

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

February 1, 2025

The Honorable Pete Hegseth
Secretary
Department of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301

The Honorable Doug Burgum
Secretary
Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary Hegseth and Secretary Burgum:

We are writing to request information on this week’s abrupt, unscheduled water releases from Terminus Dam and Schafer Dam in California’s Central Valley by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. According to multiple news reports, these releases deviated from established flood safety protocols and were carried out with minimal notice—leaving state and local government officials and local water managers “caught off-guard” as flows rapidly escalated from nominal levels to channel capacity within hours.¹ This sudden, uncoordinated move raises serious concerns for downstream agricultural operations and communities since local authorities had little time to adjust or plan accordingly. We are equally concerned that these releases did not meet their stated intent of providing Los Angeles with additional water, and could reduce the availability of critical municipal and agricultural water supplies later in the year, further exacerbating the fire, safety, and economic risks facing this drought prone region for years.

In light of these issues, we respectfully request that you promptly provide answers to the following questions no later than Friday, February 7, 2025:

1. Deviation from Flood Safety Operating Rules

Who specifically gave the order to breach established flood safety rules for water releases? When was it given and why was it given? Did President Trump—or anyone in the White House—directly order the Corps to carry out these releases? What was the Department of Government Efficiency’s involvement, if any, in these efforts?

2. Coordination with Local Authorities

Please provide the specific steps taken in advance to coordinate these releases with state and local government officials, local water managers, agricultural stakeholders, and public safety officials, including a list of all parties that were contacted prior to these releases , when they were contacted, and by whom they were contacted?

3. Impact on Water Usage

What are the objectives the release of this water is supposed to achieve and how will it be used to achieve those objectives? What considerations were made about the impact of these releases on critical municipal and agricultural water supply needs later this year? What considerations were made considering current drought protections and decreased snowpack estimates for the region? How will these releases meet their intended uses

¹ <https://www.latimes.com/environment/story/2025-01-31/trump-california-dams-opened-up>

when it is likely that much of the released water will be lost to evaporation rather than put to beneficial use? What plan is in place to replenish the water supplies lost from this release?

4. Future Release Plans

Are similar actions being considered moving forward, and if so, what assurances can be provided that full coordination with local and state agencies will be maintained?

It is vital that decisions regarding major dam releases be made with transparency, coordination, and a steadfast commitment to public safety. The public deserves clear answers to these questions and assurances that no similar actions will be taken in the future that jeopardize the safety of downstream communities or undermines the water planning necessary to meet their needs. Please provide a response no later than Friday,

Sincerely,



Jared Huffman
Ranking Member
House Committee on Natural Resources



Rick Larsen
Ranking Member
House Committee on Transportation and
Infrastructure

cc:

Lieutenant General William H. "Butch" Graham, Jr., Chief of Engineers and Commanding General, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

David Palumbo, Acting Commissioner, Bureau of Reclamation