

U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
FY 2018 Supplemental Appropriations Hearing:
U.S Department of the Interior
November 30, 2017

Questions for the Record – Deputy Secretary of the Interior

Questions from Mr. Calvert

Fish and Wildlife Service—Construction

The Supplemental request identifies \$210 million for first-responder costs, debris clean-up, repairs, and reconstruction at 41 Fish and Wildlife Service units in six States and Territories. The Fish and Wildlife Service has been a leading voice on the need to adapt to rising seas and more severe weather patterns.

Calvert Q1: With the funds requested for repairs and reconstruction, and where feasible, will the Service be fortifying, relocating, or in some cases reducing its infrastructure in coastal areas?

Answer: Yes, that is the Department's intent.

Calvert Q2: With additional funds not requested in this supplemental, could the Service also be modifying natural areas to be more resilient to flooding, as was done in the wake of Hurricane Sandy? If so, will you provide us with a cost estimate?

Answer: The Department's supplemental funding request focuses on rebuilding, repairing and replacing equipment, and addressing damages at over 150 Interior managed facilities impacted by the Hurricanes.

National Park Service – Historic Preservation Fund

The Administration has requested \$17.5M for the Historic Preservation Fund to address permitting and rebuilding historic properties damaged from Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria.

Calvert Q3: Can you provide the basis for your \$17.5M request?

Answer: The Presidentially declared disaster areas comprise hundreds of thousands of National Register properties, such as historic landmarks, neighborhoods and structures. The rebuilding effort will involve unique challenges, including the imminent need to stabilize and remediate damage in areas where the historic structures still remain. Owners of historic properties that are damaged must seek approval from their State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) or Tribal Historic Preservation Officer (THPO) before using Federal funds for recovery. Requested funding will streamline the Section 106 compliance process and allow SHPO and THPOs to provide technical assistance to local governments and property owners.

Calvert Q4: How much, for example, is required for the section 106 review process in the various impacted States, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands?

Answer: The number of historic properties and section 106 reviews necessary in States and Territories impacted by the hurricanes are not fully known. The request includes \$17.5M to accelerate recovery actions including review of permitting and Federally funded recovery projects within the areas impacted by Hurricane Harvey, Irma, and Maria.

Calvert Q5: What is the extent of the damage to historic properties from these hurricanes?

Answer: In areas impacted by Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria, there are more than 157,000 properties listed on the National Register of Historic Places. As these are privately owned properties, the NPS does not have estimates on how many of these properties were damaged.

Questions from Mrs. Lowey:

Tracking Contaminants Pathways

The U.S. Geological Survey researches the pathways of contaminants released in disasters and their impacts on fish, wildlife, and humans. This work is time sensitive. While it may be too late to study Hurricane Harvey impacts, we are running out of time to research for impacts of Hurricane Irma in Puerto Rico and what these contaminants may mean for area residents.

Lowey Q1: Why did the Administration not request this funding?

Answer: The Administration put only the highest priorities forward in its Supplemental Request.

Lowey Q2: If Congress were to appropriate \$4 million dollars to research exposure pathways, how would it be focused?

Answer: The focus would depend on the conditions imposed on it by Congress.

Assistance for Puerto Rico and U.S. Virgin Islands

Lowey Q3: The November 17, 2017 transmittal letter I received with this supplemental request stated that since Hurricane Maria had only made landfall 58 days prior, and because conditions remained extremely challenging in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands, the Administration's request purposefully does not include funding to meet many of these needs. Forcing Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands to wait until a later supplemental for their needs to be addressed, without any guarantee that this Administration would support additional funds.

What role is the Office of Insular Affairs playing in helping to determine the need in the Virgin Islands?

Answer: The Office of Insular Affairs does not participate in registering individuals to receive assistance from FEMA or other Federal disaster programs.

The Department of the Interior has a direct role in disaster recovery efforts related to its own assets such as National Park Service and Fish and Wildlife Service properties. The Office of Insular Affairs does not have physical assets in the disaster areas. The Department of Interior, through the Assistant Secretary for Insular Areas, does lead the natural and cultural resources recovery effort in the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Lowey Q4: According to the FEMA website, survivors have until December 18, 2017 to register for assistance and there are eight Disaster Recovery Centers throughout the U.S. Virgin Islands. This deadline is quickly approaching.

Since the Office of Insular Affairs is responsible for coordinating federal policy for the territories, is the office disseminating this information or helping with coordinate and assisting people in registering for assistance?

Answer: The Office of Insular Affairs disseminates information provided by the Government of the U.S. Virgin Islands and Federal partners, as appropriate, to facilitate the disaster response and recovery effort. The Office does not participate in registering individuals to receive assistance from FEMA or other Federal disaster programs.

Lowey Q5: According to a November 17, 2017 news release from FEMA, more than half of the estimated number of housing inspections are now complete across the Virgin Islands and survivors can now work with FEMA to obtain direct repairs to make their homes safe, sanitary and functional.

If funding is not provided in this supplemental to allow families to make their homes safe, wouldn't that create a significant hurdle for families to recover?

Answer: This question is better directed to FEMA.



United States Department of the Interior

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY
Washington, DC 20240

JAN 26 2018

The Honorable Doug Lamborn
Chairman
Subcommittee on Water, Power and Oceans
Committee on Natural Resources
House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Lamborn:

Enclosed are responses prepared by the Bureau of Reclamation to the questions for the record submitted following the November 30, 2017, legislative hearing before your Subcommittee on H.R. 4419, a bill to facilitate and streamline the Bureau of Reclamation and Bureau of Indian Affairs processes for creating or expanding certain water projects, and for other purposes.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this material to the Committee.

Sincerely,

Christopher P. Salotti
Legislative Counsel
Office of Congressional and
Legislative Affairs

Enclosure

cc: The Honorable Jared Huffman, Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Water, Power and Oceans
Committee on Energy and Natural Resources

Committee on Natural Resources
Subcommittee on Water, Power, and Oceans
Legislative Hearing
1324 Longworth House Office Building
November 30, 2017
2:00 PM

Legislative Hearing on:

- **H.R. 4419 (Rep. Dan Newhouse)**, To facilitate and streamline the Bureau of Reclamation and Bureau of Indian Affairs processes for creating or expanding certain water projects, and for other purposes. *“Bureau of Reclamation and Bureau of Indian Affairs Water Project Streamlining Act”*

Questions from Rep. Jody Hice (GA-10) for Alan Mikkelsen, Deputy Commissioner, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation.

1. **Mr. Mikkelsen**, I am concerned when I hear from my colleagues out West that shovel-ready projects are stalled by seemingly endless studies. As you testified, Mr. O’Toole, “...sometimes [the existing] process is used as a barrier to the planning, design and construction of new water storage projects”. We’ve seen in Georgia, how delays in construction can increase project costs exponentially. Are the provisions in the bill that streamline the feasibility study process necessary, or is the ability simply to authorize new projects sufficient?

Response: Before a project can become shovel-ready, it is necessary under the Federal Water Resources Planning process to complete a feasibility study. This is required to ensure that from a design, technical and engineering perspective the project is feasible and will, when constructed, meet the expected water and power supply needs of the benefiting community. It is also important to ensure that the identified economic benefits are accurate, will be realized by the design of the project, and will exceed the project’s costs. In addition, it is important that the local community and the taxpayers of the United States are able to bear the construction and operational costs of the project. This process, which is similar across many Federal agencies, is important to protect the long-term interest of the project beneficiaries and the taxpayers. H.R. 4419 would provide streamlining to the feasibility study process by requiring studies to be completed in a more timely and efficient manner. Finally, once feasibility studies or project construction is authorized by Congress, Reclamation depends upon the relevant non-federal cost share and congressional appropriations to undertake and complete these activities in a timely manner.

2. **Mr. Mikkelsen**, H.R. 4419 would certainly increase water supply for human needs as we can begin fixing our degrading water infrastructure. Do also you see broader environmental benefits to this increased water supply?

Response: Reclamation projects are generally authorized by Congress for multiple purposes including irrigation, municipal and industrial uses as well as to provide recreational and fish and wildlife benefits. It is our expectation that the streamlined process envisioned by HR 4419 intends to accelerate the pace of completing the feasibility studies and project completion– which would include any and all of the authorized benefits that are associated with the project.

Mr. Mikkelsen, From what we've heard today, the current challenges associated with modernizing existing and constructing new water storage projects must be a nightmare for strategic planning. How do the provisions of H.R. 4419 help the Bureau engage in long term planning?

Response: Expediting the feasibility study process will permit the Bureau's planning resources to address additional water storage projects simply by spending less time on the analysis of each. Having a defined period for completion of a feasibility analysis makes managing the overall planning portfolio more efficient. H.R. 4419 will do little to address issues with prioritizing the planning portfolio, but will add parameters on feasibility study period length which should help with overall long-term planning.

3. **Mr. Mikkelsen**, How will coordinating environmental reviews and streamlining the feasibility study process help the Bureau better serve water users?

Response: Water users would be better served through increased coordination and establishment of environmental reviews and feasibility study processes that could result in timelier project implementation. Improvements to front-end coordination and established processes for the over-all effort would likely result in: common understanding of the process, requirements, and expectations of entities involved; development of more robust schedules providing key decision points and deliverables; clear identification of data needs and necessary studies; greater certainty of timing for engagement of users; reduced environmental review and feasibility study costs; and increased transparency. The structured process improves the certainty in project timing so water users can more easily plan their financial and resource commitments associated with project implementation.