puerto Rico Seismic Network?

3. It is my understanding that some of the Fish and Wildlife Service's facilities in Cabo Rojo, Puerto Rico were impacted and damaged by the seismic activity in the region. Could you please provide my office an assessment of damages and whether the facilities are structurally sound? What actions will the Service pursue to address any damages?
4. I would also like to inquire about the status of the masonry preservation program at the San Juan National Historic Site. Specifically, on June 11, 2018, the Puerto Rico State Historic Preservation Office sent a letter to the Superintendent of the park seeking clarification on the status of about 40 to 60 expert masons whose jobs were at risk of being eliminated.

Last year during a Committee hearing, I brought this issue to Secretary Bernhard's attention. He mentioned that he would be signing an order to allow the use of recreational fees to address certain employees, including the masons at the San Juan National Historic Site.

I therefore would like to request an update on the status of this order. Has it been issued? If so, how would it specifically impact the masonry program at the San Juan National Historic Site?

5. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, through the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program, has been a leader in restoring shaded coffee plantations in Puerto Rico, providing benefits to both wildlife and the Island's coffee industry.

How does the FY 2021 budget request support initiatives such as this one? Is the Service still prioritizing this work in Puerto Rico?

6. In 2009, Congress authorized the Department of the Interior to conduct a special resource study to determine whether Fort San Gerónimo, which is on the eastern side of Old San Juan, should be added to the San Juan National Historic Site.

Could you discuss the status of this study and when the Department, and specifically the National Park Service, expects to finalize and publish its findings? I note that it has been 10 years since Congress authorized this study and it is urgent that we explore every avenue to protect this fortification.