

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

July 13, 2026

Colonel Larry Caswell, Jr.
District Commander
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Portland District
333 SW 1st Avenue
Portland, OR 97204

Dear Colonel Caswell:

We write regarding the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' Record of Decision ("ROD") for the Willamette Valley System Operations and Maintenance Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement ("SEIS") and the proposed late fall/early winter deep drawdown of Detroit Reservoir later this year.

We support science-based efforts to improve fish passage, recover Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed species, and uphold the United States' trust and treaty obligations to tribes in the Northwest. However, management of the Willamette Valley System must balance fish recovery objectives with the public health, safety, and economic needs of Oregon communities. Success should be measured not only by our ability to strengthen salmon recovery, but by whether every downstream community can still turn on the tap with confidence.

We have heard serious and repeated concerns from local governments, public water providers, emergency managers, and community stakeholders in the North Santiam Canyon and throughout Marion County regarding the potential impacts of the proposed drawdown on turbidity, drinking water reliability, public health, and critical infrastructure. Based on the information currently available, we believe the Corps should proceed with a Detroit Reservoir deep drawdown only after allowing affected drinking water systems to complete the infrastructure improvements, alternative supply measures and emergency preparedness actions necessary to protect public health and ensure continuous service to the communities they serve.

These concerns are not hypothetical. The Corps' SEIS acknowledges that the Detroit Reservoir drawdown is expected to "mobilize sediment, increasing turbidity levels downstream of Detroit and Big Cliff dams," and that fine clay material eroded from exposed sediment is likely to remain suspended and pass downstream of Detroit Dam. The SEIS further states that increased turbidity would result in adverse effects to drinking water facilities using water from the North Santiam River below Detroit and Big Cliff reservoirs, including increased filter maintenance and staffing needs.

For many of these affected communities, these additional operational demands present a significant challenge. Smaller water systems often operate with limited budgets, staffing capacity, and financial flexibility, making it difficult to absorb the costs of increased monitoring, treatment adjustments, filter maintenance, and personnel requirements. Without adequate

resources and preparation, these communities may face substantial operational and financial obstacles to maintaining safe and reliable drinking water service.

The SEIS specifically identifies Salem, Stayton, and Gates as drinking water systems requiring coordination during Detroit Reservoir drawdown operations. Our offices have heard directly from these local governments and water providers about the vulnerabilities and infrastructure needed to withstand elevated turbidity associated with a deep drawdown.

The **City of Salem's** water treatment system relies on seven slow sand filters that cannot operate effectively when turbidity levels exceed 20 Nephelometric Turbidity Units (NTU), threatening water reliability for 220,000 regional residents. Repairing a single damaged filter layer could take six months and cost \$4 million. The **City of Stayton** also operates a slow sand filtration system that is highly vulnerable to sustained turbidity events, as turbidity above 10 NTU could completely halt its water production, exhausting its critical four-day supply and firefighting reserve within days or hours under severe conditions. The **City of Gates** faces similar threats to its membrane filtration system, making it a high-priority community for immediate emergency planning and mitigation support. Each of these communities is actively pursuing infrastructure upgrades, but funding and readiness gaps remain.

These examples demonstrate that affected water systems are at substantially different stages of preparedness, with critical resilience projects still underway across various stages of planning, design, funding, procurement, or construction. Although local governments and water providers have taken significant steps to improve resilience, many of the measures necessary to protect drinking water services will not be completed before the Corps' proposed implementation timeline. Under these circumstances, proceeding with a deep drawdown would transfer substantial operational, financial, and public health risk to local communities that are not yet fully prepared to absorb it.

Given the risks identified in the SEIS and the current status of affected water systems, we request that the Corps delay implementation of the Detroit Reservoir deep drawdown until affected providers have completed necessary upgrades, alternative supply measures, and emergency preparedness actions sufficient to protect public health and maintain reliable drinking water service. As this work moves forward, the Corps should use the time to comply with its legal requirements and fulfill its obligations to communities in the Willamette Valley, including:

1. Allowing affected drinking water providers, including Salem, Stayton, Gates, and other downstream systems, to complete necessary infrastructure improvements, alternative supply measures, and emergency preparedness actions and demonstrate operational readiness.
2. Completing and publicly releasing the turbidity study required by the Thomas R. Carper Water Resources Development Act of 2024, including lessons learned from prior Willamette Valley drawdowns and a system-specific assessment of potential impacts on municipal drinking water systems.

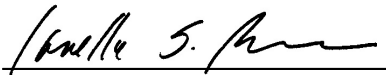
3. Publicly releasing the report on the federal interest in hydropower within Oregon's Willamette Valley System required by the James M. Inhofe Water Resources Development Act of 2022.
4. Preparing and sharing a comprehensive drinking water readiness assessment identifying each affected provider's treatment technology, turbidity tolerance, backup supply capacity, planned improvements, funding needs, construction timelines, and emergency response requirements.
5. Clearly defining the turbidity and water-quality thresholds that will trigger modification, suspension, or termination of drawdown operations when drinking water systems face unacceptable risk.
6. Identifying and committing funding, technical assistance, and mitigation measures sufficient to support affected local governments and water providers in implementing necessary resiliency improvements.
7. Establishing a clear communication protocol with affected water systems, local governments, and affected communities before and during any drawdown.

The consequences of a drinking water disruption extend far beyond inconvenience. Loss of reliable drinking water affects public health, fire protection, emergency response capability, schools, businesses, and basic community functions. These impacts also carry significant economic consequences, particularly for communities with limited financial resources that may not have the capacity to absorb unexpected costs associated with mitigation. As it works toward a deep drawdown, the Corps must work with community partners to fully address these risks of increased turbidity in the North Santiam River. The Corps must allow affected communities to implement the infrastructure and operational readiness improvements necessary to maintain safe and reliable drinking water service.

We respectfully request a written response detailing how the Corps intends to address these drinking water readiness concerns prior to implementing a deep drawdown at Detroit Reservoir. We also request a briefing for our offices and affected water providers regarding the Corps' implementation timeline, turbidity modeling, emergency response protocols, and planned funding and mitigation measures for impacted public water systems.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,



Janelle S. Bynum
Member of Congress



Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator

Andrea Salinas

Andrea Salinas
Member of Congress

Ron Wyden

Ron Wyden
United States Senator