

Statement of Representative Katie Porter (CA-45)  
House Committee on Transportation & Infrastructure  
Subcommittee on Water Resources and Environment  
March 16, 2022

Thank you, Chairwoman Napolitano and Ranking Member Westerman, for providing us this opportunity to share our district's priorities for the Water Resources Development Act of 2022. I am here today to support the authorization of the Prado Basin Ecosystem Restoration Project, which is part of the dual-purpose Prado Basin Feasibility Study. This project would benefit Riverside County, San Bernardino County, and my home— Orange County —by reducing reliance on imported water from the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta and Colorado Rivers. It would reduce risk of wildfires, restore critical habitats for endangered species, create local jobs, and save money for consumers.

The Prado Basin Ecosystem Restoration Project specifically targets the removal of an invasive plant species known as *arundo donax*, commonly known as giant reed. The giant reed outcompetes native plant species and is inedible to native wildlife. It consumes a substantial amount of water compared to native flora, which reduces water supplies. Additionally, the giant reed plays a significant role in the ignition and rapid spread of wildfires during droughts due to its rapid growth and substantial water requirements. The Prado Basin Ecosystem Restoration Project will remove the giant reed and replace it with natural flora. This will reduce wildfire risk, increase water supplies, and help native species thrive.

If this project were to be authorized, it would restore 606 acres of land along the Santa Ana River, Chino Creek, and Mill Creek, where endangered species, such as the southwestern willow flycatcher, live. The US Forest Service listed the southwestern willow flycatcher as federally endangered in 1995 after years of dwindling population numbers due to the loss of their native riparian habitat.<sup>1</sup> The Prado River Basin Ecosystem Restoration Project would restore habitats for not only the southwestern willow flycatcher, but other endangered species as well.

This restoration project would also create good jobs in my community. A report estimated that for every one million dollars spent on watershed restoration and management, we can create anywhere from 6.8 to 31.5 well-paying jobs.<sup>2</sup> Based on the average of these numbers, Orange County Water District estimated that this project could create around 931 direct, indirect, and induced jobs.

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<sup>1</sup> Southwestern Willow Flycatcher. National Park Service (October 5,2016) Retrieved at: <https://www.nps.gov/articles/southwestern-willow-flycatcher.htm>

<sup>2</sup> BenDor T, Lester TW, Livengood A, Davis A, Yonavjak L (2015) Estimating the Size and Impact of the Ecological Restoration Economy. PLoS ONE 10(6): e0128339. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0128339>

In addition to creating jobs, the Prado Basin Feasibility Study Project would help our community reduce our carbon emissions. Importing water from the Colorado River and from Northern California is an energy intensive process. Pumping imported water over the Tehachapi Mountains requires a substantial amount of energy, which also increases the cost of water when it reaches consumers in Southern California. The restoration of natural flora and removal of the giant reed will save energy by significantly reducing our reliance on imported water. The average annual energy savings is 15 Gigawatt-hours, which translates to a reduction of 11,000 metric tons of carbon dioxide.

The Environmental Impact Report for this project was certified in May 2021. That report concluded that this was the most efficient and cost-effective plan compared to proposed alternatives.<sup>3</sup> The Prado Dam Feasibility Study, conducted by the U.S Army Corps of Engineers in cooperation with the Orange County Water District, similarly concluded that the Prado Basin Feasibility Study Project will provide ratepayers with net savings of \$7.5 million. Now it is time for Congress to do our part and authorize this project.

Thank you for your consideration on this matter. I urge my colleagues to support the authorization of the Prado Basin Ecosystem Restoration Project. I'd like to thank the Orange County Water District for their leadership in spearheading this important project. And I'd like to thank Senator Padilla for his work introducing companion language in the Senate. I yield back my remaining time.

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<sup>3</sup>Prado Basin Ecosystem Restoration and Water Conservation Study. FINAL Environmental Impact Report. Retrieved at: <https://www.ocwd.com/media/9750/prado-basin-ecosystem-restoration-and-water-conservation-project-final-eir.pdf>