

U.S. Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
April 30, 2025 Hearing: *The Travnicek, Beyer, Garrish, and Abbey Nominations*
Questions for the Record Submitted to Dr. Andrea Travnicek

Questions for the Record from Ranking Member Martin Heinrich

Question 1: The DOGE’s termination of over 30 USGS site leases—mainly affecting the Water Resources Mission Area—threatens real-time monitoring of floods, droughts, and water quality. This directly impacts public safety and water managers’ ability to make informed decisions.

- How will you ensure that decisions like this one do not compromise the quality and credibility of USGS science?
- Given these disruptions to mission-critical work, what is your plan to provide USGS scientists with the necessary facilities to continue their science and research without interruption?

Response: As mentioned in my testimony, I understand the importance of real time monitoring. If confirmed, I look forward to listening and to working with you as decisions are made to implement the President’s and the Secretary’s priorities to increase accountability and responsiveness in the effective delivery of the core missions of USGS.

Question 2: The Government Accountability Office plays a vital role in making sure agencies are implementing the law as passed by Congress and ensuring American’s taxpayer dollars are being used the way Congress said they should.

In order for GAO to do its job, it needs cooperation from agencies in responding to their oversight work in a timely manner.

If confirmed, will you commit to be responsive to GAO’s outreach and requests for information without delay?

Response: I recognize GAO has a role in improving government performance and accountability. If confirmed, I commit to being responsive to GAO’s requests.

Question 3: The new NEPA guidance for energy projects that Secretary Burgum announced last week cites emergency authorities as justification for bypassing standard NEPA procedures. However, these authorities specifically say that emergency action can only be taken when it is “necessary to control the immediate impacts of the emergency that are urgently needed to mitigate harm to life, property, or important natural, cultural, or historic resources...”

How will you ensure the approval of a mining plan of operation or an oil and gas permit will meet these thresholds?

Response: If confirmed to be Assistant Secretary for Water and Science, I would oversee the U.S. Geological Survey and Bureau of Reclamation within the Department and would not have a role in the approval of mining plans of operations or permitting oil and gas development activities.

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Question 4: How would you approach water allocation decisions on the Rio Grande in a way that ensures compliance with federal environmental laws, honors the water rights of Pueblos and tribes, and addresses needs of cities, farmers and fish?

Response: Engagement with states, tribes and local communities is critical to achieving appropriate balance among water users in the Rio Grande Basin and responsible water management across the West. If confirmed, I look forward to working with you and your colleagues and to learning more about the legal frameworks governing, and tools available to address, these issues.

Question 5: If confirmed, will you commit to working with all the affected stakeholders, including the tribes and pueblos in New Mexico, when making water management decisions on the Rio Grande?

Response: If confirmed, I look forward to engaging with Tribal Nations and believe tribal input is incredibly important.

Question 6: If confirmed, will you commit to preserving the scientific integrity of the Department of the Interior and U.S. Geological Survey's work, to preserve its independence from political interference, and to deliver unbiased scientific findings to the Administration, Congress, and the public?

Response: As a published author, I am committed to scientific integrity. I value science and, as I stated during the hearing, I look forward to leading and working with the dedicated teams of engineers, hydrologists, and scientists at the Bureau of Reclamation and the U.S. Geological Survey to implement the bureaus' core missions.

Question 7: What specific steps will you take to ensure that scientific integrity is protected across the Department of the Interior?

Response: If confirmed, I commit to ensuring that all applicable laws governing scientific work are followed.

Question 8: The United States has consistently failed to meet its Trust responsibility of providing clean, reliable water for Tribal communities by not recognizing and defending senior Tribal water rights. The Department of the Interior plays a vital role in the negotiation and implementation of water settlements between Tribal governments, states, the United States, and neighboring water users. If confirmed, will you commit to continuing the Department's work to resolve these legal claims, and will you support the implementation and funding of existing water settlements?

Response: As I stated during my hearing, I understand the importance of Indian water rights settlements. If confirmed, I look forward to working with you on these issues.

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Question 9: What steps are you going to take to move forward in advancing projects that have been announced as awarded funds by the Bureau of Reclamation for projects in the Colorado River Basin from the Inflation Reduction Act?

Question 10: Why is the Department withholding funding from projects in the Colorado River Basin until a seven states solution or framework is reached related to post-2026 operations in the Colorado River Basin?

Response to Questions 9 and 10: I recognize the importance of the Colorado River to over 40 million Americans across the seven basin states. I am not familiar with the specific projects that you are referencing, but if I am confirmed, working on issues related to the Colorado River Basin, including review of project funding, will be one of my top priorities.

Question 11: Starting under Secretary Bernhardt, the United States Geological Survey assembled a Migratory Mapping Team, led by the Wyoming Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit, to map migration corridors for ungulate populations. Since 2020, this team – comprised of staff from the Department of the Interior, State wildlife management agencies, and Tribal wildlife management agencies – have been producing detailed reports on ungulate migrations across the Western United States and impediments to those migrations. These reports provide valuable insights into the seasonal migrations of several ungulate species and their habitats through which they migrate. Ungulates face many risks along their migratory routes.

If confirmed, do you commit to continuing to publish the Ungulate Migrations of the Western United States and the associated mapping data and resources?

Response: I have not been briefed on the status of this effort, but if confirmed, I will look into the issue to ensure the critical mission of the USGS is implemented to advance the administration's priorities and would look forward to further engagement with you on this topic.

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Questions for the Record from Senator Maria Cantwell

Question 1: Western Water

Western water policy is going to be one of the most important and challenging issues you will face. In the State of Washington, we have unique water challenges in experiencing extreme flooding in the western half of the state and managing annual droughts that exacerbate water supply for our farmers in the eastern portion of the state. We also generate 60% of our energy from hydropower. Right now, communities in are already experiencing drought that is expected to persist through the summer.

How we manage water is critical and a key to success is working collaboratively with the Bureau of Reclamation and developing consensus from the ground up with communities and water users.

- If confirmed, will you support ground-up, consensus-driven solutions to water management?
- Will you support the development and implementation of technology, like Water A.I., that can better manage water supply, storage and use?

Response: As I stated in my hearing, I commit to collaborative approaches to meet objectives for waters users and implementing innovation. I agree with the Secretary that technological innovation can be important to ensuring water supply certainty.

The Yakima Basin Integrated Plan is a 30-year basin-wide water project that focuses on balancing and fulfilling the needs of a robust agricultural sector, flood risk management, and salmon recovery. It's vital the Bureau of Reclamation continues to fund these projects.

- If confirmed, will you work to promote the need for water projects, like the Yakima Basin Integrated Plan and other irrigation and water conservation projects?
- Will you commit to continuing to lead the Federal Leadership Team to coordinate programs and projects across the federal government to support the Yakima Basin Integrated Plan?
- Will you commit to including funding for the Yakima Basin Integrated Plan in the Department of Interior's proposed budget?

Response: I understand Reclamation operates major reservoirs and plays a significant water management role in the Yakima River Basin. If confirmed, I commit to taking a collaborative approach and to work with you, your colleagues and stakeholders in Yakima Basin to ensure Reclamation appropriately balances water management to meet the needs of basin communities.

The Yakima Tieton Irrigation District (YTID) in Washington State operates and maintains a Bureau of Reclamation owned canal that is 12-miles-long and serves roughly 28,000 acres of orchards west of Yakima. The YTID currently faces a growing, evolving emergency resulting from wildfire damage and post-fire risks that directly threaten the stability of this canal. The risks are high for a major landslide or other environmental catastrophe in proximity to the canal at any time. YTID has begun a very expensive rebuilding of the canal to prevent a catastrophic failure

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of the fire damaged canal. I joined others in the Washington State congressional delegation in writing a letter to Secretary Burgum requesting the canal be considered for emergency extraordinary maintenance (EXM) funding and financing from the Aging Infrastructure Account (AIA) under Sec. 9603(c) of P.L. 111-11.

- Will you commit to working with me to address this important issue in my state? We have yet to receive a response to our letter to the Secretary.
- Will you commit to working with this Irrigation District as they attempt to rebuild and give their emergency maintenance request full and fair consideration?

Response: While I have not been briefed on the details of this issue, I am aware of the significant damage to the Yakima-Tieton Irrigation Canal and the ongoing efforts to repair and replace it. I understand this issue is important to you and your state and that Reclamation has a role to play with the District to minimize water delivery impacts. If confirmed, I commit to working with you, the Irrigation District and other affected stakeholders to better understand the full scope of the issue and an appropriate path forward.

The Columbia Basin Project irrigates nearly 700,000 acres of agricultural lands in Washington state and helps generate over \$4 billion annually. After 70 years, this project is not complete and over 300,000 acres still await reliable irrigation water.

- If confirmed, will you commit to working with the Columbia Basin community as they pursue continued development of the project?

Response: I understand the Columbia Basin Project is one of Reclamation's largest irrigation projects in the country. If confirmed, I commit to listening to and working with states, local governments, Tribes, other federal agencies, and affected communities, including regarding the Columbia River Project.

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Questions for the Record from Senator Mazie Hirono

Question 1: Earlier this month, the White House Office of Management and Budget ordered the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) to design a plan that would slow and then cease all activities in the Ecosystems Mission Area for Fiscal Year 2026 (FY26). This mission area supports roughly 1,200 employees nationwide, including at labs and cooperative research units, and funds many critical research efforts that are necessary for our country to respond to increasing drought and wildfires, adapt to sea level rise, conserve our forests, and manage our natural resources.

The consequences of eliminating all funding for the Ecosystems Mission Area would be devastating, not just for Hawaii but the entire United States. Eliminating this mission area would harm our ability to respond to severe drought and natural disasters, threaten the economic viability of our nation's fisheries, and drastically increase the cost of public land management for state, local and tribal governments.

Do you believe that the Ecosystem Mission Area should be eliminated?

Response: I am not in a position to speak to the President's FY2026 Budget Request for the Department of the Interior as it is still in development.

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

Response: As I have throughout my career, I commit to following the law.

Question 3: Last week, 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 USGS will continue for these rural and remote communities?

Response: President Trump directed agencies to reform the federal workforce to maximize efficiency and productivity. The Department is working to implement this directive, consistent with applicable law, to achieve government effectiveness, responsiveness, accountability, and cost savings for the American taxpayer.

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

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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: I am not familiar with these specific proposals, but I appreciate your perspective and commit to looking into this question to understand more and to evaluating an appropriate course of action.

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Questions for the Record from Senator Catherine Cortez Masto

Question 1: As we discussed during the hearing, the Bureau of Reclamation has told Hoover Dam hydropower customers there's a significant chance in the coming years it could become unable to deliver power due if the water levels in Lake Mead decrease below 1,035 ft.

What would the Department do to support these customers and how do you otherwise continue to provide for operations and maintenance funding if customers have to find alternative power sources elsewhere and are no longer paying for that electricity that gets turned around to pay operations and maintenance for the Dam?

Response: The Bureau of Reclamation is the second largest producer of hydropower, an extremely important source of low-cost energy for hydropower customers. I appreciate the challenges for customers that you have mentioned. If confirmed, I commit to looking at the issues related to hydropower at Hoover Dam to understand the underlying issues and appropriate paths forward.

Question 2: In light of recent hiring freezes and terminations of probationary employees, what assurances can you give customers on the Bureau of reclamation's ability to perform at operational adequacy? What is your plan to retain and foster an experienced and talented workforce to meet the critical mission at a location such as Hoover Dam?

Response: If confirmed, I commit to learning more about staffing needs and opportunities within the Bureau of Reclamation. I look forward to working closely with the dedicated teams of engineers, hydrologists and scientists and will ensure they have the resources they need to implement the mission of the bureau more efficiently and effectively, including at the Hoover Dam.

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Questions for the Record from Senator John W. Hickenlooper

Question 1: The Colorado River Basin is in its worst drought in the 1,200-year paleo record, and below-average snow this past winter has only made the situation worse. The seven Basin States are negotiating a plan for managing the Colorado River into the future, which will have massive implications for the health of the river itself and the communities, farmers, and economies that rely on it.

As Assistant Secretary, will you commit to working with Colorado and its fellow Basin States in ensuring that DOI invests the resources, staff time, technical support, and partnership that the states need to help them successfully reach an agreement?

Response: The Colorado River is a critical resource that travels over 1,400 miles and impacts over 40 million Americans across the seven basin states. I support a consensus-driven, state-led, durable agreement. As I stated at my hearing, if I am confirmed, working on this issue will be one of my top priorities.

Question 2: Congress provided \$4 billion to mitigate the impacts of drought in the Colorado River Basin through the Inflation Reduction Act. Projects that were awarded “Bucket 2 Environmental” funding in Colorado and across the Upper Basin would help the Colorado River better to withstand the depths of the long-term aridification we are experiencing basin-wide. That funding has been frozen for the past several months. These projects would help preserve historical Colorado River flows, help manage drought impacts on Upper Basin ecosystems, and improve water supply resiliency basinwide.

Will you help us move the funding for these projects forward, so we can better support drought resilience for the benefit of the Basin as a whole?

Response: I am not familiar with the specific projects that you are referencing. However, if I am confirmed, I commit to working on issues related to the Colorado River Basin, including review of project funding.

Question 3: The Department of the Interior recently announced emergency permitting procedures to accelerate the development of domestic energy resources and critical minerals. As noted, this initiative seeks to reduce multi-year review processes to as few as 14 or 28 days. We have heard from energy developers that such timelines leave them open to legal challenge and fail to leave reasonable time to identify environmental, cultural, or historic impacts and plan to avoid or mitigate them. Such a short timeframe also fails to leave sufficient time for communities and Tribes to learn about proposed projects and comment on them.

What do you see as the litigation risks of taking such dramatic steps to accelerate permitting timelines without an act of Congress?

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How do you justify operating under a national energy emergency while excluding key technologies like solar, wind, and energy storage from the new permitting procedures?

Response: I recognize the committee's work and interest on this issue. President Trump declared a National Energy Emergency to ensure a reliable and affordable supply of energy to meet our Nation's needs. The President and Secretary Burgum have both addressed concerns related to intermittent energy supply. To accelerate the development of domestic energy resources and critical minerals, the Department announced emergency permitting procedures that will facilitate permitting of these projects. I am not an attorney, so cannot speak to litigation strategy, but understand that these procedures are in accordance with law and regulation.