

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 19, 2021

Susan Rice
Director
U.S. Domestic Policy Council
1650 Pennsylvania Ave. NW
Washington, D.C. 20502

Brian Deese
Director
U.S. National Economic Council
1650 Pennsylvania Ave. NW
Washington, D.C. 20502

Dear Director Rice and Director Deese:

As the Biden Administration looks to support the country's economy and job creation through infrastructure investment, we ask that you include water resource and delivery systems in these considerations.

In the West, water is a precious resource that our states, communities, small businesses, and agriculture need to survive. Unlike other parts of the country, the West relies on a complex system of water storage, pipes, dams, reservoirs, and other projects. As climate change fuels more severe droughts and greater uncertainty, meaningful investment in western water infrastructure, including natural infrastructure, is increasingly important. There is broad bipartisan support in the West for climate resilient infrastructure that can simultaneously provide water for our communities and agriculture, protect and enhance rivers and habitat, and bolster the vibrant outdoor economy.

The Biden Administration has a powerful opportunity to invest in western water infrastructure. Similar to other infrastructure efforts, these investments can stimulate local economies and provide jobs. Both are critical as the nation recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic. Accordingly, we have included five initial recommendations for western water as the Biden Administration puts together a broad infrastructure proposal.

- Fully Fund Aging Water Delivery and Storage Systems: The Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) estimates they will need \$3.8 billion over the next five years to address immediate, short-term needs,¹ and many BOR projects already authorized or under construction often don't receive adequate funding.² Insufficient and inconsistent funding increases cost and forces communities to wait even longer for safe and reliable drinking water. Acting and investing now will prevent more costly repairs in the future.
- Increase Storage Capacity in Existing Facilities: Water storage is an important tool to help western communities plan and prepare for drought and climate change's effects. We suggest an effort to increase water storage capacity at existing facilities to improve drought resilience.

¹ https://www.usbr.gov/infrastructure/docs/Reclamation_Strategic_Asset_Management_Plan.pdf

² <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R46303>

- Repair Dams: The Association of State Dam Safety Officials estimates that rehabilitating federal and nonfederal dams would cost more than \$70 billion.³ State regulators have deemed certain dams unsafe, a designation that limits a reservoir's storage capacity and poses a safety risk to the nearby communities. Support for states as they bring dams up to standard would create jobs and improve public safety.
- Invest in USDA Conservation Programs: The 2018 Farm Bill (P.L. 115-334) included critical western drought provisions to support voluntary water conservation and efficiency improvements by farmers, ranchers, and the entities that serve them. Implementing these authorities in a coordinated and flexible fashion, with additional funding for the Regional Conservation Partnership Program, the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, and the Watershed Act ("P.L. 566"), would help to address the water supply challenges and sustain our agricultural economy.
- Prioritize Clean Water for Tribal Nations: Providing reliable, clean drinking water is an essential component of the Federal responsibility to Indian Tribes. For too long, this basic responsibility has been neglected. The federal government should work in collaboration with tribes to support the planning, design, development, and operation of water infrastructure to ensure reliable clean drinking water for tribal nations.

We are eager to continue working with you to develop an infrastructure proposal that will restore watersheds and support the West's water needs. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,


Michael F. Bennet
United States Senator


Ron Wyden
United States Senator


John Hickenlooper
United States Senator


Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator

³ <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/homesec/IF10606.pdf>