

**Statement of Scott Cameron,
Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary – Water and Science, Exercising the Delegated
Authority of the Commissioner of the Bureau of Reclamation
Before the
U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Natural Resources,
Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife, and Fisheries**

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Chair Hageman, Ranking Member Hoyle, and members of the Subcommittee, I am Scott Cameron, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for Water and Science, Exercising the Delegated Authority of the Commissioner of the Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation). Thank you for the opportunity to testify on how Reclamation is preparing for the next century and delivering water and power more reliably in the 17 western states.

Reclamation's asset inventory includes a total storage capacity of 149 million acre-feet throughout the 17 western states. Our dams and reservoirs, water conveyance systems, and 81 power facilities are integral components of the Nation's infrastructure, supporting more than \$34.1 billion in value added to economic output and nearly 500,000 jobs. Reclamation provides water for 1 out of 5 (or 140,000) western farmers, who collectively irrigate more than 10 million acres of farmland. Reclamation also delivers 10 trillion gallons of water to more than 31 million people each year living in our nation's cities, maintaining economic activity in hundreds of basins throughout the United States.

Aging Infrastructure

Since Reclamation's establishment in 1902, Congress has authorized facilities with the dual goals of enhancing national and regional economic growth. Consistent with those goals, Reclamation looks for ways to reduce costs to taxpayers and empower local partners where appropriate. Congress directed that Reclamation retains ownership of all facilities but assigned operation, maintenance, and replacement responsibilities in two ways. For Reserved Works, Reclamation remains responsible for both ownership and operations and maintenance. For Transferred Works, Reclamation retains ownership while contractually delegating operations and maintenance responsibilities to local, non-federal operating entities that directly benefit and are most directly affected by the operation of these facilities. This flexibility in managing facilities is central to Reclamation law and reflects Congress's intent to balance federal responsibility and associated oversight with efficient, locally driven operations. Today, roughly two-thirds of Reclamation's facilities are operated as Transferred Works.

Many of Reclamation's assets have exceeded their designed life expectancy while continuing to provide benefits to the American public. Reclamation attributes its success in lengthening these service lives to a commitment to preventive maintenance that has guided our Operations and Maintenance (O&M) practices over the years. In addition, Reclamation has responsibilities to maintain and improve existing facilities to generate hydropower and supply water.

Title Transfer

Given the age of these facilities, the level of federal oversight required for Reclamation's infrastructure has also evolved. Since 1995, Congress has authorized Reclamation to transfer title to a number of project facilities, including dams, reservoirs, canals, laterals, buildings, project lands, and easements, to project partners. These transfers followed a collaboratively developed framework that incorporated National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) compliance and engagement with project stakeholders. Title was transferred only to project beneficiaries, typically the operating entities, only after Congress enacted individual authorizing legislation.

This process changed in 2019 with the enactment of the John D. Dingell, Jr. Conservation, Management, and Recreation Act. Title VIII of this Act granted Reclamation new authority to transfer title to certain eligible facilities without requiring separate, project-specific acts of Congress. The Act established a streamlined, programmatic approach, making the process more efficient and predictable.

To date, 47 title transfers have been completed, including 15 transfers under the Dingell Act, with a 16th expected soon. In addition, Reclamation is actively working on 17 other title transfer actions, along with several additional proposals in earlier stages of evaluation. Reclamation also supports multiple non-Dingell Act transfers and continues to receive new requests and inquiries from operating entities and stakeholders.

Partner-Led Procurement

Reclamation encourages "partner-led procurement" when a non-federal entity, often a transferred works operator or a tribe, demonstrates the financial capacity, technical expertise, management capability, and engineering proficiency to deliver projects quickly and affordably. We find that our partners can often manage procurements faster and at less cost. While upfront costs are funded through appropriations, our partners are ultimately responsible for reimbursing the Treasury for the cost of the improvements. Reclamation is working to implement partner-led procurements by launching an implementation work team and participating in outreach events. Reclamation is also actively working with the Family Farm Alliance, National Water Resources Association, and other organizations to increase their members' awareness of the opportunities.

In addition, Reclamation is establishing a standardized vetting and approval process to verify partner qualifications including financial stability and bonding capacity; technical and engineering expertise; project management systems; and a record of successful contract execution. Reclamation will conduct rigorous due diligence and maintain supporting documentation for each partnering decision. This locally driven model mirrors successful approaches used for O&M transfers, funding awards, and supplemental funding implementation.

Technical Service Center (TSC) Processes

Recognizing an upcoming surge in designs performed by non-Reclamation design entities, Reclamation's TSC drafted a risk-based-framework that tailors the level of design review to align with asset ownership and criticality of the structure. In parallel, the TSC instituted a formal Workload Initiation Process and resource allocation tools to engage the right disciplines early and avoid bottlenecks. For contractors, this means better scoping, fewer change-orders, and more timely technical decisions.

Reclamation Manual Reforms

To eliminate duplicative burdens on customers, Reclamation is simplifying and streamlining its Directives and Standards. Reclamation will continue using transparent Reclamation Manual procedures to post drafts for 30-day public review, while cross-posting updates on the Secretary's Order 3446 webpage to broaden stakeholder input. These actions directly reduce reporting overhead and administrative costs for water contractors.

Conclusion

Reclamation is working with our operating partners to produce measurable improvements for the American taxpayer and our water contractors to facilitate project delivery, enhance accountability, and support more resilient operations of aging water infrastructure.