

Congresswoman Veronica Escobar
Texas' 16th Congressional District
Subcommittee on Water Resources and Environment Member Day Testimony
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Thank you Chairwoman Napolitano and Ranking Member Westerman. I look forward to highlighting water infrastructure priorities for my constituents in El Paso, Texas as the Committee considers a reauthorization of the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA).

El Paso is a vibrant community in the Chihuahuan desert, situated in the westernmost part of Texas. We are fortunate to have the Franklin Mountains in the heart of our city. However, whenever we receive large amounts of rain, stormwater runoff from the mountains routinely floods parts of our community. Flash floods are not uncommon during the storm season and water speeds can reach up to 20 feet per second. In 2006, our community received a record amount of rain that caused over \$315 million in damages to homes and businesses. Since then, El Paso Water, our local water utility, has taken on several projects to improve our stormwater system and update flood controls. The utility developed a Stormwater Master Plan containing these projects, many of which received funds through WRDA. Within the first three years of this plan, more than 50 percent of our city's flood risk was addressed or reduced. It is my hope that we can continue to build on that progress with the upcoming WRDA reauthorization by including project modifications El Paso Water has proposed to the Army Corps of Engineers under section 7001 of WRDA.

In addition to addressing our stormwater systems, El Paso Water has taken great strides to think ahead when it comes to wastewater. El Paso Water treats an average of 55 million gallons of wastewater per day for over 220,000 El Pasoans. El Paso Water has over 2,300 miles of wastewater lines carrying wastewater to treatment plants. These treatment plants then send

close to 6 million gallons of reclaimed water per day to irrigate crops and landscapes. Additionally, El Paso Water maintains a diverse water portfolio because we live in a desert environment. This portfolio has become even more important as we face the existential threat of the climate crisis. The Rio Grande, which can typically supply as much as half of our city's water needs, has seen its water level drop as temperatures have risen. One solution El Paso Water has pioneered has been treating our wastewater to drinking water standards. This water is then used to recharge the Hueco Bolson aquifer to replenish our water supply. WRDA funds have been critical to my community's ability to bolster our wastewater infrastructure and continued funding will allow us to continue to expand services to different parts of the community.

As El Paso County is an eligible community under section 219 of the WRDA reauthorization of 2007, El Paso Water has enjoyed a strong partnership with the Corps of Engineers as the non-federal project sponsor for the projects carried out under WRDA. They have collaborated on major projects to address our stormwater and wastewater needs. One of the projects that has been completed as a result of this partnership is the Boone Siphon Wastewater Line. This project replaced siphon infrastructure dating back to the 1950s. It had been crumbling due to age but is now successfully directing wastewater from Fort Bliss, the Defense Department's second largest installation, and the surrounding areas to a treatment plant.

One of the proposed projects for Fiscal Year 2020 to 2021 is improving the stormwater infrastructure of the Palisades, which is located in West Central El Paso. The area's steep terrain causes significant flash flooding for the properties downstream. The improvements proposed in this project would minimize flooding in this area, which includes University of Texas at El Paso. Another major project is repairing the Keystone Dam. This dam was constructed in the 1980s by the Corps of Engineers and is primarily used for stormwater runoff. However, there is evidence

of seepage near the downstream embankment and an analysis has recommended stabilizing the slope.

As time has passed, it is now apparent that our community requires more investment in our stormwater and wastewater infrastructure. To address this, El Paso Water is seeking modifications to the underlying section 219 authorization for El Paso County. The modifications involving stormwater infrastructure include the conduit lining of the Keystone Dam and the construction of a new pump station that will outfall into the Rio Grande. These projects are vital to protecting El Pasoans, businesses, transportation corridors, and Fort Bliss.

El Paso Water has also requested funding to upgrade a major component of our wastewater treatment infrastructure, the Haskell Street Wastewater Plant. This treatment plant is critical to our agricultural sector as it provides irrigation water to farmers in the Lower Valley. It is also the sole treatment plant for the wastewater produced by Fort Bliss. However, it is also the oldest wastewater facility in El Paso having been built in 1923. It is in need of major rehabilitation to ensure it can continue to provide essential services across the region, as well as reliable performance to support the national security mission at Fort Bliss.

El Paso has been able to successfully use WRDA and our strong relationship with the Corps of Engineers to bolster our stormwater system and expand our wastewater treatment options. It is critical that Congress reauthorize WRDA to ensure communities across the country continue to improve and bring our water infrastructure into the 21st century.

Thank you all for the opportunity to testify before you today and I look forward to collaborating with the committee to ensure a successful WRDA reauthorization.