

United States Senate

November 28, 2018

The Honorable William B. Long
Federal Emergency Management Agency
500 C Street, South West
Washington, D.C. 20472

Dear Administrator Long:

Over the last year, with the assistance of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), Texas has made enormous strides in recovering and rebuilding from the devastation of Hurricane Harvey (DR-4332). As the recovery process continues, it is important to ensure that FEMA fully leverages its assets and funding to reduce the taxpayer cost of future disasters and help the state better prepare for future weather events.

One project in particular where this can be accomplished is the emergency dredging of the West Fork of the San Jacinto River—an area where Hurricane Harvey flooded 1,621 homes. The San Jacinto River Dredging Project (W9126G18B0019) is a DR-4332 FEMA Mission Assignment that directs the United States Army Corps of Engineers (Army Corps) to return the river to pre-event conditions. Specifically, this is a debris removal assignment, which includes sediment, with an estimated cost of \$61 million.

Although the Army Corps recently began dredging operations on the West Fork of the river, the scope of the project does not include the delta or “mouth bar” that formed in the river and was made significantly worse by Hurricane Harvey. In order to prevent future flooding of property and threat to human life, FEMA should amend the project worksheet so that the scope of the project includes dredging the West Fork mouth bar and surrounding shoal sediments.

Under Section 403 of the Stafford Act, “Federal agencies may . . . provide assistance to meeting immediate threats to life and property resulting from a major disaster,” which includes such activities as debris removal.

The mouth bar on the West Fork is currently constraining in-bank flow conveyance capacity, and local officials have referred to it as “the largest blockage on the river.” The Army Corps confirmed this analysis in a May 2018 Army Corps Value Engineering Study which indicated that “[t]he water [in the river] then slows as it reaches the upper end of Lake Houston dumping its suspended sediments into a delta. The accretion of this delta creates a dam like feature which then increasingly slows water and accretes the delta, compounding the problem.”

The sediment deposited into the river from Hurricane Harvey exacerbated the accretion of the mouth bar. If the West Fork mouth bar is not addressed to restore flow conveyance capacity, then the next rain event will likely result in both public and private property damage from flood

waters rising out of the river's banks. Even a small rain event in March created more flooding than expected as a result of the sediment constraints from Hurricane Harvey.

In order to prevent future flooding of property and save lives, I urge you to amend the project worksheet to include the West Fork mouth bar in the scope of the project. Without such an amendment, surrounding residents are at risk of future flooding and FEMA is missing a key opportunity to leverage its current assets, help the state better prepare for future disasters, and reduce the federal cost of future disasters.

Thank you for your efforts on behalf of the people of Texas and for your prompt consideration of my request.

Sincerely,



TED CRUZ
United States Senator

cc: Tony Robinson, Regional Administrator, FEMA Region 6