

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

November 29, 2023

The Honorable Camille Calimlim Touton
Commissioner
Bureau of Reclamation
1849 C Street NW
Washington DC 20240

Dear Commissioner Touton,

We write to request the Bureau of Reclamation's (BOR) assistance as San Benito County and the San Benito County Water District consider potential options for a limited reopening of recreation opportunities near the San Justo Reservoir. We appreciate BOR's preparation and continued updating of the San Justo Reservoir Zebra Mussel Eradication Project and your ongoing engagement with local officials.

As you know, the closure of the San Justo Reservoir and adjacent recreation facilities since 2008 has negatively impacted the community and economy in San Benito County. Prior to the discovery of invasive zebra mussels, the reservoir and nearby lands owned by San Benito County provided important outdoor recreation opportunities to residents and the surrounding region.

We appreciate BOR's previous efforts to help develop the eradication project, and your efforts earlier this year to ensure the cost estimates for that project remain up-to-date. However, the cost of the eradication plan remains a significant challenge for the County and/or Water District to bear. In recent public meetings discussing the San Justo Reservoir, both the San Benito County Fish & Game Commission¹ and the San Benito County Board of Supervisors² considered whether a limited reopening of some recreation opportunities near the Reservoir could be possible without creating undue risk of further spread of zebra mussels. During those meetings, there appeared to be significant uncertainty regarding what risks a limited reopening could pose, what steps could be taken to minimize any risks, and what liability the Water District would assume under a limited reopening.

While we recognize that BOR neither owns the land surrounding the Reservoir nor operates the Reservoir, we know that BOR does have significant experience managing invasive species, including zebra mussels. We, therefore, respectfully ask that BOR provide any possible technical assistance to local officials as they consider whether some form of limited recreational opportunities near the reservoir could be feasible and safe.

¹ San Benito County Fish & Game Commission meeting July 24, 2023:
https://cosb.granicus.com/player/clip/603?view_id=1&redirect=true&h=d3252dc0c19949a4554fcf447b5a4bcc.

² San Benito County Board of Supervisors meeting August 22, 2023:
https://cosb.granicus.com/player/clip/611?view_id=1&redirect=true&h=032c2e7ee619d1e29f7a3ac0e7fedaf0.

We appreciate your attention to this request and BOR's continued engagement to support San Benito County communities and the safe operation of San Justo Reservoir.

Sincerely,



Zoe Lofgren
Member of Congress



Jimmy Panetta
Member of Congress