

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

December 16, 2021

The Honorable Michael Connor
Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works
103 Army Pentagon, Room 2E532
Washington, D.C. 20310

Dear Secretary Connor:

Congratulations on your confirmation as Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works. We are very pleased to see you in this role that is so important not only in managing our water resources, but in investing in economic development for our communities and in improving the quality of life for our citizens. We look forward to partnering with you to improve project delivery of Corps of Engineer's partnered projects.

As you prepare the Work Plan in support of the Infrastructure and Jobs Act, we are requesting your support of ecosystem restoration projects that are modifications to flood protection projects to address degraded conditions. The San Antonio Channel Improvement Project, SACIP, Westside Creeks Ecosystem Restoration Project (Westside Creeks) aims to restore the aquatic ecosystems of urban tributaries to the San Antonio River that were previously channelized for flood risk mitigation purposes. We are seeking the Administration's and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers continued support of this vital community supported project. What is also incredibly important about this project is the direct benefit it will provide to our minority, low income and disadvantaged communities sitting right on the banks of the Westside Creeks. This project will be transformational for our underserved areas of San Antonio and we urge your strong consideration of our request.

The San Antonio Channel Improvement Project (SACIP) was originally authorized under Section 203 of the Flood Control Act of 1954 as part of a comprehensive plan for flood protection on the Guadalupe and San Antonio Rivers. The project was subsequently modified in Section 103 of the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) of 1976 to add additional flood control features, and in Section 335 of WRDA of 2000 to include ecosystem restoration and recreation as authorized project purposes. The WSCs GRR was initiated at the request of the San Antonio River Authority and was selected into the National Pilot Program testing the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers 3x3x3 planning paradigm in June 2011.

A tremendous example of a multiple benefit approach being undertaken in our area is the Westside Creeks, a project of great significance to the San Antonio River Authority (SARA) and the San Antonio community, as it will restore the aquatic habitat of 11 miles of creeks including 222 acres of native aquatic and riparian vegetation in the four WSC. The proposed aquatic and riparian measures restore the habitat structure and function for the species within the Westside Creeks aquatic system.

Key to the benefits and importance of this project, the Westside Creeks are located in the 78207 zip code and flow adjacent to three San Antonio Housing Authority properties. These federal housing communities are the largest in San Antonio based on population. 94% of the population in the 78207 zip code identify as Hispanic, 3.5% as white, and 2.5% as African American. Of the students attending public schools, 97.2% are Hispanic and 96.8% of the total students are eligible to participate in free or reduced-cost lunch programs. The household income in 78207 is \$23,231. For comparison, the 2019 median household income in the United States was \$68,700. Over 48% of the households in 78207 are at or below the

poverty level. Once restoration is completed, these minority economically and environmentally distressed communities will have access to the health, recreational and economic benefits of local waterways vastly improving the quality of life for our underserved communities.

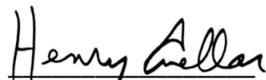
The Westside Creeks are immediately upstream of the Mission Reach. Therefore, the ecosystem restoration work we do on the WSCs will directly benefit Mission Reach, as well. The project's Director's Report was signed on May 21, 2014 and the project was subsequently approved in 2016 by OMB for Budget consideration and is ready to move into design. The Westside Creeks project was included the Administration's FY 22 Budget not only for the aquatic ecosystem restoration potential, but because it serves an environmentally and economically challenged community in the core of the 7th largest city in the nation.

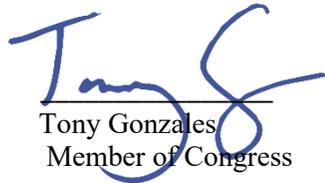
We fully expect that this project, like the Mission Reach Ecosystem Restoration Project, to pay great dividends to the community. In fact, as a result of prior public infrastructure investment for the Mission Reach project, which focused on improving the health of the San Antonio River, there has been significant economic development that has been publicly announced or already undertaken, of approximately \$658 million. There is no question that moving into construction work for Westside Creeks will continue this economic development.

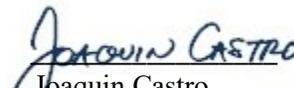
As you develop the Work Plan for the Infrastructure and Jobs Act, our preference would be to see the project fully funded, but at a minimum we are requesting \$27.5 million in the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers General Construction Account to fund all of the design needed for the project and to complete construction of San Pedro Creek. Funding all of the design and the construction of the first creek will save the Corps 5 years by allowing for a more efficient construction schedule that will reduce costs by eliminating inflation and project cost increases over time.

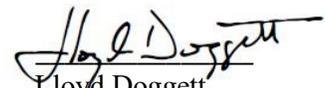
Again, you have been tremendous supporters of our requests to improve the quality of life in San Antonio for all of our citizens and we are asking for your strong consideration of the WSCs, a critical funding priority for us and our communities.

Sincerely,


Henry Cuellar
Member of Congress


Tony Gonzales
Member of Congress


Joaquin Castro
Member of Congress


Lloyd Doggett
Member of Congress