

JAIME HERRERA BEUTLER
3RD DISTRICT, SOUTHWEST WASHINGTON

COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON LABOR, HEALTH AND
HUMAN SERVICES, EDUCATION
AND RELATED AGENCIES
SUBCOMMITTEE ON LEGISLATIVE BRANCH
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND
WATER DEVELOPMENT AND RELATED AGENCIES
U.S. JOINT ECONOMIC COMMITTEE



Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-1602

□ 2352 RAYBURN HOB
WASHINGTON D.C. 20515
(202) 225-3536

□ GENERAL O.O. HOWARD HOUSE
750 ANDERSON STREET, SUITE B
VANCOUVER, WA 98661
(360) 695-6292

WWW.JHB.HOUSE.GOV

May 14, 2021

Colonel Alexander Bullock
US Army District Commander
US Army Corps of Engineers Seattle District,

Dear Colonel Bullock,

As you look to reassign roles following the upcoming retirement of Bob Thomas as your St. Helen's Section Chief in Regulatory Branch, I decided that I would write this letter to let you know the situation related to the Army Corps in Southwest Washington before Mr. Thomas was put in his current position.

It is very safe to say that no federal agency was taking more of the time, attention and effort of me and my staff in dealing with constituent complaints and problems than those stemming from action, or more frequently inaction of the Seattle office of the Army Corps of Engineers (Seattle District). Southwest Washington is bounded by water including the Pacific Ocean and the Columbia River. Multiple rivers and innumerable streams and lakes are in Southwest Washington. This brings nearly every community and many businesses and families into contact with the Army Corps.

I have been in Congress now for 11 years. In my earlier years the complaints were many but random. The problem eventually became so acute that organizations including local governments joined together in a coalition against the Army Corps Seattle District. After the opposition became coordinated my office received dozens of letters from a tremendous number of organizations requesting dramatic pressure be placed on the Seattle District to quicken the unnecessary delays. These requests came from an extremely diverse group of organizations, including but not limited to: local governments like Cowlitz County, Lewis County and the Vancouver County Council; cities as diverse as Camas, Cathlamet, Long Beach, Woodland, Ridgefield, Kelso, and more; And economic groups like the Greater Vancouver Chambers of Commerce, the Columbia River Economic Development Council and the Building Industry Association of Clark County. The letters and the specific cases they cited made clear that Southwest Washington residents were not receiving the attention from the Seattle District that they deserved.

The situation became so dire that there was a great deal of momentum building for introducing legislation to remove the Seattle District's jurisdiction over Southwest Washington and place it instead with the Portland District. Prior to that step being taken, I wrote one of your predecessors, Colonel Buck, about the volume of complaints my office had received including many regarding the untimeliness of permit applications in the Seattle District. Specifically, I

raised the possibility of stationing a local Section Chief in our area who would live and work in Southwest Washington. That position was filled by Mr. Thomas and his work and others with the Seattle District has changed the picture dramatically for the better in the last several years.

I encourage you to continue the engagement and focus from the Seattle District on Southwest Washington residents regarding regulatory permit issues. We face an extreme backlog of shellfish permits, among many other issues. With Chehalis Basin flooding specifically – a priority for thousands of residents and businesses in this region -- the history of the Army Corp Seattle District with Chehalis Basin flooding is not a story of success. This again changed when the Seattle District chose to focus more time and resources on Southwest Washington. Despite the improvement in recent years, more needs to be done; we urgently need the USACE to complete the NEPA process on the proposed water retention facility that is a potential component of the Chehalis basin strategy.

Going back to the way things were before is simply not an acceptable solution. I look forward to working with you to ensure we do not lose the critical progress the Seattle District made in recent years to drastically reduce needless bureaucratic delays. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Jaime Herrera Beutler
Member of Congress