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October 21, 2019

Dr. David Gade
Environmental Branch
Regional Planning and Environmental Center
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
2488 East 81st Street
Tulsa, Oklahoma 74127-4290

Re: *Tulsa and West Tulsa Levees Integrated Feasibility Study Draft Report and Environmental Study*

Dear Dr. Gade:

Thank you for the timely completion and release of the *Tulsa and West Tulsa Levees Integrated Feasibility Study Draft Report and Environmental Study* last month. While public comments are always an important part of report process, they are even more valuable in this instance because of the significant flooding in northeastern Oklahoma earlier this year, which made clear how dependent much of Tulsa County's critical infrastructure is on the 75 year old levee system—and how lucky we were that there was not a catastrophic failure.

The devastating 2019 flood event made clear how important it is to upgrade the Tulsa-West Tulsa Levee System. The system experienced its second largest loading and longest duration flood event in its 70 year history. Flood waters along the Tulsa-West Tulsa Levees remained high for 11 days, putting incredible strain on the aging levee system. During this time, Oklahoma National Guardsmen were deployed at key points along the entire system filling and placing sand bags to strengthen and fortify the levees. Any catastrophic failure would have resulted in the inundation of the homes and businesses of thousands of Oklahomans, the Sand Springs Petrochemical Complex (a Superfund site), and major industrial sites including Westside Chemical Co., Ozark Fluorine Specialties Inc., Koch Industries, Holly Frontier Corporation Tulsa Refinery, and the Public Service Company of Oklahoma (PSO).

More than ten years ago, the U.S. Army Corps rated the Tulsa West Tulsa levees as "unacceptable" and "very high risk" of failure due to overtopping and inadequately controlled under-seepage and through seepage—making clear the need and urgency for modernization and upgrades. Without structural improvements, it is unclear how much longer the levee system will be able to provide critical protection to the Tulsa County community. As Chairman of the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works, I was proud to author the *Water Infrastructure Improvements for the Nation Act of 2016*, which authorized the feasibility study necessary to improve the levees.

The draft report presents several options for modernizing the levees and endorses a recommended plan (referred to as Alternative 1E) that meets the primary objective of reducing flood risk and damages to protect public health, safety, life and property.

I am confident that the structural improvements will provide the protection needed by the thousands of Oklahomans and more than $2 billion in public and private infrastructure in the area. What I want to make crystal clear is this: the Corps must move forward as quickly as possible to complete this process.

Following the review of these public comments, the Army Corps must work expeditiously to finalize the Chief of Engineer's Report for this project. As the Army Corps finalizes the Chief's Report, I urge the Army Corps to take all appropriate steps to facilitate a quick and smooth transition into the Pre-Construction Engineering and Design phase for this project. I will continue to work in Congress to advance the project to completion. Working together, we can ensure vital improvements are made to the Tulsa levee system.

Thank you for considering these comments as you develop the final feasibility study. If you need additional information, please do not hesitate to contact my office.

Sincerely,

James M. Inhofe
United States Senate