

Statement of Kenneth L. Salazar
Secretary, Department of the Interior
Hearing on Energy and Climate Legislation
Committee on Environment and Public Works
U.S. Senate
July 7, 2009

Chairman Boxer, Ranking Senator Inhofe and members of the Committee, thank you for your work on this important challenge facing our Nation.

I am here today to urge this committee to join with the Administration in seeking strong and effective legislation that will steer our nation toward a new energy economy that brings new jobs to our nation and improves our energy security . As the President has said, there is a choice before us: we can remain the world's leading importer of oil, or we can become the world's leading exporter of clean energy.

Interior is our nation's largest landowner with jurisdiction over 20% of the land mass of the United States and 1.75 billion acres of the Outer Continental Shelf (OCS). As America's largest water provider and land and wildlife manager, Interior is already faced with the impacts of climate change on land, water and wildlife. Interior will thus play a key role in how the U.S. Government addresses and adapt to these climate change issues. Interior's 6,000 scientists and 14,000 land managers are already documenting these impacts and developing systems to respond to them on and across public lands.

Interior's land base includes some of the most productive renewable energy resources: solar in the Southwest; wind in the Atlantic, on the Great Plains and in the West; and geothermal in the West. We are working to develop these assets to help power President Obama's vision for a new energy economy. Interior's vast land ownership also gives it an important role in siting the new transmission lines needed to bring stranded renewable energy assets to load centers.

As the Secretary of the Interior, I can see the economic opportunity presented by the new energy economy. Since coming into office, we have prioritized the development of renewable energy on our public lands and our offshore waters. American business is responding. Companies are investing in wind farms off the Atlantic seacoast, solar facilities in the Southwest, and geothermal energy projects throughout the west. These new energy sources produce no greenhouse gases and, once installed, they harness abundant, renewable energy that nature itself provides.

The Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee recently reported out legislation that will help to promote the development of this renewable energy opportunity. But we will not fully unleash the potential of the clean energy economy unless this committee, and the Senate, put an upper limit on the emissions of heat-trapping gases that are damaging our environment. Doing so will level the playing field and demonstrate that our nation is serious about building a new, clean energy economy. It will trigger even more massive investment in new clean energy projects throughout our nation.

In addition to seeing the potential economic opportunity presented by addressing climate change, the Interior Department is in a unique position to see the negative impacts that climate change is having on our land, water and wildlife resources. Our land managers are confronting longer and hotter fire seasons, new incursions of invasive species, and the early impacts of sea rise; our wildlife managers are dealing with climate change-induced impacts on wildlife mating and migration habits and species interactions; and our water managers are factoring new precipitation patterns into their planning decisions, as snow packs diminish and more extreme wet and dry periods challenge long-standing water management practices.

The Interior Department is participating actively in the interagency process on adaptation policy being led by the White House, and I look forward to working with your committee as well as you consider adaptation strategies that address the impact that climate change is having on our resources. We have been developing a unified approach to adaptation challenges through the Department of the Interior, and we look forward to providing the committee with the benefit of the expertise that our land, wildlife and water managers can provide on this subject. Our Department's developing experience with adaptive management strategies for resource management can provide a template for future efforts. For example, snowpack declines in the Northwest and Mountain-West have been accompanied by earlier annual peaks in river run-off as documented in stream gage monitoring and analyses across the lower 48 States and throughout Alaska. Land managers facing this reality are analyzing potentially substantial changes in management requirements for fish and wildlife and water resources. Interior managers are also learning to be strategic in rebuilding facilities that are lost to such natural disasters as Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. The Fish and Wildlife Service has repaired or replaced dozens of facilities at refuges along the coast damaged by these storms. In the process of rebuilding facilities for people across the region to enjoy, the Service decided not to replace some facilities judged to be too vulnerable and has relocated others to more secure locations.

In all of these activities, the Department of the Interior is putting a premium on integrating our dual science and land management roles. Scientists in our United States Geological Survey (USGS), the Fish & Wildlife Service, and the National Park Service, for example, are working hand-in-glove with our land, wildlife and water managers who are responsible for the more than 500 million acres of public lands that we oversee. We are focused on ensuring that our USGS and other agency scientists are collecting and analyzing data that are providing relevant scientific information about natural resource conditions, issues, and problems to decision-makers in the Department, at all levels of government, and the general public. This is, and needs to be, an interactive process, as our land, wildlife and water managers work with our scientists and help focus the nature of their research and analysis on the reality of on-the-ground changes. This information – baseline scientific information, trends detection, modeling and forecasting, together with the effective dissemination of information and decision support tools – is key to understanding and addressing climate change and its effects.

Finally, I look forward to working with the committee as you address the opportunities for carbon reduction provided by the "biological sequestration" of carbon in our Federal lands. As you know, pursuant to section 712 of the Energy Independence and Security Act of 2007 (P.L. 110-140), the USGS has the responsibility, in consultation with the Secretary of Energy and others, to conduct national assessments of biologic carbon sequestration, ecosystem greenhouse gas fluxes, and potential effects of management practices and policies on ecosystem carbon sequestration and greenhouse gas emissions. The USGS is well underway with this work. Combined with the work of other agencies, it will help to enhance the scientific underpinning needed for a domestic offsets program that focuses on carbon reductions from land use practices.

I also would like to point out that the Interior Department has been engaged in a variety of projects that will teach us a great deal about biological sequestration, ranging from wetlands restoration projects in the mid-Atlantic and southeast, to afforestation projects in the lower Mississippi Valley, and habitat restoration projects in the west. The methodologies that USGS is developing at the direction of Congress, and the experience of our land managers in pursuing these projects as part of our broader ecosystem responsibilities, should be useful to the committee as you develop an offsets program that credits verifiable carbon reductions that are associated additional and with environmentally sound land management practices.

Madame Chairman, a problem as complex as climate change takes the coordinated efforts between all the branches of the government and all the governments of the world. The Department of the Interior

stands ready with our shoulder to the wheel to contribute to this effort.

Thank you. I look forward to answering your questions.