

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

March 6, 2023

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

Dear Commissioner Touton:

We are writing to respectfully request the Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) to include invasive species eradications as an eligible component of the Aquatic Ecosystem Restoration Program. For years, our offices have worked closely with the BOR and local stakeholders in San Benito County to execute the Zebra Mussel Eradication Project at the San Justo Reservoir located in California. We appreciate the Bureau's assistance in developing the Final Eradication Plan in 2019, however due to recent flooding and prolonged drought conditions across California, the state's residents, especially agricultural producers who heavily rely on water resources for their operations, simply cannot afford the price inaction of this project. We believe that expanding the eligible components of this program will help fund our project, and projects similar to ours.

Prior to the discovery of the invasive exotic zebra mussel, the San Justo Reservoir and adjacent picnic facilities were 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 ground water basin.

Unfortunately, the Reservoir and its public facilities have been closed since 2008 to prevent potential spread of the invasive species. The closure has had a dramatic and detrimental effect on the community, economy, and environment of San Benito County, where residents continue to request that the Reservoir be reopened.

The Final Eradication Plan conducted by BOR in 2019 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.

Currently, the Aquatic Ecosystem Restoration Program does not name eradication of invasive species as an eligible component of the program. However, we believe that removal of the invasive zebra mussel would accomplish the program's mission of funding restoration projects that have widespread regional benefits and result in the improvement of the health of aquatic habitats.

If the BOR adds eradication of invasive species to the list of eligible components of the Aquatic Ecosystem Restoration program, it will not only allow for the eradication of the zebra mussel in the San Justo Reservoir, but also give other water systems plagued with invasive species the opportunity to be restored.

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. It is because of this we want to restore this ecosystem alongside BOR with the Aquatic Ecosystem Restoration Program.

For these reasons, we appreciate your attention to this request and look forward to working with you to advance this valuable project.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'J. Panetta', with a large, stylized initial 'J' and a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Jimmy Panetta
Member of Congress

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Zoe Lofgren', with a large, stylized initial 'Z' and a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Zoe Lofgren
Member of Congress