

**MEMBER STATEMENT FOR THE 2022 WATER RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT ACT  
MEMBER DAY HEARING**

**REP. EARL BLUMENAUER**

**MARCH 16, 2022**

Chair Napolitano and Ranking Member Rouzer,

Thank you for providing the opportunity to testify on behalf of priorities in the upcoming Water Resources Development bill. Continuing the recent successes of passing WRDA bills, this bill will help many states and localities, including Oregon, move critical projects forward.

WRDA 2022 will not only provide the opportunity to authorize new, eligible projects. It is also an opportunity to continue to modernize the Army Corps of Engineers and ensure equity and justice are centered in the Corps' mission.

**Tribal Housing**

As the Committee is aware, based on my initiatives in the 2018 WRDA bill, one of my priorities is to ensure the Corps creates adequate tribal housing to address the displacement of the Columbia River Treaty Tribes by the construction of The Dalles Dam and other dams along the lower Columbia River.

The construction of The Dalles, Bonneville, and other lower Columbia River dams beginning in the 1930s inundated and destroyed villages where Columbia River Tribes lived, fished, traded, and socialized for thousands of years. The dams severely damaged their heritage, livelihoods, and economic base. The Tribes and their citizens have never been fully compensated for these losses.

In 2013, the Corps determined that many Tribal families who lived on the banks of the Columbia River prior to construction of the Bonneville and The Dalles dams did not receive relocation assistance. In 2016, the Corps completed a legal analysis of its unmet obligation to build housing on the Columbia River for the four Treaty Tribes, finding that it had existing authority to construct one village associated with the construction of The Dalles Dam.

On the basis of these studies, I have fought for funding for the Corps to construct housing that they have the authority to replace associated with this particular dam. Where the Corps has not found existing authority to replace villages inundated due to the construction of the other dams, I am working to provide them that authority in order to fully address the federal government's unmet obligations to the Tribes.

Following an authorization in the 2018 WRDA, the Corps produced a list of replacement village options associated with The Dalles Dam that were not mutually acceptable to Columbia River

Treaty Tribes. Last year, the Corps and the four Columbia River Treaty Tribes had a government-to-government meeting where it was determined that the authorization needs to be updated and clarified. The Corps and the Tribes are asking for additional authority to produce a comprehensive village development plan that will help us as the federal government finally meet our unmet obligations to the Tribes.

### **MCDD Chiefs Report**

Another priority is the authorization of the Corps' Portland Metro Levee System improvements project, which will reduce flood risk and increase the resiliency and reliability of the levee system along the Columbia River in the Portland metro area.

The Portland Metro Levee System was originally designed and constructed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers over 80 years ago. The federally authorized infrastructure has allowed the area along the river to become a cornerstone to the regional, statewide, and national economy. The livelihood of people throughout Oregon and the Pacific Northwest is reliant on the levee system as it reduces flood risk for vital infrastructure like the Portland International Airport, three interstate highways, a U.S. Air National Guard base, a major natural gas pipeline, back-up drinking water for nearly one million people, and transmission lines for all regional electricity providers. In addition to safeguarding over 7,500 residents and 59,000 jobs, the levees and associated drainage infrastructure also help keep major pollutants out of the Columbia River and protect over 2,000 acres of parks and natural spaces that are home to multiple endangered and protected species.

The Portland Metro Levee System project includes a series of improvements spanning the length of the system. These improvements will increase the resilience, reliability, and operability of the system by improving levee performance and reliability while reducing risk of flooding. These improvements will also address environmental justice concerns and economic risks in the area.

### **Resilience and Equity**

In general, while I applaud the significant progress made by Committee in the 2020 WRDA bill, more can be done to ensure that the Corps has the tools and capacity needed to advance community-supported solutions to water resources challenges for the nation's most vulnerable communities. This includes increasing capacity and expertise within the Corps, ensuring meaningful opportunities for public input, increasing opportunities for assistance, maximizing toxics remediation and ecological restoration, and advancing environmental justice.

We must also work with the Corps to ensure the agency is taking full advantage of existing programs, authorities, and operations to leverage natural systems and prioritize resilience in the face of increasingly frequent and severe climate disasters.

These are critical issues for my constituents. Thank you for the opportunity to speak about the infrastructure needs and opportunities for Oregon's Third Congressional District.