

U.S. Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
May 14, 2025 Hearing: The Brightbill, Pierce, Prochaska and Mamula Nominations
Questions for the Record Submitted to Dr. Ned Mamula

Questions for the Record from Ranking Member Martin Heinrich

Question 1: The U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) should be a nonpartisan science agency. I would like specific answers to each question below.

- How will you work to preserve the scientific integrity and independence of the U.S. Geological Survey's work and deliver unbiased scientific findings to the public?
- What specific steps will you take to ensure that scientific integrity is protected across the USGS?

Response: As a scientist, I have a deep understanding of the importance of scientific integrity as a basis for sound decision making. If confirmed, I commit to working with my colleagues within the Survey to ensure that appropriate scientific integrity policies are in place and adhered to so that the Survey is a source of objective scientific information.

Question 2: The U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) plays a critical role in monitoring wildfire conditions in the West. During active fires, it provides real-time satellite and commercial data to the National Interagency Fire Center for use by frontline firefighters. After fires, USGS assesses burned areas to identify risks like landslides and other hazards. The President's proposed budget for FY2026 cuts USGS funding by \$564 million.

If confirmed, what would you do to make sure these activities, which are crucial for public safety, remain supported at USGS?

Response: I know the USGS plays a role with other agencies in monitoring wildfire and providing data and tools to land managers to respond to a variety of wildfire issues when they occur. I am not familiar with the details of the President's budget proposal, but if confirmed, I will be briefed on the proposal and work with this committee on this issue.

Question 3: The USGS plays an important part in monitoring and managing Chronic Wasting Disease. Chronic Wasting Disease is an untreatable disease found in deer, elk, and moose that is always fatal. It has been detected in 34 states, including New Mexico.

If confirmed, how will you ensure that critical USGS research and monitoring of Chronic Wasting Disease continues, so that hunters—many of whom hunt to feed their families—can trust that their local deer and elk populations are not at risk?

Response: I understand Chronic Wasting Disease is a threat to species central to big game hunting in your state and in many states across the country. If confirmed, I commit to learning more about this issue and the role the Survey and other bureaus may play in supporting efforts to address it.

Question 4: New Mexico has been facing wildfire, drought, flood, and extreme temperatures that devastate families and communities, stress our water supplies, and challenge our recreational tourism industry. USGS science highlights that more frequent extremes are in New Mexico's

U.S. Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
May 14, 2025 Hearing: The Brightbill, Pierce, Prochaska and Mamula Nominations
Questions for the Record Submitted to Dr. Ned Mamula

future and that adaptation will increase our resilience to and lessen future costs of these events. Through partnerships with universities, Tribes, and tribal organizations, the USGS has brought adaptation solutions to New Mexico and every other state and territory of the U.S. through the National and Regional Climate Adaptation Science Centers, or CASCs. However, three CASCs—the Northeast CASC, Pacific Islands CASC, and South Central CASC, which serves New Mexico—have not been renewed by the USGS yet, even though funding was appropriated in FY2025. Congress specifically directed “the USGS to prioritize the funding needs of the Regional Centers [CASCs] and expedite the processing of funds to university-led consortia.” The CASCs have bipartisan and bicameral support from Congress, with the expectation that the openly competed and scientifically reviewed “rebid proposals” to host these three CASCs would be approved and funded by USGS in March or April 2025. I would like specific answers to each question below.

- When do you expect a decision to be made and funding sent to the USGS-selected consortia?
- What is the process to ensure there is no funding lapse when current funding ends on July 31, 2025?
- How will you ensure that USGS employees who oversee the CASCs, provide scientific leadership and support, and manage the critical data and metadata of hundreds of CASC projects are not fired, even though Congress provided FY25 funding with the intent for the CASCs to produce “critical actionable science that is invaluable to stakeholders, rights holders, and policy makers”?

Response: As I stated at my hearing, I have great respect for the scientists at the USGS and for the collaborative work that is done across the nation. However, as I am not currently at the Department, I am not familiar with, nor can I speculate on, the particular decisions or processes that you are referencing. If I am confirmed, I can commit to working closely with the scientists at the USGS to implement the agency’s mission responsibilities in accordance with law.

Question 5: The USGS Ecosystems mission area provides essential research and data collection to support America’s conservation efforts, and helps ensure that we have a strong foundation in science for programs that significantly benefit people and wildlife nationwide. Longstanding initiatives under the Species Management Research Program, such as the Bird Banding Lab and Breeding Bird Survey, support long-term data collection to better understand population trends and abundance, helping target conservation work to focus on the highest priorities for efficient use of funding, while supporting recreational activities such as birding, hunting, fishing, and their substantial economic impact. Birding alone contributes \$279 billion in economic output annually, and supports 1.4 million jobs. These efforts improve wildlife management, reduce conflicts, and benefit businesses, including data that can help support faster recovery and delisting species when appropriate.

If confirmed, will you support and advocate for the funding, staff, and programs under the USGS Ecosystems mission area, and the critical scientific efforts undertaken by this mission area?

U.S. Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
May 14, 2025 Hearing: The Brightbill, Pierce, Prochaska and Mamula Nominations
Questions for the Record Submitted to Dr. Ned Mamula

Response: I agree that conservation programs are among those that benefit from a strong scientific foundation. If confirmed, I commit to reviewing the Administration's proposed budget in depth and to ensuring that the science programs that serve the core mission of the Survey have the resources and staffing needed to effectively and efficiently deliver on behalf of the American public.

Question 6: Dr. Mamula, the President's proposed budget for FY2026 cuts USGS funding by \$564 million. It is my understanding that the Ecosystems Mission Area would take the most cuts in funding. It is also my understanding that over 1,000 USGS employees doing this work may be terminated – this is deeply troubling. USGS Ecosystems research is at the foundation of the tough decisions that Federal, State, and Tribal resource managers must make on a daily basis. USGS scientists develop locally relevant, user-driven scientific information, data, and tools that help managers detect and eradicate invasive species, improve species and habitat resilience to natural hazards, such as floods and wildfires, and ensure the resilience of multiple land uses, such as energy development, hunting and fishing, and outdoor recreation, to extreme events. Dr. Mamula, you testified that, if confirmed, you will examine each proposed budget cut at USGS to determine whether the cut is deserved. I would like specific answers to each question below.

- If confirmed, do you believe the proposed funding reduction for USGS is warranted?
- If not, will you advocate for continued funding and staffing?
- If confirmed, will you ensure that massive terminations and program closures are not carried out in advance of Congressional appropriations?
- If confirmed, will you ensure that any actions taken at the USGS are in accordance with the law and the Impoundment Control Act?

Response: As I noted at my hearing, I am not currently at the Department and am not familiar with the specific funding and staffing issues that you have identified. Consequently, it would be premature for me to provide my opinion on these issues. With respect to your remaining questions, if I am confirmed, I commit to working closely with the Department's legal team to ensure the actions I take as Director of the USGS are lawful.

U.S. Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
May 14, 2025 Hearing: The Brightbill, Pierce, Prochaska and Mamula Nominations
Questions for the Record Submitted to Dr. Ned Mamula

Questions for the Record from Senator Steve Daines

Question 1: Dr. Mamula, as you know, energy and mineral security is national security. If confirmed to be Director of the U.S. Geological Survey for the Department of the Interior, will you commit to work with Congress to uphold key USGS mission areas and promote domestic mining and mineral production?

Response: Yes. If confirmed, this commitment will likely be a number one priority because it fulfills USGS' responsibility to help strengthen U.S. national security *and* because it upholds the USGS Organic Act under which the agency was established.

U.S. Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
May 14, 2025 Hearing: The Brightbill, Pierce, Prochaska and Mamula Nominations
Questions for the Record Submitted to Dr. Ned Mamula

Questions for the Record from Senator Mazie Hirono

Question 1: The USGS currently has 5 mission areas. Do you believe all 5 mission areas are important? If confirmed, will you ensure that all 5 mission areas are carried out with adequate resources? If not, what is your justification for eliminating mission areas and how will those gaps be filled?

Response: As a scientist and a former employee of the Survey, I strongly support the mission of the Survey as provided by the USGS Organic Act. If confirmed, I will ensure that the Survey continues to produce and deliver to decision makers the critical science necessary to meet the needs of our nation.

Question 2: If confirmed, will you commit to following the law and dispersing 100% of the funding appropriated by Congress for the USGS?

Response: If I am confirmed, I commit to following the law.

Question 3: Last month, an email was sent by the USGS to its employees stating that the department is planning for reductions-in-force, while exempting positions that are considered high-priority and public safety critical from being cut.

What percentage of jobs within the USGS are high priority and public safety critical? Do these jobs include employees who serve rural and remote communities in Hawaii and the U.S. Affiliated Pacific Islands? If so, will you commit to keeping these jobs from being cut? If not, how will you ensure that the critical services currently provided by the USGS will continue for these rural and remote communities?

Response: I am not yet at the Department and therefore cannot speculate on current staffing issues, but if confirmed, I commit to ensuring the critical services provided by the Survey are available to communities in your state and throughout the country and that they are delivered effectively and efficiently.

Question 4: The current policy at the Department is that Secretary Burgum must provide additional review of all awards above \$100,000. Three USGS CASC 5-year rebid proposals, including the Pacific Islands program, were submitted in February, have been reviewed by USGS, and are sitting on the Secretary's desk. Additionally, FY25 funding for all CASCs is currently being withheld by the Department. In the absence of timely funding, faculty, staff, and supported students will have to be furloughed beginning this summer.

If confirmed, will you see that these proposals are quickly reviewed by the Secretary and that the FY25 funds are released?

Response: Again, I am not at the Department and am not familiar with the funding issues that you are raising. However, I can assure you that, if I am confirmed, I will look into these issues.

U.S. Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
May 14, 2025 Hearing: The Brightbill, Pierce, Prochaska and Mamula Nominations
Questions for the Record Submitted to Dr. Ned Mamula

Questions for the Record Submitted from Senator Catherine Cortez Masto

Question 1: Mr. Mamula, do you believe that it is important to study the patterns of natural phenomena like drought and wildfire?

Follow-up: Do you believe that the USGS has a role in helping better our understanding of how to live with the challenges that our environment provides us?

Response: The Survey indeed has a critical role to meet our nation's natural hazard and ecosystem challenges, particularly given the recent explosion of demand for energy resources, critical minerals, rare earth elements, and technology metals. Geologic mapping, discovery of energy and mineral resources and inventorying other products continue to be important to our nation, and if confirmed, I look forward to leading this preeminent scientific agency.

U.S. Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
May 14, 2025 Hearing: The Brightbill, Pierce, Prochaska and Mamula Nominations
Questions for the Record Submitted to Dr. Ned Mamula

Questions for the Record from Senator John W. Hickenlooper

Question 1: USGS scientists manage crucial long-term datasets on water supply and quality, with thousands of monitoring sites across the country. These employees provide expert analysis of water availability by integrating satellite data and field measurements – turning that raw science into the analysis that guides reservoir management and water planning.

USGS water-focused science is key for us in Colorado and the drought-prone West. Severe staffing cuts at USGS threaten that essential work and the integrity of maintaining those long-term data resources. The President’s Budget request proposes to slash USGS’s budget by over a third.

How do you plan to ensure that USGS continues to deliver the critical water science we depend on, all while cutting staffing and funding?

Response: As I noted at my hearing, I am not currently at the Department and am not privy to details regarding funding and staffing. However, I recognize the importance of maintaining the critical data that the Survey has collected and will continue to collect on many resources, including water. If confirmed, I will conduct a thorough review of the Survey to ensure that we have the tools and resources necessary to meet the Survey’s core mission as one of the Nation’s preeminent science agencies.

Question 2: The Earth MRI program at USGS is a vital mapping program that we need to address our critical mineral needs as well as rebuild our skilled geoscience workforce.

In just five years, Earth MRI has quadrupled our geophysical mapping data coverage and has identified new critical mineral resources all over the U.S.

Will you ensure that USGS maintains the robust support, staffing, and funding that Earth MRI needs to continue this work?

Response: As I stated at my hearing, the Survey’s mapping programs are a key element necessary to meet the Nation’s urgent need for domestic energy and mineral security. If confirmed, I will conduct a thorough review of the Survey to ensure that we have the tools and resources necessary to meet the core mission of one of the Nation’s preeminent science agencies, including the Earth MRI Program.

U.S. Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
May 14, 2025 Hearing: The Brightbill, Pierce, Prochaska and Mamula Nominations
Questions for the Record Submitted to Dr. Ned Mamula

Questions for the Record from Senator Alex Padilla

Question 1: Dr. Mamula, USGS is not a mining agency, but rather our nation's premier scientific institution on everything from earthquakes and water to biodiversity and climate change. Can you commit that if confirmed, USGS won't become a glorified mining agency?

Response: As I stated at my hearing, USGS is one the oldest and most storied of our federal agencies. If confirmed, I commit to following the law while leading one of our Nation's preeminent scientific agencies, and to implement its responsibility to provide quality scientific information to the public and to decision makers.

Question 2: Are you committed to unequivocally supporting USGS's critical work on climate science, water systems, ecosystems, and other natural hazards?

Response: If confirmed, I commit to supporting the critical work of the Survey in accordance with the law.

Question 3: You have spent a significant portion of your career focused on resource extraction. How exactly will you build trust with the career scientists at USGS, many of whom have dedicated their lives to studying things like groundwater mapping, wildfire modeling, and endangered species management?

Response: I have great respect for the scientists at the Survey, many of whom I have associated with over my career. If confirmed, I will bring my experiences and enthusiasm for science and will dedicate myself to work collaboratively with my colleagues at the Survey to meet the mission requirements of this critical scientific agency.

Question 4: Do you support mining within National Parks?

Question 5: Do you think USGS should be participating in assessments that could open the door to mining in National Parks?

Question 6: Is there any policy justification for industrial mining within a unit of the National Park System?

Response to Questions 4-6: Although I appreciate the beauty and importance of our national parks, if I am confirmed as Director of the USGS, I will not be in a position to make decisions regarding the management of parks. Rather, I will ensure that the USGS fulfills its core missions, including classifying lands and mapping their geological structure, energy and mineral wealth, and other endowments. I further commit to ensuring this scientific information will be provided to the Secretary and other decisionmakers clearly and accurately.

Question 7: How will you ensure that USGS's science won't be used to greenlight mining projects near tribal sacred sites, national monuments, wilderness, or other protected landscapes?

U.S. Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
May 14, 2025 Hearing: The Brightbill, Pierce, Prochaska and Mamula Nominations
Questions for the Record Submitted to Dr. Ned Mamula

Response: As noted above, the mission of the USGS is to evaluate and provide quality scientific information about our public lands and resources to the public and decision makers. If confirmed, my role will be to ensure that the USGS meets its mission requirements, which do not include making land use decisions.

Question 8: USGS partners with Tribes to study cultural landscapes. Are you committed to honoring Tribal sovereignty, particularly where mining proposals overlap with sacred lands?

Response: I recognize the importance of honoring Tribal sovereignty and the nation-to-nation relationship between the Federal government and Tribes. However, as noted above, if confirmed, my role will be to ensure that the USGS meets its core mission requirements, not to make land use decisions.

Question 9: If confirmed, you would be responsible for overseeing vital efforts to monitor and prepare for natural disasters, such as earthquakes. Earthquakes, which are a matter of “when” not “if,” pose an increasing threat to our communities, and USGS partnership on the ShakeAlert program is critical to California and other West Coast states’ efforts to protect our communities from earthquakes and minimize the damage they cause. Will you commit to continuing USGS’s partnerships with state entities and universities on programs, like ShakeAlert, that underpin our nation’s earthquake preparedness?

Response: If confirmed, I am committed to ensuring that the Survey continues to conduct research, monitoring and assessment activities related to natural disasters, including earthquakes, in accordance with law. And, as I stated at my hearing, I believe that collaborations between scientists are a fundamental element of the research process and will continue to support such collaborations, if confirmed.

Question 10: What plans do you have to ensure that USGS continues to improve and expand its efforts to prepare and protect our communities from earthquakes?

Response: If confirmed, I intend to take a hard look at the programs and missions of the Survey to ensure that we are continuing to provide reliable scientific assessments as required by law. In those instances where our programs and data can be improved, I will seek to implement those improvements.