

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

February 18, 2021

The Honorable Rob Fairweather
Acting Director
Office of Management and Budget
725 17th Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20503

Mr. Vance F. Stewart III
Sr. Official Performing Duties of ASA(CW)
United States Department of the Army
108 Army Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20310

Dear Acting Director Fairweather and Mr. Stewart,

We write to encourage you to include appropriate funding in the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) Fiscal Year 2022 budget request for sediment monitoring activities for the Mt. St. Helens Sediment Control account. Funding this critical action will ensure that the downriver communities will remain safe from a future flooding event.

As you are aware, the Long-Term Sediment Management Plan was developed following the eruption of Mount St. Helens. Congress authorized USACE to construct, operate and maintain a sediment retention structure and provide the associated downstream actions necessary to ensure flood risk reduction for the communities of Longview, Kelso, Castle Rock, and Lexington. Additionally, funding was authorized by Congress in the Mount St. Helens Construction Account for Mount St. Helens Sediment Control in 1985 to ensure the structure is maintained and sediment flows did not cause rivers downstream to reach dangerous levels.

Proper river management requires yearly monitoring to ensure that river water levels do not threaten the downstream communities. Unfortunately, federal funding for sediment monitoring has been inconsistent, creating uncertainty for local communities most at risk from the impacts of flooding.

We appreciate the USACE and Office of Management and Budget's (OMB) work last summer to reprogram unused federal funds to allow the USACE Portland District to conduct sediment monitoring work last year. It was especially important that the local communities did not need to make difficult decisions on pulling money from vital local services to pay for sediment monitoring.

However, we are disappointed that the Fiscal Year 2021 work plan did not provide money for the Portland District to conduct the work this year, yet again abdicating a federal responsibility and forcing the local communities to cobble together funds to pay for the work. To prevent the lack of funding from occurring again in the future, Congress inserted the following report language in the Fiscal Year 2021 Energy and Water Appropriations Joint Explanatory Statement, which indicates congressional intent that the USACE provide adequate funding in future budget requests for the sediment monitoring work:

The agreement notes that Mount St. Helens Sediment Monitoring activities have not been funded in the Corps work plan for the sixth consecutive year. Yearly monitoring is vital to ensure that the sediment retention structure can properly protect the communities in Cowlitz County, Washington. There is awareness that the lack of federal funding has led to local communities funding sediment monitoring and encourages the Corps to include appropriate funding in future budget submissions for this effort.

We sincerely hope you come to recognize the importance of this funding to our communities, the relatively minor expenditure it will take in the larger USACE budget compared to the extraordinary burden it represents to small rural communities, and the cost of failing to undertake this work. Neglecting to address the risk to impacted communities not only threatens them with the uncertainty of flooding but also the peace of mind that the monitoring can provide. We request that you honor congressional intent and provide the requisite funding in the Fiscal Year 2022 budget for the USACE to conduct the necessary sediment monitoring activities. We look forward to your prompt response.

Sincerely,



Jaime Herrera Beutler
Member of Congress



Patty Murray
United States Senator



Maria Cantwell
United States Senator

CC: Lieutenant General Scott A. Spellmon, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Chief of Engineers