



# United States Department of the Interior

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY  
Washington, DC 20240

January 18, 2022

The Honorable Jared Huffman  
Chair, Subcommittee on Water, Oceans, and Wildlife  
Committee on Natural Resources  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Huffman:

Enclosed are responses prepared by the Department of the Interior to written questions submitted following the appearance of the Department's witness, Tanya Trujillo, Assistant Secretary for Water and Science, at the November 4, 2021, legislative hearing on H.R. 4832, the *Open Access Evapotranspiration Data Act*; H.R. 5001, the *Upper Colorado and San Juan River Basins Recovery Act*; H.R. 5345, the *Saline Lake Ecosystems in the Great Basin States Program Act*; and H. Res. 320, *Recognizing the critical importance of access to reliable, clean drinking water for Native Americans and Alaska Natives and confirming the responsibility of the Federal Government to ensure such water access*.

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

Sincerely,

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

Enclosure

cc: The Honorable Cliff Bentz  
Ranking Member

**Question from Rep. Gonzalez-Colon**

1. H.R. 5345, the Saline Lake Ecosystems in the Great Basin States Program Act of 2021, would require the Department of the Interior to establish an assessment and monitoring program focused on the hydrology of saline lake ecosystems in the Great Basin and the migratory birds and wildlife that depend on them. In your written testimony, you argue that the U.S. Geological Survey would be uniquely suited to carry out such a program, in large part due to the agency's experience with Integrated Water Availability Assessments.

In researching Integrated Water Availability Assessments ahead of the Subcommittee hearing, my office noticed that the National Integrated Water Availability Assessments concept map released by the U.S. Geological Survey in late 2019 only contained data from the conterminous United States—that is, the 48 contiguous states. The map did not appear to include hydrological data from the non-contiguous states and territories: Puerto Rico, Alaska, Hawaii, American Samoa, Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands, and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

The non-contiguous states and territories—particularly the island jurisdictions like Puerto Rico—face unique water conservation and management challenges, including a vulnerability to droughts and a critical dependence on local sources of freshwater, in ways that differ from the mainland. I believe we would greatly benefit from the U.S. Geological Survey conducting an Integrated Water Availability Assessment or a similar program focused on water availability in the non-contiguous jurisdictions and would welcome the opportunity to work with you and your team on that.

- a. **Do the Department of the Interior and the U.S. Geological Survey have any plans to incorporate the non-contiguous states and territories into the National Integrated Water Availability Assessments? Or to carry out a regional Integrated Water Availability Assessment—or equivalent water availability study—focused on these jurisdictions?**
- b. **What additional resources or authorities—including legislation from Congress, if necessary— would the U.S. Geological Survey require to achieve this?**

**Response:** The U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) recognizes the need to provide water availability assessments for the whole of U.S. water resource management needs. While initial efforts for the National Integrated Water Availability Assessment (IWAA) are focused on the contiguous U.S., the USGS is actively planning to expand the National IWAA to eventually include Puerto Rico, Alaska, Hawaii, American Samoa, Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands, and U.S. Virgin Islands. To help fill some of these gaps, the USGS is undertaking several regional activities that will provide immediate information for water resource management while also strengthening USGS IWAA capacity. In Fiscal Year 2022,

Question for the Record  
House Committee on Natural Resources  
Subcommittee on Water, Oceans and Wildlife  
Legislative Hearing on *H.Res. 320, H.R. 4832, H.R.  
5001 and H.R. 5345*  
November 4, 2021

USGS-planned activities will include building infrastructure needed to eventually expand IWAAAs to non-contiguous states and territories.

Regarding authorizations, expanding authorities for the National Groundwater Monitoring Network (NGWMN) to allow the USGS to provide funds to Indian tribes (as that term is defined under 42 U.S.C. § 10362(10)), Native Hawaiian organizations, and U.S. territories would benefit the data collection efforts needed to expand the National IWAA to the non-contiguous states and territories. The NGWMN was authorized in the SECURE Water Act (P.L. 111-11) and currently only allows the USGS to provide funds to State and local entities.