

**Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources  
Questions for the Record Submitted to Ms. Camille C. Touton  
September 21, 2021**

**Questions from Ranking Member Barrasso**

**Question 1:** Water is the lifeblood of the West and its importance cannot be understated. The West is currently undergoing an historic drought. Ranchers and farmers in Wyoming and other western states, are struggling. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, 99.8 percent of Wyoming is currently experiencing drought conditions. In addition, the USDA reports that 75 percent of stock water supplies for ranchers in my state were rated either “very short” or “short.” Irrigation water is also in short supply.

- a. If confirmed, what would be your immediate priorities and how would you work with western communities, including ranchers and farmers, to provide more water for Wyoming and other western states?**

**Response:** I believe in Reclamation’s core mission to deliver reliable water and power, in dry years and wet years. Drought is no stranger to the west, and Reclamation has a suite of programs to help address it. Since I have been with the Department, I have worked with Reclamation staff and our partners and stakeholders on what technical, operational, and financial assistance we could provide. This includes the reprogramming of \$100 Million in FY 2021 for drought related activities across the west, including \$20 million in additional funding for the Drought Contingency Plan. Moving forward, I will continue to work with stakeholders as they prepare for and address the effects of drought and other water management issues, through WaterSMART and other infrastructure authorities. In facing this year’s historic drought, I am committed to continue looking at all of the authorities we have to maximize our response to the ongoing effects of drought. If confirmed, I’ll leverage those programs to support the continued delivery of water and power in all Reclamation states, including Wyoming.

**Question 2:** At the end of this year, important provisions of the Water Infrastructure Improvements for the Nation Act, or “WIIN Act,” will expire. This is why I introduced the Western Water Infrastructure Act of 2021. This legislation would reauthorize expiring provisions that allow for the construction of new water storage, desalination, and water reuse infrastructure. The legislation also fully funds the Bureau of Reclamation and provides funding to manage the agency’s maintenance backlog. You worked on the WIIN Act as a Congressional staffer and know as well as anyone how important the law is.

- a. Can you speak about the importance of reauthorizing these expiring provisions in the WIIN Act?**

**Response:** Since I have been with the Department, I have worked to support Reclamation making important progress on water storage, recycling and desalination projects using the authority and appropriations provided pursuant to the WIIN Act. I believe water storage, desalination and water reuse infrastructure are each tools to increase flexibility and address drought resilience. We need to invest in existing tools and develop additional tools and programs to ensure local communities are able to meet the challenges associated with a variable water supply. This included a recommendation to Congress of \$205 million for new storage water, \$30 million for Water Recycling, and \$12 million in Desalination for inclusion of FY 2022 from WIIN. We will follow Congressional direction whether the statute is extended,

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replaced with similar authority in the bills currently under consideration by the Congress, or whether project funding is provided through processes followed prior to the enactment of WIIN.

**Question 3:** The West is currently suffering historic drought conditions. Yet, the budget that the President proposed earlier this year sought to cut funding for the Bureau of Reclamation, while increasing funding for the rest of Interior.

- a. **Would you agree with me that now, during a historic drought, is the time to prioritize western water infrastructure, not cut funding for it?**

**Response:** If confirmed I will work to ensure that Reclamation does the most with the funding it receives in the budget process that involved both the Administration's request and action by Congress. The FY 2022 budget submitted by Reclamation proposed a diverse portfolio of activities, with very large increases requested in FY 2022 for dam safety, Indian water rights settlements and Native American Affairs, while also continuing to support our efforts in water conservation, drought response, and cybersecurity. I believe these investments are central to Reclamation's ability to maintain its infrastructure, and deliver water and power, especially during drought. In addition, when looking at Reclamation's budget, I believe it is important to note that \$247 million in WIIN Act projects have already been appropriated and were approved by Congress as part of the Continuing Resolution. If confirmed, going forward, I look forward to working with Congress on our FY 2022 budget and in future years.

**Question 4:** Most of Reclamation's facilities are more than 50 years old, and the agency's estimated five-year major repair and rehabilitation needs (including dam safety needs) surpasses \$4.6 billion. Similarly, infrastructure that has been transferred to non-federal users ("transferred works") is aging. P.L. 116-260 authorized a new Aging Infrastructure Account, and Reclamation has requested funding for the new account in the FY2022 Budget. Some in Congress also have proposed "innovative" financing authorities that facilitate public-private partnerships (i.e., a Reclamation Infrastructure Financing and Innovation Act) that would address aging infrastructure issues.

- a. **How might you facilitate Reclamation's efforts to address aging infrastructure issues at federally owned infrastructure?**

**Response:** I appreciate your leadership along with others on this committee on a bipartisan basis on legislation that provided an assessment of our infrastructure. Since joining the Department, I am aware that Reclamation's initial "Asset Management Report, April 2021" identified our five-year major rehabilitation and replacement needs of \$4.6 billion. I believe it is important to recognize that all infrastructure is aging, and I will work to ensure that Reclamation follows an asset management strategy that categorizes repair needs to address risks and benefits associated with major rehabilitation and replacement activities. I believe the longevity of Reclamation's infrastructure is achieved through preventive maintenance programs, capital improvement planning, and substantial investment in major rehabilitation and replacement activities. Using these approaches, I believe Reclamation can keep infrastructure operating past its original design

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life and will continue to make targeted investment to assure that projects can deliver benefits far into the future. If confirmed, I will work to ensure that Reclamation continues to engage with stakeholders through formal and informal discussions at the local and regional levels on implementation of infrastructure needs and financing options in compliance with the Reclamation Transparency Act.

**b. What would be your plans for the newly created Aging Infrastructure Account?**

**Response:** As noted, Reclamation requested \$1 million for this account in our FY 2022 budget request, and if confirmed, I would take the efficient and effective allocation of these and additional funds very seriously. This October, we intend to issue a notice of open application period with applications due by the end of December 2021. I understand that Reclamation plans to rank applications during January and February 2022 and provide our allocation proposals to Congress in March 2022. We are watching the FY 2022 appropriations process closely and are aware and supportive of provisions in pending infrastructure legislation that would provide significant additional funding to this account.

**c. Is there a role for innovative finance and public-private partnerships to address aging infrastructure issues at Reclamation facilities? If so, what is the role?**

**Response:** I am open to considering a variety of options, including partnerships to address Reclamation funding needs. For example, implementing section 9603 of Public Law 111-11, as amended, allows for innovative financing solutions to address aging infrastructure issues at Reclamation facilities. I support Reclamation continually working with our non-Federal operating partners to explore financing options that are tailored to their specific circumstances, within existing authority and in accordance with administration priorities. If confirmed, I also look forward to working with the Congress as new authorities are considered.

**d. What is the role of Reclamation in helping non-federal water managers address their aging infrastructure issues?**

**Response:** I believe Reclamation has an important role in working closely with non-federal water managers who operate and maintain federal water infrastructure. If confirmed, I would work to ensure that role is one of collaboration with these local project beneficiaries, providing technical expertise at the field office, area office, and regional office levels to assure the reliable maintenance of these assets. I also believe that this often involves a strategic approach to budgeting and schedules for routine or extraordinary maintenance work. Working together, we can ensure that continued investments by Reclamation and its water and power partners will further extend the serviceability of Reclamation's infrastructure.

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**Question 5:** Reclamation has multiple programs, including the Cooperative Watershed Management Program and the Basin Studies Program, which engage stakeholders to negotiate solutions to complex water management issues. Reclamation also plays a leadership role in multiple basins with contentious water management issues.

- a. **Please describe in detail the importance of the Commissioner engaging with stakeholders to solve complex water management issues.**

**Response:** I believe engagement at the leadership level with Reclamation stakeholders is crucial to meeting our mission. This leadership-level engagement allows us to provide the benefits of the Reclamation program and leverage the benefit of our partners' expertise in our common goal of reliable water and power. If confirmed, I intend to maintain an open and constructive channel of communication with stakeholders.

- b. **Please describe recent examples, in your role as Deputy Commissioner, of successful stakeholder engagement by Reclamation.**

**Response:** In my previous experience at the Department and in Congress, and since January 2021, I have seen how direct engagement and collaboration with partners and stakeholders across the West is key to our ability to manage our water resources. I have participated in the Colorado River Basin work that has resulted in a collaborative approach to addressing a severe 22-year drought. The progress we have made in the Basin to address the drought is remarkable. For example, partner water contributions have raised Lake Mead by nearly 35 feet and agreements identifying the specifics of water reductions have been accomplished through strong partnerships with Basin states, Tribes, water users, and Mexico. In 2021, I have also engaged as Reclamation has worked with water districts that have successfully requested title transfers, four of which have been sent to Congress. Through constant coordination and collaboration with our many partners and stakeholders, I commit, if confirmed, to continue to forge these strong relationships; working together will be even more essential in the future as we face tougher water and power generation challenges.

**Question 6:** Reclamation and other agencies in DOI are involved in large-scale ecosystem restoration initiatives in the western United States, including initiatives in the Salton Sea, Platte River, Lake Tahoe, and the Lower Colorado River Basin. Section 1109 of P.L. 116-260 authorized \$15 million for Reclamation to provide assistance to states, state-based entities, tribes, and non-profits, among others, for the design, study, and construction of aquatic ecosystem restoration and protection projects for the benefit of fish and wildlife. This program, which has not received funding to date, is Reclamation's first broad-based authority to support ecosystem restoration projects. Some assert that Reclamation should have additional authority to conduct restoration to complement its water management activities. Others oppose the expansion of Reclamation's authority insofar as it may be seen as taking resources away from Reclamation's core water management activities.

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- a. **What are your views on further expanding Reclamation's budget authority and authorized activities for ecosystem restoration?**

**Response:** I welcome the Aquatic Ecosystem Restoration Program as an encouraging new program that addresses aquatic ecosystems in connection with Reclamation projects. The program provides broad authority for Reclamation to fund fish passage improvements and aquatic habitat enhancement. I believe this new authority aligns with the Administration's priorities for climate change and climate resiliency, and Reclamation has requested \$1 million in FY 2022 for this new effort. We also recognize the significant investments included by Congress in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Framework and look forward to working with Congress in this regard. I would consider a variety of views and work with Congress on a bipartisan basis on any further proposals to expand our authorities in this area.

- b. **What role does Reclamation play in restoring ecosystems associated with water management and conveyance projects?**

**Response:** I believe river restoration and associated environmental compliance is a key to Reclamation's ability to continue to deliver water and generate power in an environmentally and economically sound manner in the interest of the American public. To meet Reclamation's mission, a part of its programs must focus on the protection and restoration of the aquatic and riparian environments influenced by its operations. In my experience, it is important to factor in that Reclamation's operations are also influenced by runoff from, and catastrophic wildfire in, the terrestrial environment; as such Reclamation partners with other agencies to address these concerns in our watersheds. If confirmed, I will work to ensure that these efforts help Reclamation balance its environmental protection role as well as its role as a water supplier and power generator, thus better positioning Reclamation to address the ongoing challenges presented by drought, increasing populations, the growing water demand associated with energy generation, and environmental needs.

- c. **What ecosystem services would protect water supplies from the effects of drought in the West?**

**Response:** I believe healthy ecosystems are more resilient in the face of drought, and the water derived from healthy ecosystems is more reliable when water and power projects work in balance with natural processes. River and habitat restoration work, in-stream flows for fish and wildlife, augmentation and conservation of genetic integrity, and conservation of other aquatic and terrestrial endangered species enable Reclamation projects to operate without additional regulatory restrictions. Overall, if confirmed, I will work to ensure that resilient terrestrial ecosystems help to preserve watershed yields and prevent sediment-induced loss of capacity at our reservoirs.

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- d. What restoration or conservation actions would be appropriate for Reclamation to undertake related to these ecosystem services?**

**Response:** I believe Reclamation can structure aquatic ecosystem program objectives to complement the climate adaptation and resiliency priorities in Executive Orders 13990 and 14008 and Reclamation has developed a framework for the new program. If confirmed, I would work to ensure that implementation of this new Reclamation program will prioritize climate resilience investments supported by multi-stakeholder engagement and resulting in improved watershed health.

**Question 7:** Issues posed by aging infrastructure are of primary concern to Wyoming. The Goshen Irrigation District tunnel collapse in 2019 highlighted the need to get a better handle on aging infrastructure throughout the state in general. This includes ways to work with the Bureau of Reclamation to identify opportunities to address needs on shared works.

- a. Knowing this is a pervasive issue throughout the West, how would you approach working with States and water users to continue tackling this issue?**

**Response:** I believe maintenance of aging infrastructure requires strong partnerships, a strategic asset management approach and reliable, dedicated funding. If confirmed, I intend to use all three to assure that Reclamation's infrastructure delivers benefits into the future, including in Wyoming. I look to Reclamation's assessment of major rehabilitation and replacement long-term capital and repair needs, as summarized in our initial "Asset Management Report, April 2021", as a foundation for long term planning for infrastructure investments in collaboration with Reclamation operating partners and project beneficiaries.

- b. Are you aware of any programs and/or BOR resources are available?**

**Response:** One possible program would be section 1101 of P.L. 116-260 to establish the Aging Infrastructure Account to provide for the extended repayment of work by a transferred works operating entity or project beneficiary for the conduct of extraordinary operation and maintenance work at a Reclamation facility. As stated above, the FY 2022 Budget proposes \$1 million for this effort, and if confirmed, I look forward to overseeing the first application period for this program during the fall and winter of 2021-2022.

**Question 8: Will you commit to ensuring that BOR provides technical assistance to states, including my home state of Wyoming, when necessary?**

**Response:** Yes. Reclamation has a long history of providing technical expertise on water infrastructure projects, and I am committed to look for opportunities to partner and provide technical assistance to Reclamation states.

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**Questions from Senator Risch**

**Question 1:** In my state of Idaho, we are working with the Bureau of Reclamation on constructing additional water supply storage at Anderson Ranch Dam on the Boise River. The WIIN Act has been instrumental in bringing federal funding to assist my state and our water users in raising this dam and provide the much needed additional water storage in an important economic river basin. **If confirmed, will you continue to work with us to complete this process and increase this storage capacity at the Anderson Ranch Dam?**

**Response:** Yes. I am aware that Reclamation made a determination of feasibility for this project and has allocated the full federal share of funding for this project under the WIIN Act. The Fiscal Year 2021 appropriations legislation secured \$12.88 million in WIIN Act funding for the Federal cost share to finalize environmental compliance and construction.

**Question 2:** Idaho recently had two federal irrigation projects – A&B Irrigation District and Minidoka Irrigation District – successfully take title to their facilities from the Bureau of Reclamation. I led legislation in the Senate that was eventually enacted by Congress and the previous administration and view these title transfers as a huge success for our state – properly placing the ownership of irrigation water delivery infrastructure in the hands of Idaho water users.

- a. Will you commit to work with this Committee to continue the title transfer program that was so successfully used to transfer title to these two irrigation districts in Idaho?**

**Response:** Yes, if confirmed, I will continue to ensure that Reclamation implements the title transfer program consistent with Congressional direction, including the four title transfer projects in Washington, New Mexico, and Utah we submitted this year. The title transfer program has relied on active participation by Reclamation's local partners and robust public outreach. Our experience is that title transfers - facilitated by local partners who work with all stakeholders and interested parties to address all questions and concerns - have been successful and garner broad support.

**Question 3:** In Idaho, we have a collaborative group including the Nez Perce Tribe, the Lewiston Orchards Irrigation District, and the local county, city, and Chamber of Commerce known as the Lower Clearwater Exchange Project. It was formed over a decade ago to resolve water supply issues for the irrigation district and endangered species and Tribal trust issues surrounding the Lewiston Orchards Project. This resulted in mediation and agreement to send water that would be diverted by the irrigation district back into streams for endangered fish as wells providing replacement water were drilled. The Bureau of Reclamation has assisted both technically and financially on this project over the last decade. If confirmed:

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- a. Can you commit to learning about this project? Will you continue to use Reclamation resources to support this project?**

**Response:** Yes, if confirmed, I commit to learning about this project and keeping your office apprised of its status and Reclamation will continue to support this project and collaborate with the project partners.

**Question 4:** Aquifer recharge is a point of pride in Idaho. Diverse interests in our state have come together and surpassed goals year after year to recharge an aquifer that provides water to a significant portion of our state. At the end of the last Congress, legislation I led in the Senate, the Aquifer Recharge Flexibility Act, was included in a larger bill that was signed into law. This bill allowed the use of Reclamation land and facilities for recharge, which could significantly aid in our recharge efforts.

- a. If confirmed, will you work to effectively and expeditiously implement this legislation?**

**Response:** Yes, if confirmed, I will work to learn more about and implement this authority to help provide additional water resources. Currently, Reclamation is working with the State of Idaho to support recharge efforts in the Eastern Snake Plain Aquifer.

**Question 5:** Hydropower is incredibly important to the Idaho, providing the majority of our state's energy needs. Preserving hydroelectric facilities was even cited by the National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine as a necessity for reaching carbon emission targets.

- a. Do you agree hydropower is a clean and renewable resource?**

**Response:** Hydropower is a clean, renewable and reliable resource providing carbon-free energy to the West.

- b. Do you support the continued use of already-operating hydropower projects, and do you support additional hydropower development?**

**Response:** The Bureau of Reclamation is the second largest provider of hydropower in the country, and as Commissioner I would be committed to responsibly managing our hydropower projects. If confirmed, I will continue to ensure the safety and efficiency of our dams is an essential part of Reclamation's hydropower operations and continue to seek new and environmentally friendly hydropower projects.

**Question 6:** The issue of aging infrastructure is a critical issue for many Reclamation projects across the West. While there is certainly a role for Congress to play in helping to address this issue, it is also vitally important that the agency use all tools available to efficiently repair and improve aging infrastructure. If confirmed, will you:

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- a. Expedite all processes to get resources to the ground to fulfill projects as efficiently as possible?**

**Response:** I am grateful for the leadership of this Committee in enacting the Aging Infrastructure Account as a part of the solution of repairing aging infrastructure and look forward to working with Congress to ensure it is implemented and funded. Addressing aging infrastructure at Reclamation projects will ensure that in these drought conditions water infrastructure is operating as efficiently as possible to maximize our resources in these changing operating conditions. Updating our aging water infrastructure is a priority of this administration and, if confirmed, I will work to fulfill these important projects expeditiously.

- b. Coordinate across other federal agencies to maximize infrastructure investments?**

**Response:** Updating our aging water infrastructure is a priority of this administration across federal agencies. I am committed to working with our federal partners to ensure coordination among agencies.

**Question 7:** The Bureau of Reclamation is an agency that requires leadership not just in Washington, but even more importantly, on the ground. Water users in Idaho have greatly appreciated Commissioners that have had regular, on the ground meetings. **If confirmed, will you commit to continue engaging stakeholders directly on issues affecting Reclamation projects?**

**Response:** Our stakeholders are our partners; especially given the unprecedented dry year we are experiencing. If confirmed, I am committed to continue our ongoing engagement with stakeholders in Idaho and across the West to manage, develop, and protect our water resources. Reclamation appreciates the knowledge and expertise of water users in addressing infrastructure and water resource management challenges.

**Question 8:** The Bureau of Reclamation several years ago completed a report entitled “Managing for Excellence” – a review and critique of bureau processes, stakeholder outreach, and financial and human resource needs for Reclamation’s future. While this report is several years old, I am told many parts of it are still relevant to improving today’s Bureau of Reclamation operations and policies in meeting critical water resource needs in the most efficient and effective way possible.

- a. Can you commit to looking into this report and provide my office with any updates needed to ensure that its implementation will continue to improve Reclamation programs, processes, outreach, and transparency with its stakeholders?**

**Response:** I believe the Managing for Excellence initiative produced many lasting benefits to Reclamation programs that are memorialized in policies and practices in place today in areas such as project management, engineering and design services, stakeholder engagement, asset management, and other. Yes, if confirmed, I commit to keeping your office apprised of actions taken in response to improve Reclamation programs, processes, outreach, and transparency with our stakeholders.

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Questions from Senator Daines

**Question 1:** Ms. Touton, do you support increasing hydropower development and production on Bureau of Reclamation operated dams?

**Response:** Yes. These actions allow Reclamation and our partners to derive additional value and revenue from existing public infrastructure.

**Question 2:** Ms. Touton, the Bureau of Reclamation manages 25 dams in Montana, many of which are currently non-powered dams that have the potential to produce clean, carbon-free electricity. **How can USBR work with local districts and congress to power existing non-powered dams?**

**Response:** I am aware that Reclamation has an established lease of power privilege (LOPP) program and is committed to facilitating the development of non-federal hydropower on Reclamation projects - via the LOPP or Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) permitting process. It is my understanding that acting on this commitment, Reclamation has undertaken a number of activities including the completion of two resource assessments, identifying technical hydropower potential at existing Reclamation facilities. If confirmed, I would be pleased ensure that work between Reclamation, local districts and Congress continues on this topic.

**Question 3:** Ms. Touton, approximately half of Montana's power production comes from hydropower. The Bureau of Reclamation manages a number of hydropower dams that help produce carbon-free, baseload power for Montana communities. **If confirmed, what steps will you take to ensure these dams continue to provide power to our communities for generations to come?**

**Response:** I believe it is important for constructed facilities, including those built for the generation of hydropower, that Reclamation follows an asset management strategy that categorizes repair needs to address risks and benefits associated with major rehabilitation and replacement activities. I recognize that longevity of Reclamation's infrastructure is achieved through preventive maintenance programs, capital improvement planning, and substantial investment in major rehabilitation and replacement activities. If confirmed, I would work to ensure that Reclamation continues to use these approaches to keep infrastructure operating past its original design life. Working with Congress, I would also endeavor to ensure that we can continue to make targeted investment to assure that projects can deliver benefits far into the future. If confirmed, I look forward to working with you in meeting our mission as the second largest hydropower producer in the nation.

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**Question 4:** Ms. Touton, the St. Mary's Milk River project is one of the oldest Bureau of Reclamation water systems in the country. The system is in dire need of repair, as evidenced by the catastrophic failure of a drop structure last summer. **If confirmed, will you work with my office to adjust the federal cost-share to ensure rehabilitation of the system can move forward expeditiously?**

**Response:** If confirmed, I would work to ensure that Reclamation continues to work with our customers, your office, the State of Montana, and the entire Montana delegation on solutions that appropriately share the rehabilitation costs among those that receive the benefits of the project and that are in the interest of the Nation.

**Question 5:** Ms. Touton, the ARPA interim final rule limited water infrastructure project eligibility to those projects eligible under the Clean and Drinking Water State Revolving Funds. This severely limited eligible projects in Western states. **If confirmed, will you commit to work with Treasury to ensure water infrastructure funds under ARPA can be applied towards water storage and dam projects like the St. Mary's Milk River project?**

**Response:** Updating our aging water infrastructure, like the Milk River Project, is a priority of this administration, and I will work to fulfill these important projects expeditiously consistent with our resources. We are committed to working with our federal, state, and local stakeholders, Indian Tribes, and partners to use all appropriate funding mechanisms, including those you mention, to meet that goal.

**Question 6:** Ms. Touton, as it relates to hydropower resiliency and maintaining hydropower production during times of drought, what do you believe USBR should do to optimize the amount of power that can be produced given the available water supplies?

**Response:** In my experience, we must take into consideration the needs of all of our project beneficiaries including the power customers, the water users, recreationists, and fish and wildlife. If confirmed, I will work to ensure that Reclamation is engaged with our stakeholders and reviewing the science to ensure the water is most efficiently managed. Reclamation is engaging in multiple hydropower initiatives, including development of hydropower optimization systems and capital investments to mitigate drought impacts, and continues to look opportunities to safeguard hydropower production.

**Question 7:** Ms. Touton, President Biden's 2022 budget request for the USBR includes \$3.4 million to expand renewable energy implementation by increasing Reclamation project hydropower capabilities and value. **If confirmed, how do you think USBR can leverage the benefits provided by increasing hydropower production to help reduce current and potential project operating costs?**

**Response:** I recognize that Reclamation has a long, successful history delivering reliable, low-cost hydropower to our customer groups. As hydropower is a renewable, clean energy resource, Reclamation's hydropower program serves the Administration's clean energy and climate change initiatives. I believe investments should be targeted to achieve cost stability of hydropower resources while maintaining high reliability, maximize benefits of hydropower through increased efficiencies, and enhance scientific capacity and technological tools necessary to increase hydropower performance. Hydropower power investment can provide a steady source of revenue for project repayment and investment, while ensuring that Reclamation hydropower remains a long-term, cost-competitive energy resource.

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**Question 8:** Ms. Touton, two years ago litigation on a structure within the St. Mary's Milk River system threatened the continued supply of water resulting in further consultation and construction requirements by the Bureau of Reclamation. **If confirmed, how will you prioritize funding and limited resources between operations, maintenance, and rehabilitation of water resource projects, new construction, and compliance with endangered species and environmental regulations?**

**Response:** It is very important to me that Reclamation successfully execute its mission to provide reliable water supply in an environmentally sound manner. Reclamation's holistic asset management approach relies on condition assessments, facility performance metrics, technological research and deployment, and strategic collaboration to inform and improve the management of assets and deal with infrastructure maintenance challenges. If confirmed as Commissioner, I will seek opportunities to leverage this approach to assure that projects like St. Mary's and others in the Reclamation states continue to deliver critical benefits to those who rely on them.

**Question 9:** Ms. Touton, Montana is experiencing severe drought, threatening water reliability, availability, and supply. **If confirmed, how will you guide the agency in making decisions to mitigate the impact for rural communities, agriculture, and wildlife?**

**Response:** I take Reclamation's core mission of water reliability, availability, and supply to heart, and it must drive everything we do, in dry years and wet years. Facing this year's historic drought – I am committed to looking at all of the authorities that we have to maximize our response to the ongoing effects of drought in an environmentally responsible manner. If confirmed, I'll leverage those programs to maximize the continued delivery of water and power in Montana and across the west.

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**Questions from Senator Murkowski**

**Question 1:** President Roosevelt signed the Reclamation Act in 1902 to help address water scarcity and lack of settlement in western states by improving water storage and transmission systems for irrigation projects. Although the Bureau of Reclamation does not have a large presence in Alaska, the Bureau was integral in the development of the Eklutna Project near Anchorage, which was authorized in 1950 and completed in 1955. While Alaska faces some different water challenges than typical Reclamation states in the lower 48, it still faces significant water challenges, including drought, lack of water storage, and aging water infrastructure.

- a. In what ways can the Bureau of Reclamation use its authorities and resources to help address some of the water challenges that Alaska faces?**

**Response:** I recognize that Reclamation recently received authority from Congress to extend the benefits of the WaterSMART Program to the states of Alaska and Hawaii. As it does in other western states, Reclamation can use this authority in Alaska to provide assistance to entities seeking to stretch limited water supplies to reduce conflicts, facilitate solutions to complex water issues, and meet the growing needs of expanding municipalities, domestic energy development, the environment, and agriculture. If confirmed, I would work to ensure that Reclamation works with Alaska stakeholders interested in pursuing WaterSMART.

- b. Alaska is currently eligible for WaterSmart grants and should the Infrastructure and Jobs Act be signed into law, Alaska would also be eligible for the small water storage and groundwater storage projects program established under that bill, given that the Bureau of Reclamation does not have a huge presence in the state, can you commit to conducting a training for interested stakeholders in Alaska in order to provide awareness and guidance for my constituents on how they apply for some of these competitive grant resources?**

**Response:** Yes, if confirmed, I will commit to Reclamation providing informational sessions for interested stakeholders in Alaska to promote awareness of opportunities associated with authorized competitive grant programs. Since entities in Alaska became eligible for WaterSMART funding, Reclamation has conducted outreach with Alaska stakeholders, and we are already seeing interest in the program. For example, in June 2021, Reclamation selected the Chugach Regional Resources Commission, the Southeast Alaska Watershed Coalition and Metlakatla Indian Community Department of Fish and Wildlife, and the Kenai Watershed Forum for WaterSMART Cooperative Watershed Management Program funding to expand their watershed-based approaches to addressing water management issues.

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**Question from Senator Kelly**

**Question: If confirmed, do I have your commitment that the Bureau of Reclamation will move forward with its feasibility study for mitigating sediment on the Verde River in Arizona?**

**Response:** I am committed to ensuring that Reclamation moves forward with the Verde Reservoirs Sediment Mitigation Study and to managing, developing, and protecting water resources on the Verde River and throughout Arizona and the West, and, if confirmed, look forward to working with the Congress to identify the appropriate authority and resources to do so.