United States Senate

June 14, 2021

The Honorable Dianne Feinstein
Chair
Appropriations Subcommittee on
Energy and Water Development
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable John Kennedy
Ranking Member
Appropriations Subcommittee on
Energy and Water Development
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chair Feinstein and Ranking Member Kennedy:

We write to express our support for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' Water Operations Technical Support (WOTS) program within Operations and Maintenance, Remaining Items. We respectfully request the Committee fund this program at $5.5 million for FY 2022.

Many Western water operations are strictly regulated by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers approved Water Control Manuals based on long-term averages of winter storms and spring runoff, operating on calendar year directives: reservoir water levels are lowered in October to prevent winter-storm-runoff floods, and raised again in April. There is a need to improve reservoir operations to increase water conservation and reliability, while maintaining flood control and enhanced public safety during extreme precipitation events.

40-60% of annual precipitation along the West Coast, and nearly 85% of its flooding, are caused by sporadic, extreme atmospheric river (AR) rain events. An entire water year, and the risk of flooding or drought, may hinge on a few AR storms. Too few, and drought develops. Too many ARs, capped by one that is too strong, can lead to historically damaging floods.

New federal policies allow water managers to incorporate precipitation forecasts in planning water operations, allowing forecast information to be incorporated in Water Control deviations and updates. AR storms now show promise of being predictable enough several days before landfall to use this information in flood control and water management models. By developing tools and techniques to incorporate better forecasts into management processes, water managers are able to retain water that would otherwise be needlessly released—resulting in cost savings and a more reliable water supply, while preserving and enhancing flood control capabilities. This is relevant for the multitude of dams and reservoirs in Western U.S. whether utilized for flood control, water supply, or both.

This program recently demonstrated success increasing dry season storage of water at one reservoir by almost 20% during two very different years - one relatively wet, and one the third driest on record. Funding the WOTS program at $5.5 million for FY2022 will allow continued development of and improvement in decision-making tools at additional western reservoirs to enable water managers to more accurately track, monitor, and respond to major precipitation variability – from flooding to drought conditions.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

Alex Padilla
United States Senator

Maria Cantwell
United States Senator

Mark Kelly
United States Senator

Ron Wyden
United States Senator