

Congress of the United States  
Washington, DC 20515

May 20, 2022

Ms. Camille Touton  
Commissioner  
U.S. Bureau of Reclamation  
1849 C St. NW #7654  
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Commissioner Touton:

We are writing to respectfully request the Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) prioritize and expedite the initial project scoping process required by the Bureau to execute the Zebra Mussel Eradication Project at the San Justo Reservoir located in California. While we appreciate the Bureau's assistance in developing the Final Eradication Plan<sup>1</sup> in 2019, more needs to be done to move this project forward. Scoping this project is the first step towards assisting the San Benito County Water District and San Benito County in reopening the reservoir and restoring critical access to water for local residents.

The San Justo Reservoir and adjacent picnic facilities were previously used by many residents of San Benito and surrounding counties for outdoor recreational purposes and as an important water resource. The San Benito County Water District also utilizes the Reservoir as part of a diverse portfolio of resources to provide water and balance and benefit the sustainability of the North San Benito groundwater basin.

Unfortunately, due to the discovery of the invasive exotic zebra mussel, the Reservoir and its public facilities have been closed since 2008. The closure has had a dramatic and detrimental effect on the community, economy, and environment in San Benito County, where residents continue to request that the Reservoir be reopened.

In June 2019, the BOR took an important and long overdue step toward reopening the Reservoir when it completed its Final Eradication Plan for the San Justo Reservoir Zebra Mussel Eradication Project. That report details how the BOR can fully eradicate the zebra mussel and eventually reopen the Reservoir. The report also demonstrates that the eradication project presents an innovative and feasible opportunity to effectively eradicate the zebra mussel population since the San Justo Reservoir is separated from other bodies of water. Thus, this type of project will not only benefit San Benito County, but also provide the BOR with a better understanding of how to combat the spread of other larger and different types of infestations in our nation's water systems.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.usbr.gov/mp/nepa/nepa\\_project\\_details.php?Project\\_ID=21049](https://www.usbr.gov/mp/nepa/nepa_project_details.php?Project_ID=21049)

For years, our offices have worked closely with the BOR and local stakeholders in San Benito County to move this project forward, including working to secure funding for the eradication project through the Energy and Water Development Appropriations bill. During the Fiscal Year 2023 appropriations process, we collaborated with BOR to develop a plan for bolstering this project and pushing it to completion as quickly as possible. It is our understanding that taking this next step to initiate the project scoping process is necessary before the project can move forward any further. To this end, it is important that BOR continues to work closely with our offices and the San Benito County Water District to complete this process in a timely manner. Ultimately, we would like to see the eradication project included in the Bureau's next Fiscal Year Spend Plan.

If the BOR directs federal funding to this project, it will not only allow for the eradication of the zebra mussel, but also for the San Justo Reservoir to be reopened and California's water systems to be protected. In light of recent and prolonged drought conditions in California, the state's residents, including agricultural producers who rely on the state's water resources for their livelihoods, simply cannot afford the price of inaction on this project.

A healthy water supply and good water quality are essential to economic growth, environmental sustainability, and quality of life for residents in San Benito County and the State of California. For these reasons, we appreciate your attention to this request and look forward to working with you to advance this valuable project.

We appreciate your consideration of this request and ask for a formal response to our offices outlining the plan for completing this initial process at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,



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Jimmy Panetta  
Member of Congress



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Zoe Lofgren  
Member of Congress