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May 30, 2025

Ms. Caryl Brzymialkiewicz
Acting Inspector General
Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Acting Inspector General Brzymialkiewicz:

We write to request that your office evaluate the extent to which workforce reductions at the Bureau of Reclamation (“Bureau” or “BOR”) prevent the agency from fulfilling its statutory mission and implementing relevant programs and activities authorized by Congress. The Bureau is the largest wholesaler of water in the United States—delivering trillions of gallons of water to more than 31 million people.¹ The Bureau is also the second largest producer of hydroelectric power in the country.² The facilities BOR operate generate 40 million megawatt-hours of electricity each year.³ However, recent reductions in workforce significantly threaten BOR’s ability to safely and reliably deliver water to communities and farmers, keep waterways flowing for fish and wildlife across the western United States, and produce reliable electricity.

According to reports, BOR has lost 1,400 public servants since the administration began its assault on the federal workforce.⁴ The positions reportedly eliminated include mechanics, engineers, and fish biology specialists—personnel with considerable expertise.⁵ Through firings of probational workers, buyouts, early retirements, and other related actions, BOR has shrunk by 25 percent.⁶ This workforce reduction has lacked a coherent, mission- and safety- driven strategy and instead led to the departure of experienced personnel—some with over 20 years of

¹ “About Us – Mission,” Bureau of Reclamation – Department of the Interior, <https://www.usbr.gov/main/about/mission.html>.

² Id.

³ About Us – Hydropower Program,” Bureau of Reclamation – Department of the Interior, <https://www.usbr.gov/power/who/who.html>.

⁴ “Reclamation Staff Losses Could Threaten Dam Safety, Critics Say,” Greenwire, May 1, 2025. <https://subscriber.politicopro.com/article/eenews/2025/05/01/reclamation-staff-losses-could-threaten-dam-safety-critics-say-00315465>

⁵ “Trump Administration Dramatically Cuts Staff at Water Agency in California,” Los Angeles Times, March 3, 2025. <https://www.latimes.com/environment/story/2025-03-03/trump-doge-staff-cuts-reclamation-california>

⁶ “Reclamation Staff Losses Could Threaten Dam Safety, Critics Say,” Greenwire, May 1, 2025. <https://subscriber.politicopro.com/article/eenews/2025/05/01/reclamation-staff-losses-could-threaten-dam-safety-critics-say-00315465>.

experience⁷—leaving the Bureau susceptible to operational disruptions.

Rapid reductions to BOR’s workforce raise significant concerns about the Bureau’s ability to meet its core responsibilities, particularly inspecting dams and identifying threats to public safety. BOR manages over 450 dams throughout 17 western states.⁸ Previously, BOR’s dam safety program identified over 300 high and significant hazard dams at more than 200 facilities.⁹ The age and complex nature of dam systems necessitates having experienced staff trained in the operation of such systems. In fact, as your office identified in a September 2023 report, approximately 90 percent of BOR’s dams are more than 50 years old and “[a]ging dams increase the risk of dam failures.”¹⁰ BOR needs experienced personnel with the necessary expertise to manage critical infrastructure. We are concerned that the administration’s actions to gut the agency of qualified public servants could leave critical water infrastructure and communities vulnerable to operational disruptions.

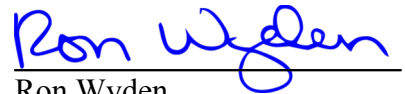
Your office is responsible for promoting “accountability, integrity, economy, efficiency, and effectiveness within” the DOI and identifying “ways to improve the DOI’s programs and operations by offering specific, actionable recommendations that lead to positive change.”¹¹ We therefore urge you to evaluate whether recent workforce reductions at BOR inhibit the Bureau from carrying out its obligations.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,



Martin Heinrich
United States Senator
Ranking Member, Committee
on Energy and Natural
Resources



Ron Wyden
United States Senator

⁷ Id.

⁸ “Budget Justifications and Performance Information Fiscal Year 2025,” Bureau of Reclamations – Department of the Interior, <https://www.usbr.gov/budget/2025/FY-2025-Bureau-of-Reclamation-Budget-Justifications.pdf>.

⁹ Id.

¹⁰ “Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act,” Office of Inspector General – Department of the Interior, September 2023. https://www.doioig.gov/sites/default/files/2021-migration/Flash%20Report_DOI_Western%20Water_Aging%20Infrastructure%20and%20Dam%20Safety_Public.pdf

¹¹ “About Us,” Office of Inspector General – Department of the Interior, <https://www.doioig.gov/about/about-us>.



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