



Committee: Senate Energy & Natural Resources Subcommittee on Water & Power
Event: [Water and Power Subcommittee to Receive Testimony on the Following Legislation](#)
Date: March 17, 2026

Executive Summary:

On March 17, 2026, the Senate Energy & Natural Resources Subcommittee on Water and Power held a hearing to discuss pending legislation. Members broadly agreed that the nation's water challenges require bipartisan cooperation. Republicans emphasized the need to streamline permitting and reduce regulatory barriers. Democrats stressed the need for strong federal leadership and technology-neutral innovation.

Member Toplines¹:

Subcommittee Chair John Hoeven (R-ND): Hoeven stated that water access is fundamental to our quality of life. He emphasized that water access plays a large role in our nation's ability to grow crops, livestock for communities, and attract businesses.

Subcommittee Ranking Member Ron Wyden (D-OR): Wyden argued that strong federal leadership and smart policy on water issues are critical. He explained that Western states are facing a devastating "one-two punch" due to the historic drought and record-low snowpack. He stressed that certainty regarding a variety of community concerns to protect water resources is necessary. Wyden highlighted the Watershed Results Act ([S. 1242](#)) that he introduced to authorize the Secretary of the Interior to carry out watershed pilots.

Sen. Steve Daines (R-MT): Daines discussed the four bills he introduced that were considered during this hearing—Lower Yellowstone River Native Fish Conservation Act ([S. 3409](#)), Fort Peck Water System Reauthorization Act ([S. 3635](#)), the Hydropower Licensing Transparency Act ([S. 3500](#)), and the Cooperative Watershed Management Program Reauthorization Act ([S. 4041](#))—emphasizing that they are intended to expedite the permitting process, increase financial responsibility, and help the nation become good stewards of our water. He added dozens of letters from irrigation districts, county commissions, and rural electric co-ops, as well as individual agriculture producers and Montana Gov. Greg Gianforte (R) into the record.

Sen. Lisa Murkowski (R-AK): Murkowski mentioned her two bills—the FLOWS Act ([S. 3518](#)) and the Water Power Research and Development Reauthorization Act ([S. 3684](#))—and highlighted the importance of water management. Murkowski discussed the importance of S. 3518, which allows the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) to retain full authority over dam safety while eliminating red tape that slows projects. This bill aims to decrease the lengthy

¹ Written testimony is not available for Subcommittee Chair Joe Hoeven, Ranking Member Ron Wyden, Senator Steve Daines, or Senator Lisa Murkowski.

licensing process and decrease the gap affecting marine energy technologies. She emphasized that her proposed licensing process will be more helpful to smaller projects than the current process, which primarily focuses on commercial projects. Murkowski also highlighted S. 3684, which would support integrating hydropower and marine energy research with microgrids.

Witness Toplines:

[David Palumbo, Deputy Commissioner of Operators, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation](#): Palumbo discussed the Bureau of Reclamation's focus on supporting existing grant programs and creating new ones. Palumbo mentioned several pieces of legislation, specifically calling out Sen. Wyden's Watershed Results Act and Sen. John Hickenlooper's (D-CO) Water Project Navigators Act ([S. 3792](#)). He also emphasized Reclamation's willingness to work with the sponsors of the following bills: Snow Water Supply Forecasting Program Reauthorization Act of 2025 ([S. 2437](#)), Large-Scale Water Recycling Reauthorization Act ([S. 3693](#)), Fort Peck Water System Reauthorization Act ([S. 3635](#)), MORE WATER Act ([S. 3738](#)), and the Water Security and Drought Resilience Act ([S. 3732](#)). Palumbo also emphasized Reclamation's commitment to the Colorado River Basin and its willingness to work with Congress to promote water supply and resilience. Palumbo highlighted the importance of managing water responsibly for the American people.

[Terry Turpin, Director, Office of Energy Projects, Federal Energy Regulatory Commission](#): Turpin highlighted FERC's lead role in infrastructure projects sign-offs. He mentioned that FERC is the designated lead agency for water projects under the *Federal Power Act* and is tasked with providing documentation for these projects. He explained that 90 percent of the Commission's work is re-licensing, while the other 10 percent is signing off on new project licenses. Turpin stated that the Commission is committed to working with federal and state agencies, stakeholders, and Congress on infrastructure matters and to providing technical assistance.

Legislation of Interest Considered:

[S. 1034](#), Southwestern Power Administration Fund Establishment Act
[S. 1242](#), Watershed Results Act
[S. 2437](#), Snow Water Supply Forecasting Program Reauthorization Act of 2025
[S. 2753](#), Urban Canal Modernization Act
[S. 3409](#), Lower Yellowstone River Native Fish Conservation Act
[S. 3500](#), Hydropower Licensing Transparency Act
[S. 3518](#), FLOWS Act
[S. 3635](#), Fort Peck Water System Reauthorization Act
[S. 3684](#), Water Power Research and Development Reauthorization Act
[S. 3693](#), Large-Scale Water Recycling Reauthorization Act
[S. 3723](#), Western South Dakota Water Supply Project Feasibility Study Act
[S. 3725](#), Lewis & Clark Regional Water System Expansion Feasibility Study Act
[S. 3732](#), Water Security and Drought Resilience Act
[S. 3736](#), Dakota Mainstem Water Supply Project Feasibility Study Act
[S. 3737](#), GROW SMART Act
[S. 3738](#), MORE WATER Act

[S. 3743](#), A bill to direct the Secretary of the Interior to carry out a feasibility study on a selective water withdrawal system at Glen Canyon Dam, and for other purposes.

[S. 3792](#), Water Project Navigators Act

[S. 4040](#), A bill to amend Public Law 89-108 to modify the authorization of appropriations for State and Tribal, municipal, rural, and industrial water supplies, and for other purposes.

The full list of legislation discussed at this hearing can be found [here](#).

Major Takeaways:

Barriers to Meeting Infrastructure Needs

- Sen. **Alex Padilla** (D-CA) cited time as a major barrier to meeting water infrastructure needs in the West, stating: “The process to authorize and fund these projects can take years, sometimes a decade or more.”
- Padilla spoke about the MORE WATER Act ([S. 3738](#)), which he introduced to promote faster development of water conveyance projects. He questioned Palumbo about whether the bills he introduced would help address water infrastructure needs.
 - Palumbo replied that these programmatic authorities help Reclamation swiftly address the drought and implement on-the-ground efforts.
 - Padilla pointed out that a balance needs to be struck between legislation focused on specific projects and a programmatic approach.
- Padilla highlighted the GROW SMART Act ([S. 3737](#)), which directs federal funding to water efficiency and tests irrigation strategies. Palumbo praised this bill for addressing the water supply-and-demand problem in the West with innovative solutions.

Bipartisan Support and Collaboration

- Hoeven noted that [S. 4040](#) is key to completing critical water supply projects in California and Nevada. Hoeven asked Palumbo about his commitment to bringing these projects to completion, to which Palumbo replied that Reclamation was committed to working on them.
- Hoeven inquired about whether FERC will expand efforts to streamline the licensing process to better leverage hydropower resources. Turpin stated FERC is focused on this issue.
 - Hoeven asked for recommendations on how Congress can help FERC in this process, and Turpin responded that current regulations create a lack of clarity among different agencies' roles and responsibilities. Turpin suggested greater congressional direction and a defined scope of the national interest, and a more specific role for FERC in this process.
- Wyden highlighted the importance of technology-neutrality resource policy in encouraging good science, innovation, and private-sector participation, particularly for water power technologies.
 - Turpin said that FERC was committed to a tech-neutral approach to energy production. Wyden expressed interest in working with Turpin on incentives for reducing carbon emissions.
 - Palumbo said Reclamation prides itself on professional excellence and stressed the importance of ensuring that projects use the best science and technology.

He expressed interest in working with Wyden's office to assess the effective and responsible use of taxpayer money.

- Palumbo and Wyden agreed to work together to determine how the existing Reclamation's [WaterSmart](#) program could incorporate some ideas presented in Wyden's Watershed Results Act.
- Hickenlooper asked Palumbo about negotiating a solution to the Colorado River Basin drought. Hickenlooper stressed the continued lack of consensus among stakeholders.
 - Palumbo said Reclamation is working to achieve consensus and operate the system responsibly within existing authorities. He discussed an imbalance of supply and demand and the necessary reductions to the Lower Basin.
 - Hickenlooper inquired about the actions Reclamation was taking to address drought funding, and Palumbo stated that there must be a process to allocate funding for both the Upper and Lower Basins. Palumbo also suggested that contributions be made to offset costs for tribes and non-tribal communities, and emphasized that the goal is to allocate all funds by the end of the fiscal year.
 - Hoeven emphasized that the Colorado River's drought mitigation is a massive challenge, particularly in balancing the issue fairly between upstream and downstream regions.
 - Hickenlooper emphasized the need for bipartisanship to successfully chart a path forward.