

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

August 19, 2026

The Honorable Adam Telle
Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works
108 Army Pentagon
Washington, DC 20310-0108

Re: Docket ID No. COE-2026-0034

Dear Assistant Secretary Telle:

We write in opposition to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' proposal to deauthorize the New River and Imperial County environmental infrastructure projects. There remains strong local support and an urgent need to proceed with these projects due to serious public health effects from untreated sewage originating in Mexico that is flowing through the New River channel into Calexico.

As the Corps acknowledges in its notice seeking public comment on the proposed deauthorization list, Congress has directed the agency to identify water resources development projects that are no longer viable for construction due to (1) a lack of local support, (2) a lack of available Federal or non-Federal resources, or (3) an authorizing purpose that is no longer relevant or feasible. The New River and Imperial County projects do not meet these criteria for deauthorization. There remains an urgent public purpose for the New River and Imperial County authorizations, given that an estimated 60 million gallons of water flow through the New River into the United States at Calexico each day, and recent border monitoring has documented pollutants and water-quality indicators including fecal coliform, ammonia, biochemical oxygen demand, arsenic, and selenium. The urgency of this problem has also generated significant local non-Federal support and consideration of additional Federal support for actions to remedy the public health impacts.

For residents of Calexico, this is a direct environmental threat and public health crisis. Communities live, work, and attend school near the New River and are exposed to the conditions surrounding it every day. As a result, students at nearby schools have called emergency services from classrooms because of exposure symptoms including headaches, shortness of breath, and lightheadedness. Additionally, Imperial County has experienced some of the highest rates of asthma-related emergency department visits among children in California. Moreover, individuals who have come into contact with the river, including Border Patrol agents, have also reported symptoms such as severe headaches, skin rashes, blurred vision, and flu-like symptoms.

Air quality surrounding the New River remains a serious public health concern. Hydrogen sulfide, a toxic gas that the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) warns can affect the respiratory and nervous systems, has been detected near the New River. Monitoring has, at times, recorded hydrogen sulfide levels above health-based guidance established by the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR), raising additional concerns for

communities that live, work, and attend school near the river. These conditions are further compounded by Imperial Valley's extreme summer heat, with temperatures in Calexico frequently exceeding 110 degrees Fahrenheit. High temperatures can intensify the persistent and noxious odors associated with the river, further burdening nearby residents. Children, seniors, outdoor workers, and individuals with respiratory or cardiovascular conditions are particularly vulnerable to the combined effects of extreme heat, persistent odors, and ongoing air quality concerns.

These conditions make it clear that the need for action on the New River is still present. Pollution crossing the international border cannot be solved by Calexico or Imperial County alone. The volume of cross-border flow, the contaminants documented in the river, and the impacts experienced by surrounding communities warrant continued federal involvement.

During an April hearing, EPA Administrator Lee Zeldin committed to visiting the New River region, engaging with the binational water-quality study, and applying the federal model used to address the Tijuana River crisis to the New River. This has brought much-needed federal attention to this environmental crisis. However, it is deeply concerning that the Army Corps is considering abandoning these communities as EPA increases its efforts to monitor these cross-border environmental challenges. The proposal to deauthorize the New River and Imperial County projects would withhold vital resources from impacted communities and move federal efforts in opposite directions at a time when cross-government collaboration is essential to addressing this public health crisis.

We therefore oppose the USACE's inclusion of the New River and Imperial County projects on the proposed deauthorization list. We also urge the Corps to consult with the California congressional delegation, Imperial County, the City of Calexico, and other affected stakeholders.

The evidence is clear that the environmental concerns that these projects were authorized to address still exist. Millions of gallons continue to cross the border through the New River each day, contaminants continue to be detected, and Imperial Valley communities continue to live with the consequences. This is the time for sustained Federal and non-Federal action, not deauthorization.

Sincerely,



Alex Padilla
United States Senator



Adam B. Schiff
United States Senator



Raul Ruiz, M.D.

Member of Congress