



Bureau of Reclamation: FY2017 Appropriations

Overview

Most of the large dams and water diversion structures in the West were built by, or with the assistance of, the Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation), part of the Department of the Interior. Reclamation’s mission is to develop water supplies primarily for irrigation to reclaim arid lands in the West.

Reclamation manages hundreds of dams and diversion projects, including more than 300 storage reservoirs in 17 western states. These projects provide water to approximately 10 million acres of farmland and 31 million people. Reclamation is the largest wholesale supplier of water in these 17 western states and the second-largest hydroelectric power producer in the nation. Reclamation facilities also provide flood control, recreation, and fish and wildlife benefits. Operations of Reclamation facilities can be controversial, particularly for their effects on fish and wildlife species and their role in conflicts among competing water users.

Reclamation’s single largest budget account, Water and Related Resources, encompasses the majority of the agency’s traditional programs and projects, including construction, operations and maintenance, dam safety, and ecosystem restoration, among others. Reclamation also requests funds in a number of smaller accounts, including California Bay-Delta Restoration, the Central Valley Project Restoration Fund, and Policy and Administration. **Figure 1** shows recent appropriations for Reclamation accounts.

FY2017 Appropriations Summary

The President’s budget for FY2017 proposed \$1.12 billion for the Bureau of Reclamation, a decrease of \$158 million from the FY2016 enacted level. The request included \$956 million for Reclamation’s largest account, Water and Related Resources. The final enacted bill for FY2017 provided \$1.32 billion, an increase of \$200 million.

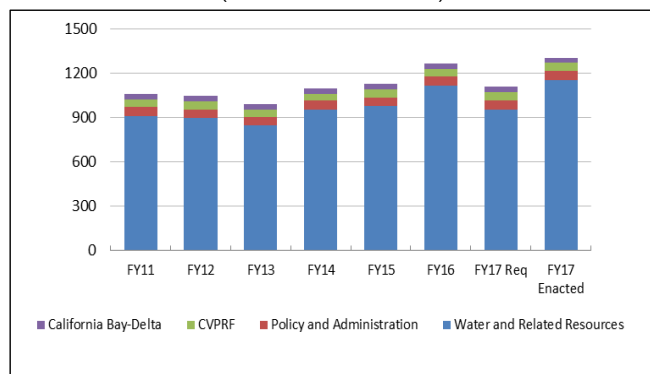
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Earmarks and Reclamation

The Reclamation budget is made up largely of individual project funding lines and contains relatively few programs. Recently, Reclamation projects have been subject to earmark moratoriums that restrict the addition of funding for geographically specific project line items that the Administration did not request. In lieu of these additions, Congress has included “additional funding” for selected categories of Reclamation projects (e.g., rural water projects, water conservation, and drought response) and directed Reclamation to report back on project-level

allocations of this funding in an annual work plan. Enacted appropriations for FY2017 add \$112 million to the President’s requested budget for work in various categories. This was less than the amount (\$166 million) that was added in FY2016. The funding was subsequently allocated at the program and project levels in the bureau’s FY2017 work plan (available at <http://www.usbr.gov/budget/>).

Figure 1. Bureau of Reclamation Appropriations, FY2011-FY2017
(nominal \$ in millions)



Source: Prepared by the Congressional Research Service (CRS) with data from the Bureau of Reclamation.

Note: CVPRF = Central Valley Project Restoration Fund.

Issues for Congress

Western Drought

Significant precipitation in the winter of 2016-2017 ended the severe drought in California that dated to 2012. Previously enacted Energy and Water Development appropriations bills included drought-related provisions and funding. FY2015 and FY2016 enacted appropriations for Reclamation provided additional funding for western drought response projects in amounts of \$50 million and \$100 million, respectively. The FY2017 enacted appropriations continued to provide funding for drought mitigation, adding \$40 million for these projects, to be allocated by Reclamation.

WIIN Act Funding

In addition to drought response, efforts to mitigate the effects of future droughts by constructing new Reclamation water storage projects in western states have garnered attention in recent years. Section 4007 of the Water Infrastructure Improvements for the Nation Act (WIIN Act; P.L. 114-322), enacted in December 2016, authorized Reclamation to provide financial support for new or expanded federal and nonfederal water storage projects (see CRS In Focus IF10626, *Reclamation Water Storage Projects: Section 4007 of the Water Infrastructure Improvements for the Nation Act*, by Charles V. Stern).

Enacted appropriations for FY2017 provided funding for this authority, stipulating that \$67 million of the \$79 million in additional funding amounts under the category “Water Conservation and Delivery” go to projects authorized under Section 4007 of the WIIN Act. In subsequent reporting, Reclamation has noted that this funding cannot be allocated to individual projects until the Secretary selects and transmits these proposals to Congress.

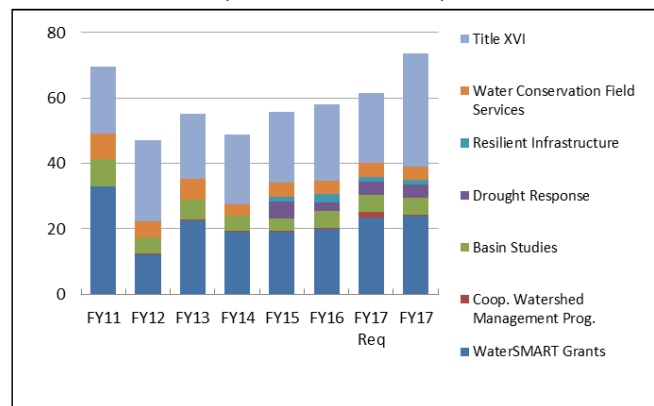
FY2017 enacted appropriations for Reclamation included WIIN-authorized funding in other selected categories. The law provided an additional \$6 million above the Administration’s request for Water Desalination Act research and development activities as authorized under Section 4009(a) of the WIIN Act. The law also required that \$10 million of the \$34 million appropriated for the Title XVI program (see below section, “WaterSMART Program”) be allocated to projects under Section 4009(c) of the WIIN Act, which authorized federal construction funding for projects with studies carried out by nonfederal sponsors.

WaterSMART Program

Reclamation combines funding for bureau-wide programs promoting water conservation into a single program—the WaterSMART (Sustain and Manage American Resources for Tomorrow) program. The program is part of the Department of the Interior’s focus on water conservation, reuse, and planning, and it is notable for its departure from Reclamation’s traditional project-based funding. It includes funding for seven programs, which are shown in **Figure 2**. Of these seven programs, the largest amount of funding is appropriated for WaterSMART grants and Title XVI projects.

In FY2017, the President’s budget requested \$62 million for the WaterSMART program, an increase of \$4 million over the FY2016 enacted level. The two largest WaterSMART programs, Title XVI and WaterSMART grants, received \$74 million for WaterSMART in the enacted bill, including a \$13 million increase from the budgeted level for Title XVI and a \$1 million increase for WaterSMART grants.

Figure 2. Bureau of Reclamation WaterSMART Program, FY2011-FY2017
(nominal \$ in millions)



Source: Prepared by CRS with data from the Bureau of Reclamation.

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