Statement for the Record
U.S. Department of the Interior

House Natural Resources Committee
Subcommittee on Water, Oceans, and Wildlife

H.R. 2492 – St. Mary's Reinvestment Act
H.R. 2871 – Aquifer Recharge Flexibility Act
H.R. 3937 – To redesignate the facility of the Bureau of Reclamation located at Highway-155, Coulee Dam, WA 99116, as the "Nathaniel 'Nat' Washington Power Plant"

June 25, 2020

Thank you for the opportunity to provide the Department of the Interior's (Department) views on H.R. 2492, the St. Mary's Reinvestment Act; H.R. 2871, the Aquifer Recharge Flexibilty Act; and H.R. 3937, to redesignate the facility of the Bureau of Reclamation located at Highway-155, Coulee Dam, WA 99116, as the "Nathaniel 'Nat' Washington Power Plant."

H.R. 2492 – St. Mary's Reinvestment Act

H.R. 2492 would authorize the Federal Government to provide 75 percent of the Milk River Project's overall operation, maintenance, and replacement (OM&R) costs. Section 2(a)(2) details the inclusions and definition of the "Milk River Project," including both reserved and transferred works within the Milk River Project. While both reserved works and transferred works are federally owned, the transferred works referred to in the legislation are single-purpose works, which are operated and maintained by project beneficiaries pursuant to contracts with the Bureau of Reclamation.

The current non-federal OM&R cost-share requirements for reserved works under the Milk River project vary from approximately 66 percent for Fresno Dam to 74 percent for the St. Mary Unit facilities. The current level of base OM&R for transferred works that would be affected by this authorization is $1.7 million per year. Under current law that $1.7 million per year is 100 percent funded by project beneficiaries. The authorization in H.R. 2492 would reduce the project beneficiaries' responsibility to 25 percent of project costs, and increase the Federal government's responsibility to 75 percent of the project costs.

Under Reclamation law, OM&R activities for single-purpose facilities usually are 100 percent water user funded. Requiring the beneficiaries of Reclamation water and power facilities to provide this funding is consistent with the principle of "beneficiaries pay" that has been part of Reclamation law for more than 100 years. The project repayment terms identified in the bill depart from the traditional project repayment practice in placing the majority of this project's costs onto the United States.

The Department recognizes the importance of this Federal project in serving the people of Montana and is aware of the affordability concerns of the project beneficiaries. This importance has been made even more abundant with the recent collapse of the St. Mary Canal Drop

Structure No. 5, which will affect deliveries during this irrigation season, with an impact on just over 100,000 acres of irrigated land. Reclamation shares the concerns over the condition of these facilities. We continue to have significant concerns with H.R. 2492 as currently written, and therefore the Department cannot support the legislation as introduced.

We understand the sponsors are looking at changes and look forward to continuing to work with them in the House and Senate to address concerns related to the Milk River Project we raised during the Senate hearing.

H.R. 2871 – Aquifer Recharge Flexibility Act

H.R. 2871, the Aquifer Recharge Flexibility Act, seeks to improve aquifer levels across western states by expanding the ability for aquifer recharge through federal lands and facilities.

In Idaho, Reclamation has been working with the state and water users on efforts to stabilize the Eastern Snake Plains Aquifer (ESPA) and reduce conflict over groundwater withdrawals. This is consistent with the ESPA Comprehensive Aquifer Management Plan, adopted by the Idaho legislature in 2009, which sets forth strategies to stabilize the aquifer, including a managed recharge. Reclamation has been assisting with these efforts while still meeting obligations to the Minidoka Project contractors and listed fish species.

In Idaho and many other locations, aquifer recharge could require the use of Federal property, sometimes after a lengthy wait for congressional authorization. Reclamation provided technical assistance on the Senate companion bill, and we believe its new authorities will help reduce delays in using appropriate federal lands to recharge local aquifers. As we testified in the Senate, we look forward to working with the committee and bill sponsors to clear up ambiguities and avoid unintended consequences.

H.R. 3937 – To redesignate the facility of the Bureau of Reclamation located at Highway-155, Coulee Dam, WA 99116, as the "Nathaniel 'Nat' Washington Power Plant"

H.R. 3937 would name the Third Power Plant at Grand Coulee Dam in memory of Nathaniel Washington, who was known as "Nat." Nat Washington, a relative of George Washington, moved west from Virginia to Grand Coulee, Washington, along the Columbia River. He was the elected Grant County prosecutor and served as the first president of the Columbia River Dam, Irrigation, and Power District. In that position, he assisted in developing and securing the approval for the construction of the Grand Coulee Dam.

His son, Nat Washington, Jr., was also elected as the Grant County prosecutor and then served 30 years in the Washington State Legislature. Nat Washington, Jr., contributed to the development of several hydropower projects across the region, as well as the Columbia Basin Project, which utilizes the Grand Coulee Dam to supply water for irrigation to 10,000 farms on 671,000 acres of farmland in the Columbia Basin.

The Third Power Plant is the largest of the three powerhouses located at Grand Coulee Dam. Designed by the famous architect, Marcel Breuer, the plant has a unique design reflecting a

Brutalist architectural style. The powerplant was built from 1967 – 1975, with the six generating units installed over the following five years.

The Third Power Plant contains three generating units producing 600MW and three generating units producing 805MW, contributing 4,215MW to Grand Coulee Dam's 6,809MW total generating capacity. The average power generation at Grand Coulee is 21 billion kWh per year, which about 2/3 is generated from the Third Power Plant. When the Third Power Plant was completed, and the last generating unit went into service in 1980, Grand Coulee became the largest hydropower facility in the world. Today, the Grand Coulee Dam stands as both the largest concrete structure and the largest energy producer on the North American continent. Two of the generating units in the Third Power Plant can supply a city the size of Seattle with all its power needs for a year.

While Reclamation remains neutral on the proposal to designate the Third Power Plant the "Nathaniel 'Nat' Washington Power Plant" as specified in H.R. 3937, both Nathaniel Washington, Sr., and Jr. contributed significantly to Grand Coulee and the Grant County area.

Conclusion

The Department appreciates the opportunity to present its views on the above-referenced legislation.