

House Committee on Transportation & Infrastructure

Proposals for a Water Resources Development Act of 2024: Member Day Hearing

Congresswoman Kim Schrier, M.D.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member. I want to first thank the committee for their work on WRDA 2022. During the last WRDA member day, I spoke to this committee on the importance of the continued funding of the Howard Hanson Dam, a project with the entire Washington delegation's support that will provide downstream fish passage, safe drinking water, and critical habitat restoration for endangered salmon species. We were able to include authorization of the necessary funds for project completion in the 2022 WRDA. Thank you for your work.

Today, I'd like to speak to you about my bipartisan bill, the WIFIA Amendments of 2023. As you know, the Water Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act program, or WIFIA, is a federal credit program managed by federal agencies for eligible water and wastewater infrastructure projects. Under this program, borrowers, including state, Tribal, and federal governments, can apply for low-interest, flexible loans to fund water infrastructure projects. These loans are invaluable resources that allow local governments to meet the infrastructure needs of their respective communities at an affordable rate.

WIFIA loans have had a significant impact throughout the country, and to date, the program has announced \$19 billion to help finance 109 projects across the country, creating 60,000 jobs. In Washington state, King County, the City of Tacoma, and Seattle public utilities have all received WIFIA loans. King County was invited to apply for a \$287 million WIFIA Master Agreement, which helped fund several projects including the NW Lake Sammamish Interceptor Upgrade and the Sammamish Plateau Diversion Project.

Despite its importance and significant impact on water infrastructure, the program has not been modified since its inception in 2014. In addition to reauthorizing the program through 2027, my bipartisan bill would update and improve WIFIA by removing barriers of entry for rural community water projects. This is an exciting opportunity to help rural communities access critical loans and long-term, stable funding for water infrastructure. This keeps our water clean, ensures a supply of safe drinking water, and keeps costs low for ratepayers. I request that the bill be considered by this committee in the 2024 WRDA or in future committee activity.

With my remaining time, I'd like to speak in support of a project I will submit for the City of Chelan in my district. In 2015, Washington experienced the worst wildfire season in the state's recorded history, which included the devastating Chelan Complex fires that destroyed 75 homes and businesses nearby. Risk of similar fires is increasing. Seeing a serious gap in wildfire preparedness, the City of Chelan has proposed constructing a water reservoir at higher elevation for both wildfire resilience and water supply.

The current water system of Chelan relies on booster pump stations to distribute water over increasing elevation and distance from Lake Chelan. This system contains serious risks: a failure of these pump stations, such as from a power outage which is common during wildfires, could disrupt water distribution to the eastern side of the city for both emergency firefighting and daily life. To counter this vulnerability, the city seeks to build a new 1 million gallon water reservoir in east Chelan. This reservoir will assist in mitigating future wildfire risks associated with the unique geographic and infrastructure challenges of the city. I will be submitting an authorization request for \$9 million for the construction phase of this project.

Thank you for your consideration.