

Statement of Representative Katie Porter (CA-47)

**Before the
House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure Subcommittee on
Water Resources and Environment**

Water Resources Development Act of 2024 Member Day Hearing

January 11, 2024

Thank you, Chairman Rouzer and Ranking Member Napolitano, for holding this hearing so that members can share our water infrastructure priorities for this year's Water Resources Development Act.

The WRDA process provides a unique opportunity for members to deliver federal projects that guarantee consistent and ample clean drinking water and even help constituents avoid devastating flooding.

That's exactly what my requests do, and I strongly urge this committee to give them full and fair consideration.

The Westminster-East Garden Grove Flood Risk Management (WEGG) project was authorized in 2020 to reduce the risks of life, safety, and property from flooding in Orange County due to current deficiencies of flood control channels. The WEGG project is anticipated to protect one million residents, 24,000 at-risk structures, U.S. military operations and critical transportation infrastructure from \$5.45 billion in damage. The project will also save Orange County residents from collectively paying approximately \$3.7 million annually in flood insurance premiums.

However, the project cannot access federal funding and its supposed federal cost-share is not enough to help the County prepare 74-square miles for storm readiness.

That is why I am requesting that this committee authorize the Orange County Flood Control District and the County of Orange to enter into a Project Partnership Agreement so that the WEGG project can access available federal funds. I also request that this committee increase the County's cost-share ratio to 50 percent for the project's implementation to improve the flood control and protection of highly urbanized, at-risk areas.

The next project is one that many Southern Californians know – the Santa Ana River Mainstem, Prado Dam Project, or SARP. SARP is designed to provide flood protection to more than 3.35 million people in Orange, Riverside, and San Bernardino counties.

Most of the construction work is finished, but it still needs funding to acquire additional lands for the expansion of the Prado reservoir, installation of protective dikes, and raising the spillway. If these upgrades aren't made, then the surrounding area could see more than \$40 billion in economic losses.

That is why I am requesting that this committee authorizes the Army Corps of Engineers to approve new project appraisals that cost higher than \$1.5 million and reimburse the county for amended project agreements when new easements are acquired. These requests are necessary for the project's completion and to safeguard millions of residents from flooding.

Finally, I want to highlight my support for a critical, drought resilience program in Southern California. The Forecast-Informed Reservoir Operations (FIRO) Program has been supporting watershed monitoring and modern weather forecasting to efficiently capture stormwater at Prado Dam. It has also a success story of how to balance flood-risk management, water supply, and water resiliency.

It should not be surprising to hear that California still struggles with drought. Because of climate change, the Sierra Nevada snowpack – a critical piece of Californian water delivery – is at its lowest levels in 20 years.

We are now at a point where we need to be looking at solutions amid a major water crisis in the west. Programs like FIRO are a significant step in the right direction and have proven success.

Lake Mendicino in northern California saw an increase to its reservoir storage by 20 percent through FRIO and now Prado Dam, especially with atmospheric river events, has been able to reduce flood risk for Orange County while also balancing significant levels of water conservation.

I respectfully request that this committee include the projects I've spoken in support of today in its reauthorization. Let's make sure that every American is safe from ecological and economic disasters and protect our constituents from lasting drought.

I yield back.