

TESTIMONY OF REP. FILEMON VELA (TX-34)
Water Resources Development Act
Member Day Hearing
Feb. 27, 2020

Chairman DeFazio, Ranking Member Graves, Chairwoman Napolitano, and Ranking Member Westerman, thank you for giving me the opportunity today to testify about water projects in my district.

As you prepare to draft legislation to reauthorize the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA), I wanted to bring to your attention some critical flood control needs in the Rio Grande Valley of Texas.

In just the past two years, South Texas has suffered catastrophic flooding, causing tens of millions of dollars in damage on more than one occasion. In June 2018, storms brought a year's worth of rainfall to the Rio Grande Valley in just a few hours, resulting in massive flooding and over \$60 million in infrastructure damage. In June 2019, the Rio Grande Valley again experienced record rainfall and flooding.

While the United States is one of the richest countries in the world, pockets of persistent poverty exist. Sadly, financial hardship and poverty in these regions are exacerbated by severe weather and flooding. The Rio Grande Valley is one of these areas.

To help address these flooding concerns, it is critical that the Raymondville Drain project moves forward. It is also vital to understand the watershed of our entire area and what is required to avoid future flood events, and we must work to allocate needed resources to fund flood control infrastructure to prevent flooding that threatens the lives and livelihoods of Americans, especially those in areas of persistent poverty.

Raymondville Drain Project

The Raymondville Drain project was previously authorized in WRDA 1986 and updated in WRDA 2007. Once constructed, this project will provide storm water management on a regional basis and ultimately contribute to improvements to watersheds of three Texas counties. The project will add a new channel that connects to existing channels, widen existing channels, and make additional improvements to the approximate 63-mile drainage system of in-line and off-line detention, reservoirs, and control structures from Edinburg Lake in Hidalgo County to the Laguna Madre in Willacy County.

The Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works is currently reviewing the Raymondville Drain Section 203 Submittal. I understand that the submittal is expected to be delivered to the Committee as a Favorable Decision Document and will be a recommended project for Construction Authorization, so I urge you to include language in your legislation to authorize construction of the project.

Lower Rio Grande Valley Watershed Feasibility Study

Not only is construction of the Raymondville Drain project vital to flood control in the Lower Rio Grande Valley, but the region needs to fully understand the entire watershed and take action to address flooding and stormwater issues.

In August, Cameron County submitted a proposal to the Army Corps of Engineers for a Lower Rio Grande Valley Watershed Feasibility Study. The ASA's office is currently reviewing the project

submittal for inclusion in the Section 7001 report that is due to Congress next month. I urge you to include authorization language for this project in the upcoming WRDA legislation.

Impoverished Community Flood Risk Management, Resiliency, and Sustainability Equity

Studying flood control needs and producing plans to address these issues is important for areas throughout the United States, but impoverished regions of our nation, like the Rio Grande Valley, lack the resources of many other communities to fund critical infrastructure projects; and all too often areas with high poverty rates are prone to flooding. I urge you to include language in your bill for the Army Corps to account for these issues when determining feasibility and to help flood-prone, low-income areas fund projects to increase resiliency and prevent flood damage.

Beach Nourishment

Not only is support for risk management in local watersheds critical to the resiliency of communities like mine, but maintaining our beaches on barrier islands is also important to avoid damage both to the islands themselves as well as the mainland. I appreciate the work of this committee and the Army Corps to help renourish local beaches with materials dredged from navigation projects. I urge you to continue this support and encourage the Army Corps to look for even more approaches to ensure the most efficient and effective ways to move dredge material to support the beaches.

Thank you again for giving me this opportunity to testify about some of the most critical water issues in my district.