

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

COMMITTEES:  
BUDGET  
ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES  
ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC WORKS  
JUDICIARY  
RULES AND ADMINISTRATION

January 31, 2025

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

Dear Secretary Hegseth,

I write regarding the troubling unscheduled release of water from two dams in California's Central Valley by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers following President Trump's Executive Order falsely linking statewide water policies to the wildfires in Los Angeles. As I'm sure the Administration is aware, the rivers into which this water was released do not actually flow into Los Angeles.

Unscheduled water releases require close coordination with local officials and safety personnel, as well as downstream agricultural water users, in order to reduce flood risks to communities and farms. Based on the urgent concerns I have heard from my constituents, as well as recent reporting, it appears that gravely insufficient notification was given, recklessly endangering residents downstream. Therefore, I ask that you respond in writing to the following questions:

1. Who directed that these releases be made?
2. If the purpose of these releases is to help fight wildfires in Los Angeles County (which are already almost fully contained), what is the plan to transport this water to Los Angeles rather than let the water simply be discharged into Tulare Lake where it will evaporate?
3. What type of notification, and how much advanced notice, was given to irrigation districts and public safety personnel to prepare for these increased flows?
4. What impact will these releases have on Tulare Lake communities, including private landowners?

Clarity and transparency on these matters are crucial to ensure that the public is properly informed, that proper procedures are followed, and that any actions taken in the name of protecting against natural disasters will have the intended impact.

I look forward to your prompt response to these questions.

Sincerely,



Alex Padilla  
United States Senator