

Virtual Townhall

Nikki Gmitter

Jeanne Whittington

Easing into Winter

Invasive Mussels

Youth

Missouri River

Leadership



**RECLAMATION**  
*Managing Water in the West*



U.S. Department of the Interior  
Bureau of Reclamation

**ETA**

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**Efficiency  
Transparency  
Accountability**

## Commissioner holds virtual townhall

Reclamation made history earlier this year by participating in its first interactive Commissioner's All-Employee Livestream Town Meeting. Employees at approximately 200 locations took part by viewing online and submitting questions during the live event through an online chat function provided on the website. Questions were also submitted in advance by email. The video from this event can be viewed at: <http://www.usbr.gov/live/>. Since the Livestream was such a success, we expect to hold more live events in the future.

For those who didn't see the event, here are a few paraphrased questions and answers from it.

***Q. When you first started, you said you had a completely different perspective serving as Commissioner as to what goes on in this agency, when contrasted to your work on the Senate side. Please tell us a notable Reclamation accomplishment during your tenure.***

**A.** For eight years on the Hill I worked on implementing water policy. I will tell you, the latter part of that, implementation, is a lot tougher than thinking about it and trying to put in programs conceptually in place. Getting those programs on the ground is by far much harder. I worked fairly closely with Reclamation on a daily basis when I was on the Water and Power subcommittee in the U.S. Senate,

so I had a healthy respect for the work done by Reclamation and its employees. It has increased exponentially since coming on as Commissioner.

I think the most rewarding part is putting together an agenda that takes care of our core mission, but helps to define how we work with our western partners to prepare for the water challenges in the 21st century. I just feel like we've been very successful in the organization overall, through the regions, through the policy team we have in place in Denver and all the administrative support we get and people buying into that mission, helping us think through these programs from a practical standpoint, getting the resources to do the job and begin implementing them in a way that our partners very much appreciate. I think we have made great progress on that front and in a lot of different areas.

***Q. People really look at these infrastructure projects from the last century as a towering accomplishment. Do you see Reclamation engaged in building more projects in the future?***

**A.** We will still be involved in a lot of new construction and new projects. I am not seeing projects the magnitude or the type of a Grand Coulee imminently on the horizon. On the hydropower front, we are looking for opportunities with existing facilities. We are

taking advantage of some of those coming even as we speak. We are working with a lot of partners, developing these opportunities. More on the power front, I would say, most of what we are doing is trying to work with private entities to develop those resources. It is not just Reclamation moving out on our own with respect to water delivery infrastructure. We have massive large scale projects going on with the Indian Water Rights settlements and associated Rural Water Projects. The Navajo Gallup Pipeline Project is in itself close to \$1 billion of investment, which we will be looking at over time. We are looking at storage facilities in many areas, not on the scope of some of the larger ones, like Lake Powell or Lake Mead, but storage facilities that will help provide water supply reliability in the future. And even some of our environmental restoration programs are of incredible magnitude as we try to rebuild some of these river systems creating an appropriate habitat for fish and wildlife, allowing for fish passage. There's \$100 million there and that will also have a lot of value to a lot of communities from a water and power reliability standpoint. Rebuilding those stream systems provides economic opportunities, as the Secretary has pointed out in the past.

***Q. The Reclamation Drought Relief Act is going to expire soon. Is there an***

# From the Commissioner

**Townhall**, continued from Page 2

*effort to extend it?*

**A.** I believe there is an effort to extend our authority under the Drought Relief Act. As part of the appropriations process, there is a multiyear extension that has been part of the energy-water appropriations bill that was put together on the Senate side. That will be helpful. The authority does still exist. Authority is one of the things we would be looking at over the next year, so it provides us an opportunity to provide some relief through emergency wells and temporary pipelines. But perhaps in this day and age, we may have to look at the need to broaden that authority and I think that is a discussion we have been having earnestly with regard to the widespread droughts that exist across the country. Also, I would like to point out that my own perspective on drought is that drought and water shortages are the reasons the Bureau of Reclamation came into being. That is what our projects were intended to do -- to help smooth out variations in water availability across the arid 17 western states. Our projects and our programs have proved to be very valuable. I think the challenges are much more immense. We are trying to improve, not only the operation of these projects, but these other programs like WaterSMART and water conservation opportunities. And implementation of better efficiency measures, diversifying supplies. All those things that we do as part of our normal course of business is intended to help the significant droughts that occur. I think what



Reclamation's Chief of Public Affairs, Dan DuBray, left, and Commissioner Mike Connor discuss items of interest to the live and on-air audience at Commissioner Connor's first virtual townhall.

we know and understand from climate change the historical nature of droughts will continue, but probably be exacerbated in the future. The

programs, on a daily basis, on a yearly basis right now, in addition to drought relief, are going to be incredibly important to address the needs that exist to manage drought in the future.

**Q.** Given the positive results from the Urban Canals Information Project, do you see Reclamation moving toward a more programmatic effort toward best

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# Reclamation 101

## *getting to know the people*

Although the mission of the Bureau of Reclamation spans 17 western states, there are more than 60 Reclamation employees working at the main Department of the Interior building at 1849 C Street, NW, Washington, DC.

Sitting at her desk in the Program and Budget office in Washington, D.C., Nicole Gmitter imagines her future: “Ladies and gentlemen, it is my pleasure to introduce you to the 2020 Secretary of the Treasury Ms. Nikki Gmitter,” or so goes the daydream of the five-year Reclamation employee. She smiles when she admits the Secretary of the Treasury gig is only one piece of her long-range plan. But she is serious about her ambitions to continue growing as a government employee and eventually joining the ranks of the Senior Executive Service. At Reclamation, her day job is managing the Budget Review Committee process and providing budget formulation support for our Policy, Integration and Execution Team.

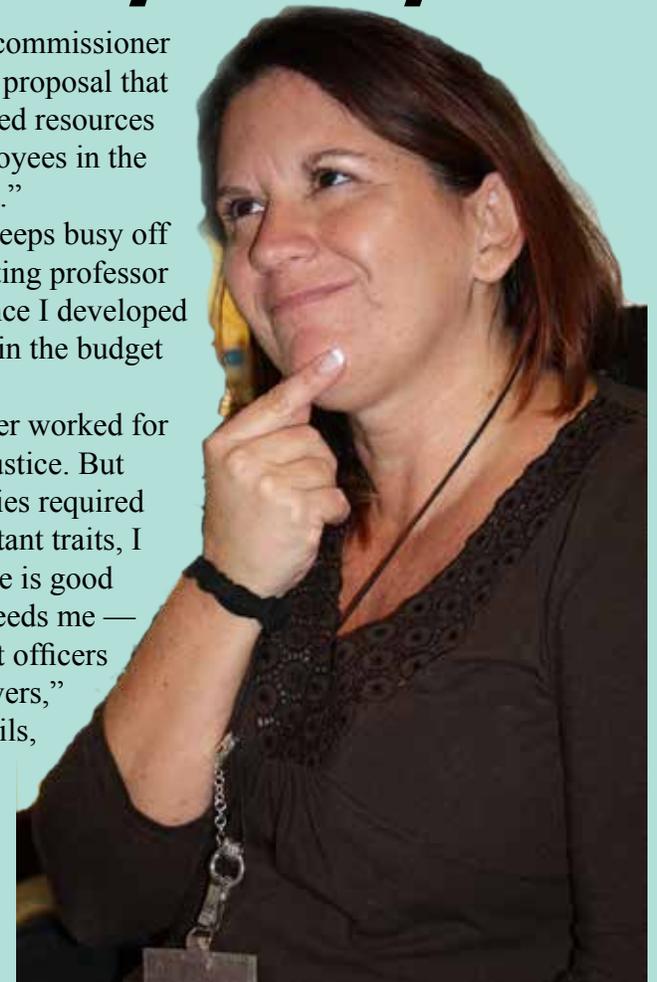
“I get to assist a diverse team, consisting of Reclamation employees from all different regions, offices and levels,” Gmitter said of her work. “The team changes every year, but

our mission does not. Our goal is to provide the commissioner and regional leadership team with a solid budget proposal that balances the needs of Reclamation with the limited resources available. I enjoy meeting the Reclamation employees in the field and seeing the tangible benefits of our work.”

Gmitter, a die-hard Green Bay Packers fan, keeps busy off hours working part time as a finance and accounting professor at the University of Maryland. “I think the patience I developed working with students has helped me in my role in the budget office and as BRC staff,” she quipped.

Prior to joining the Reclamation team, Gmitter worked for the Department of Defense and Department of Justice. But no matter where she’s served, she says the qualities required to succeed are the same. “One of the most important traits, I feel, you need to be a good government employee is good customer service. My customer is anyone who needs me — my bosses, my coworkers, the BRC team, budget officers in the field and our Department and OMB reviewers,” she said. “Such things as returning calls and emails, anticipating people’s needs, exceeding expectations and providing assistance to others is the basis for good customer service and for building solid relationships.”

**People,** *continued on Page 5*



# Reclamation People

## People, *continued from Page 4*

While Gmitter's future, if she has it her way, includes a presidential appointment, another Washington office employee, Jeanne Whittington, looks down a road leading to a beach with a pina colada in her hand. Whittington has worked for Reclamation for 31 years and the Department of the Interior for 33 years.

She also works in the budget office, where she provides staff assistance to the BRC. "What I do is not really unique," she said, "but the concept of formulating a budget from the ground up is a unique process not found in most other agencies. Reclamation formulates its budget using this ground up method, and the BRC helps to facilitate this process."

Whittington has worked in most of Reclamation's Washington office hallways and divisions, "I started with the Program and Budget office, and coming full-circle and (hoping to) finish my career in the Program and Budget office," she said. Throughout her many years at Reclamation, Whittington has had time to identify what skills are needed to succeed. "Dependability is key. Like my father used to say, 'If you aren't here, I don't care how good you are, you are no good to me.' Another positive trait is to try to do your best each day. Each one of us has a lot to offer," she said.

Whittington hopes that Reclamation management will embrace the opportunities available to offer work/life programs such as alternative work schedules and regularly scheduled



telework days. "We can do better as an agency to become more competitive in order to attract the best prospective employees and to show our current employees that they really are our greatest resource."

**Nikki Gmitter (previous page) and Jeanne Whittington are just two of the faces behind Reclamation's Budget Review Committee.**

## Easing into winter

The squirrels are storing nuts, the bears are beginning their hibernation and Reclamation is in the process of readying its facilities for the coming winter months. Across the West, preparations are underway to get our facilities in the best running order for the next irrigation season. These operations and maintenance plans vary by region and time of year, but a lot of work is done during the winter months.

In the Mid-Pacific Region, the Tracy Fish Collection Facility (TFCF), located in Tracy, Calif., is one Central Valley Project facility that begins preparing for the irrigation season early. The irrigation season usually starts in June or July each year, so the TFCF schedules all of its equipment checks and repairs during the winter and spring months. Throughout the year, the TFCF captures fish species from around the pumps and safely returns them to the Delta. About 50 species of fish are collected at the facility, including federally listed endangered and threatened species.

In the Pacific Northwest Region, several powerplants will undergo their annual maintenance outages this fall of up to four or five weeks. During this time, the generators, governors and switchyards will undergo annual maintenance, relays will be tested and power lines inspected.

pumping plants will be inspected and, if needed, repaired. Canal maintenance will include concrete panel replacement or spray-on sealant, as needed.

In the Upper Colorado Region, approximately two weeks are scheduled each winter for each power facility to complete annual maintenance. Annual and corrective maintenance are scheduled so as to support peak power generation goals by avoiding the months of December and January and to ensure maximum unit availability for spring runoff. Also, selective withdrawal structures at Flaming Gorge are adjusted in preparation for the following year to support environmental commitments.

In addition, diagnostic testing and inspections are periodically performed, as conditions warrant. Such testing and inspections include gate maintenance, penstock inspections and transformer and generator inspections. Information gained from testing and inspections supports planning for replacements, unusual maintenance and budget justifications.

In general, many of us may think the end of irrigation season brings a lull in our operations, but let's not forget the operations and maintenance crews who are keeping our facilities in top shape for the next irrigation season.

## Reclamation researchers muscle in on invasives

Ever since quagga and zebra mussels were found in the West, Reclamation has been looking to mitigate their impacts on water and hydropower facilities.

In on-going research, Allen D. Skaja, Ph.D., PCS, of Reclamation's Technical Service Center found silicone foul release coatings may be an important tool for mitigating invasive quagga and zebra mussels' impacts to water and hydropower infrastructure.

"The silicone foul release coatings reduced the rate of mussel settlement, and any attached mussels were easy to remove," Skaja said. "In many cases, water flowing at 0.1 feet per second provided sufficient force to remove mussel colonies."

Skaja tested more than 50 coatings and metal alloys at Parker Dam on the Colorado River. This location provided an excellent field test site to evaluate coatings in still and flowing water because the quagga and zebra mussels infesting it reproduce throughout the year and have a high growth rate.

The tested coatings and metal alloys divide into six broad categories: conventional epoxies with no fouling control, foul release coatings, antifouling coatings, fluorinated powdered coatings, metallic coatings and

metal alloys.

The coatings were tested in still water and flowing water. For still water conditions, three 1-foot-square steel plates were tied on a nylon rope and lowered into water approximately 50 feet deep near the face of the dam. For the flowing conditions, one 18 by 24 inch coated floor grate with 1 inch spacing was suspended 40 feet below the water surface downstream from the forebay trashrack structure.

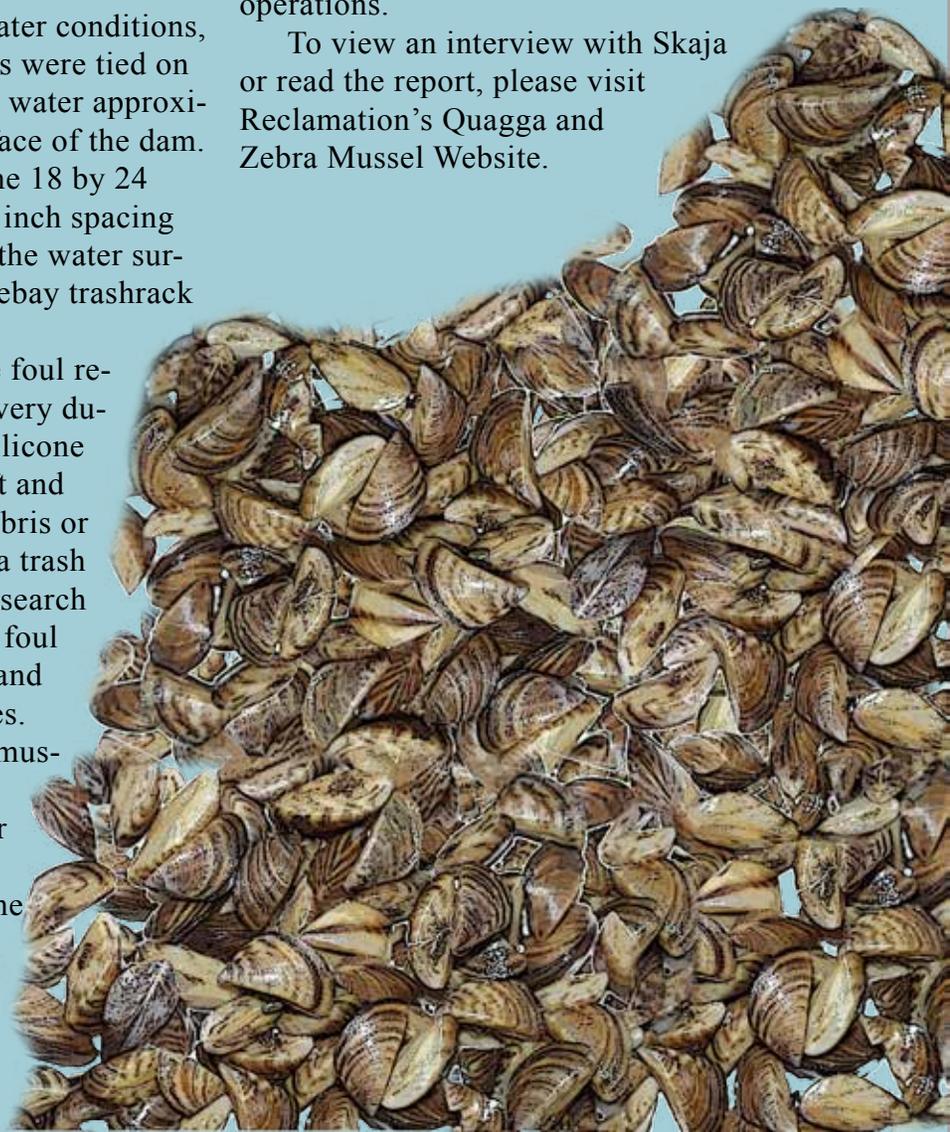
One problem with silicone foul release coatings is they are not very durable. Initial research found silicone foul release coatings were soft and easily damaged by floating debris or mechanical abrasion, such as a trash rack being cleaned. Further research is underway to find a silicone foul release technology that can stand up to the abuse on the facilities.

Fouling occurs where the mussel attaches to an object. Foul release coatings make it easier to remove the mussel while anti-fouling coatings inhibit the ability of the mussel to attach. However, in this study,

it was found that mussels were not attaching to the silicone foul release coatings.

The effort was funded by Reclamation's Research and Development Office where research is conducted to develop and deploy successful solutions to improve water management practices, increase water supply and ensure cost-effective power generation operations.

To view an interview with Skaja or read the report, please visit Reclamation's Quagga and Zebra Mussel Website.



## Reclamation teaches youngsters about America's Great Outdoors

Across the West, Reclamation has provided a little extra attention to the younger members of the community. From events promoting exploration of America's great outdoors to easier ways of accessing job opportunities, Reclamation has worked to update its youth programs over the past year.

Youth-centric events have long been a proud focus for Reclamation, with many employees significantly involved in activities for the past several years. While members of the Technical Service Center's Mussel Lab went to the 8th Annual Westminster Youth Water Festival, and Reclamation hosted several C.A.S.T. for Kids events, there were a few new events on this year's lineup.

In Stanley, Idaho, children, parents, grandparents and others gathered at the Sawtooth Salmon Festival on a cool, August weekend and were given the chance to learn a little more about Chinook salmon and their perilous journey from the Pacific Ocean to Salmon River tributaries.

The event was held with several other enti-

ties, including environmental groups and the U.S. Forest Service. For children and adults alike, it was an opportunity for the community to gain a better understanding of salmon and their environmental needs. It also was an opportunity to highlight Reclamation's Yankee Fork Rehabilitation Project, which would provide restored habitat for juvenile Chinook salmon.

With a variety of events going on throughout the year, it can be difficult to know when something might be going on in your neighborhood. Over the past several months, a new and improved website was launched for young men and women interested in Reclamation. Its many features include a newsroom for updates and coverage of numerous events, stories of our young employees, a page dedicated to new job opportunities for youth and those completing their education, and descriptions of different Reclamation and the Department of the Interior youth programs and initiatives.

Reclamation strives to give students their first chance at a career and has made job opportunities and education a large focus of its new youth website. Because that first step often leads to a successful professional life, the site



**Reclamation engineer Jeff Peterson shows Hailey, Idaho residents Brody and Gilleen Simcoe and Jack Herlinger how to shape river currents to build salmon habitat at the Sawtooth Salmon Festival in August.**

provides resources on the type of opportunities available to students and youth, the benefits of working in a family-friendly work atmosphere and the wide variety of occupations within Reclamation.

# Infrastructure

## *Missouri River*

### Water treatment plant will improve drinking water to 11 communities

On August 20, a significant milestone was celebrated for the Lewis and Clark Regional Water System – the opening of the Lewis and Clark Water Treatment Plant. With the opening of the plant, located near Vermillion, S.D., Missouri River water treated to drinking water standards is being delivered to 11 communities and rural water systems. When fully complete, the regional water system will serve more than 300,000 people in southeast South Dakota, southwest Minnesota and northwest Iowa. The system is planned to be completed in 2019,

depending on receipt of adequate federal funding.

Several dignitaries attended the ribbon cutting, including Commissioner Mike Connor and Great Plains Regional Director Mike Ryan and Gov. Dennis Daugaard, and U.S. Senators John Thune (R) and Tim Johnson (D) and U.S. Rep. Kristi Noem (R) from South Dakota. Additionally, Minnesota's Sen. Amy Klobuchar (D) and U.S. Rep. Tim Walz (D-1st) and Iowa's U.S. Rep. Steve King (R-5th) attended.

The Lewis and Clark project was autho-

rized in 2000 (P.L. 106-246) and construction on the water treatment plant began in 2004.

The completed project would address concerns regarding the low-quality, contamination vulnerability and insufficient supply of existing drinking water sources for 15 municipalities and five rural water systems throughout the project area. The project is estimated to cost about \$560 million; with \$402 million in federal funding and \$158 million in non-federal funding anticipated. The project is estimated to be about 65 percent complete.



# ON THE MOVE

## Commissioner announces changes in senior leadership

On Nov. 8, Bureau of Reclamation Commissioner Michael L. Connor announced changes among three senior leadership positions. Lowell Pimley will become the Deputy Commissioner of Operations in Washington, David Murillo will be Mid-Pacific Regional Director in Sacramento and Don Glaser will move to Denver where he will work on several high priority projects for the Commissioner. Michael Gabaldon will assume the leadership role for the Technical Service Center as part of his current duties as Director, Technical Resources in Denver.

“Lowell, David and Don bring their vast knowledge and experience, matched with their long history of working collaboratively with Reclamation’s customers and stakeholders, into their new positions,” Commissioner Connor said. “With more than 75 years of combined knowledge and experience in the water and related resources field, these outstanding leaders will build upon Reclamation’s commitment to excellence and public service.”

Lowell Pimley, most recently the Director of the Technical Service Center, has spent his career conducting and coordinating planning

studies, designs and construction support on a variety of water resources and related projects. He joined Reclamation in 1980 as a civil engineer where he developed and directed designs on project features ranging from tunnels to bridges to large pipeline systems. Over the years, his responsibilities expanded to include project reviews for domestic and international civil works projects as well as policy development for Reclamation’s planning, design, cost estimating and construction programs. He was named Director, Technical Service Center in 2008. He has bachelor’s and master’s degrees in civil engineering from Montana State University.

David Murillo will bring his knowledge of water and related resources policy, water and power system operation and maintenance and ecosystems recovery to the Mid-Pacific Region. His work at several levels within Reclamation has demonstrated his ability to collaborate with the many partners and stakeholder interests of Reclamation. He has served as Deputy Commissioner for Operations since 2010. He joined Reclamation in 2000 as the manager of Yakima Field Office where he was responsible for the

operation and maintenance of storage reservoirs, fish facilities and hydropower plants and the recovery of several salmon species. He then served as the Power Manager at Grand Coulee Dam, the largest hydroelectric facility in the United States. Murillo graduated from Washington State University with a Bachelor of Science degree in mechanical engineering in 1984.

Don Glaser’s experience in Reclamation, the federal government and nonprofits will allow him to provide sound counsel to the Commissioner on Reclamation issues. He has worked for more than 25 years at Reclamation in several positions including Assistant Commissioner for Resources Management and Deputy Commissioner for Operations. Besides his Reclamation background, Glaser managed several nonprofits engaged in water education, open space preservation and fish and wildlife conservation and restoration. He also was a water consultant, Executive Director for the Presidential Commission on Western Water Policy and Bureau of Land Management Colorado State Director.

These Reclamation leaders will assume the duties of their new positions by January.

# From the Commissioner

**Townhall**, *continued from Page 3*

*practices, data and information management?*

**A. Yes, I do. With respect to inventorying** our infrastructure, assessing the needs out there, we are getting a better handle on understanding the needs that exists with respect our infrastructure, especially over the last couple of years with the urban canal inventory. We are building that database with more detail, which helps us understand the investments we think need to be made and the priorities for those investments. I think that is going to be very helpful. It is an ongoing process. Even those assessments take a significant amount of resources. I think we used \$10 million from the Recovery Act as part of our program. It is something that I am committed to -- and I think our senior leadership is committed to building that database. Understanding those needs is an important thing we need to do and continue. I do think it will be a more systematic, programmatic effort over time.

*Q. I often hear about Reclamation and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers trying to standardize dam safety practices. Is that taking place between the agencies and in what ways is it taking place?*

**A. It is taking place amongst the agencies.** I'm smiling a little bit because during the course of my tenure, there has been somewhat of a competitive nature between the Army

Corps of Engineers and the Bureau of Reclamation trying to ensure both of our dam safety programs are in the best shape by trying to attract the most experienced folks in the field.

I think the Corps has been trying to attract our great talent at the Bureau of Reclamation that we have had help put together our dam safety program and who are the core aspects of what we do with our program. I think we have a very good collaborative dialogue with the Army Corps of Engineers over the last couple of years where we are moving systematically toward trying to work more hand in hand, make more effective use of these agencies' resources, both personnel and financial.

I see us moving forward with an overall Risk Management Program that I hope one day has us brought together completely, the two agencies, in jointly managing our risk-management efforts. I think it is a great question. It is one of the charges of Secretary Salazar and President Obama that we agencies with similar missions are not acting as a loose confederation of agencies. We are looking at how we can use each other's expertise -- use each other's resources as effectively as possible.

*Q. Where do you think we are in our efforts to identify and develop small hydro power project opportunities and how will those affect the Secretary's overall emphasis on renewable energy?*

**A. They are an integral part of the** department's overall efforts to increase the amount of renewable energy that's generated in this country. Overall, the department has a

high priority goal, for increasing or facilitating permits for new large-scale renewable energy generation. You have seen, through the department announcements, a lot of opportunities for large-scale wind development, large-scale solar developments on public lands. But notwithstanding those huge opportunities, there are just very significant opportunities that exist with respect to low head hydropower. Through our WaterSMART program, we have facilitated a number of small renewable hydro projects anywhere in the 1 megawatt to 5 megawatt range.

We are proud of the fact that over the last couple of years as we've tried to incentivize renewable energy development in conjunction with good water conservation water efficiency measures. Obviously, the word is getting now, people are coming to us with proposals that we think have a lot of value in the water-energy nexus area. We also have a systematic program to facilitate opportunities to develop these low head hydropower opportunities.

Dave Murillo, our Deputy Commissioner for Operations, has led the effort to revamp our Lease of Power Privilege process working with our great team in Denver and providing clarity and a systematic process that our partners can understand.

We worked on a demonstration project with the Department of Energy, trying to bring online some new low head hydropower opportunities.

We are doing a lot in many different areas. I think we will see a lot of progress in this area. Getting back to your question, this program is

**Townhall**, *continued on Page 12*

# From the Commissioner

## **Townhall**, *continued from Page 11*

part and parcel of our overall strategy where we are looking across the board at all renewable energy opportunities.

***Q. What do you think the mission or the role of Reclamation will be in another 10 or 15 years in the future?***

**A. I think our mission and our program** will continue to evolve to meet the challenges that exist in western water. I think Reclamation has done that over the last 100 years and we will continue to do that. The primary reason I say that is because one of the great things about working for the Bureau of Reclamation is the can-do, problem-solving attitude of the employees of the organization generally. I think that has been part of the organization since its inception. You see a systematic increase in the number of challenges this agency is asked to address in 17 western states related to water management and energy management. That is continuing to happen right now.

We have significant budget challenges, because we have these expectations in all of these areas: future energy development, water projects, environmental restoration, a new infrastructure and first time water supply. All of these areas where the expectation is that Bureau of Reclamation can bring something to the table that will help meet the challenges that certain communities or states are facing and that will continue to be part of this effort with respect to drought cycles. We are looking at more extended deeper droughts that's going to require us to

be more aggressive in administering projects efficiently, to look for opportunities to incentivize water conservation, to improve the efficiency of our infrastructure, to help meet our partners and customers deal with the challenges that affect our economic livelihoods. This evolution will continue.

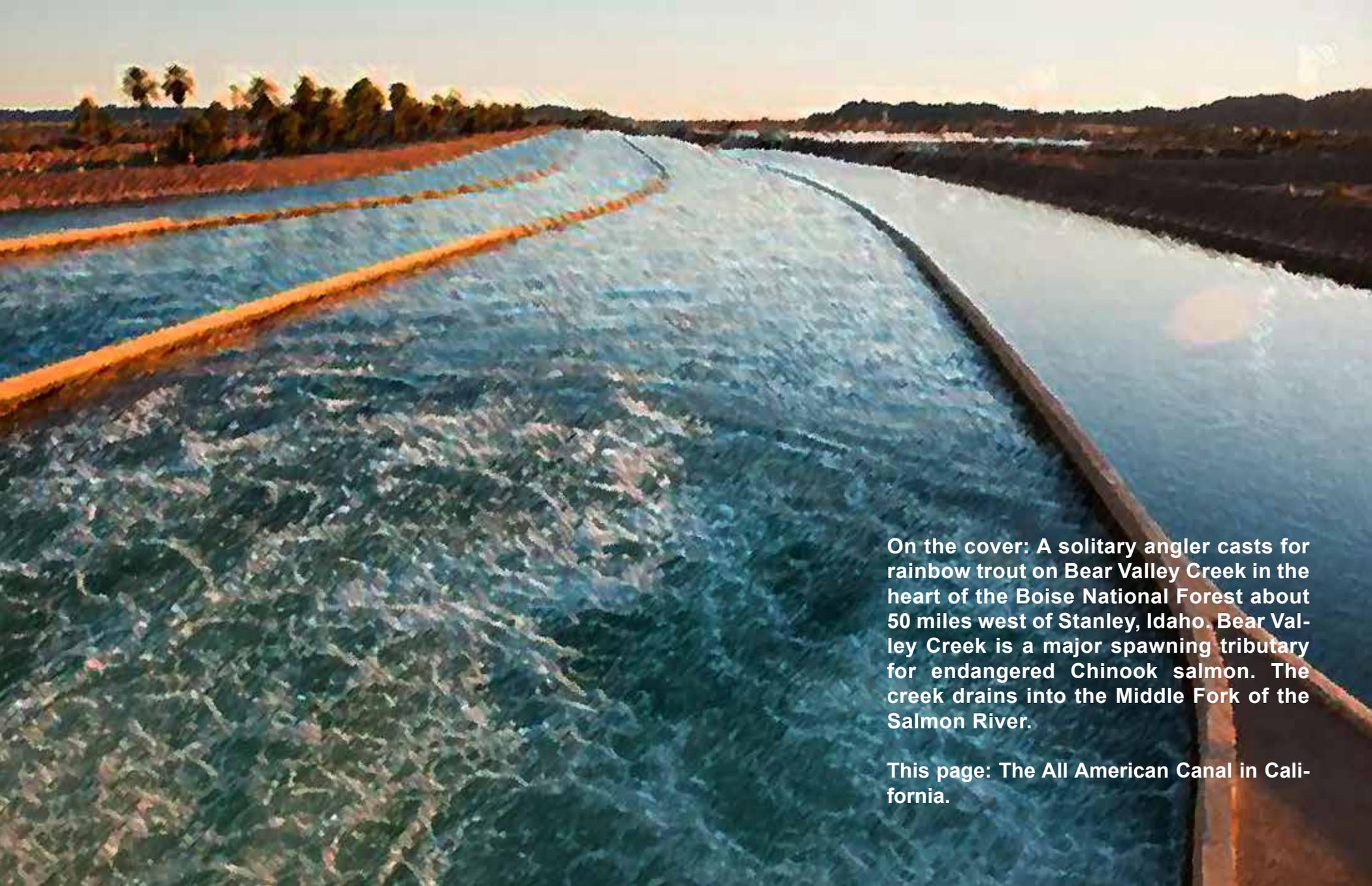
I hope we are on the right track right now with the programs we have in place to meet those challenges today and tomorrow, but I am sure there are a few things that future Commissioners will be looking at to do differently.

***Q. In the current challenging budget climate, it is more difficult to fund and implement water supply development projects using traditional Reclamation approaches. Can you comment on alternative funding approaches that are working or might work for future water supply projects?***

**A. Already I think you see that, whether** it is Congress or ourselves looking at ways to innovate how we get resources to move forward with projects.

First of all, we have been fortunate in this funding climate that exists where it is tough to get resources to meet this \$6 billion backlog of projects and programs that Reclamation has -- to see how we will get this through the annual appropriations process. Congress made mandatory funding available where they have identified a funding source such as in Indian Water Right settlements and in some of the environmental restoration projects we have. It

made resources available to us outside the appropriations process; we have access to those funds and can start implementing those projects. I think that has been very helpful to help us meet some of those program initiatives. We continue to work with our stakeholders, who are ever-more committed and understanding of this situation. The Great Plains Region has done a great job in working with its power customers to get large scale rehabilitation projects funded by those partners prepaying, rather than Reclamation having to get appropriations and be repaid for those appropriations. On the water side of things, we built the Drop 2 Brock reservoir off the Lower Colorado River as a means to efficiently pick up another 70,000 acre feet per year of water off the Colorado River system, which everybody knows is over subscribed. So basically it was an efficiency project to get a regulating reservoir in place. I think it was in the neighborhood of \$170 million. Our partners in the Lower Colorado Region came up with those resources. We managed the project. We came in on time, under budget. We used their money effectively. But they prepaid and made those resources available and I think we managed the project well. We are seeing the benefits of that project in annual water operations. We're going to need to continue with that type of creativity. Reclamation is looking for opportunities for some of the revenues that we bring in; that we propose new ideas in how we might reinvest some of those revenues and then Congress will take it upon themselves in certain instances to make resources directly available.



**On the cover: A solitary angler casts for rainbow trout on Bear Valley Creek in the heart of the Boise National Forest about 50 miles west of Stanley, Idaho. Bear Valley Creek is a major spawning tributary for endangered Chinook salmon. The creek drains into the Middle Fork of the Salmon River.**

**This page: The All American Canal in California.**

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