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(Original Signature of Member)

119TH CONGRESS  
2D SESSION

**H. R.** \_\_\_\_\_

To provide for the establishment of a Water Project Navigators Program,  
and for other purposes.

\_\_\_\_\_  
IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Ms. PETTERSEN introduced the following bill; which was referred to the  
Committee on \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
**A BILL**

To provide for the establishment of a Water Project  
Navigators Program, and for other purposes.

1       *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*  
2       *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3       **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4       This Act may be cited as the “Water Project Naviga-  
5       tors Act”.

6       **SEC. 2. DEFINITIONS.**

7       In this Act:

8               (1) **DISADVANTAGED COMMUNITY.**—Except as  
9       otherwise defined by the Secretary of the Interior

1 based on current methodologies, the term “disadvan-  
2 tagged community” means a community (including a  
3 city, town, county, or reasonably isolated and divis-  
4 ible segment of a larger municipality) with an an-  
5 nual median income that is less than the statewide  
6 annual median income for the State in which the  
7 community is located, according to the most recent  
8 decennial census.

9 (2) ELIGIBLE ENTITY.—The term “eligible enti-  
10 ty” means—

11 (A) a State;

12 (B) an Indian Tribe;

13 (C) any acequia, land grant-merced, local  
14 government, water supplier, special district,  
15 conservation district, or municipal water district  
16 located in an eligible State;

17 (D) any State, regional, or local authority  
18 located in an eligible State, the members of  
19 which include 1 or more organizations with  
20 water or power delivery authority;

21 (E) a nonprofit conservation organization  
22 with a demonstrated history of working in part-  
23 nership with 1 or more entities described in any  
24 of subparagraphs (A) through (D); or

1 (F) a combination of entities described in  
2 subparagraphs (A) through (E).

3 (3) ELIGIBLE STATE.—The term “eligible  
4 State” means—

5 (A) a State or territory described in the  
6 first section of the Act of June 17, 1902 (43  
7 U.S.C. 391; 32 Stat. 388, chapter 1093);

8 (B) the State of Alaska;

9 (C) the State of Hawaii; and

10 (D) the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico.

11 (4) INDIAN TRIBE.—The term “Indian Tribe”  
12 has the meaning given the term in section 4 of the  
13 Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance  
14 Act (25 U.S.C. 5304).

15 (5) MULTI-BENEFIT WATER PROJECT.—The  
16 term “multi-benefit water project” means any  
17 project in an eligible State that—

18 (A) enhances the overall resilience of a  
19 community or region to climate-related impacts  
20 on water supplies, including through activi-  
21 ties—

22 (i) to increase water use efficiency;

23 (ii) to reduce consumptive use of  
24 water;

25 (iii) to promote system conservation;

- 1 (iv) to reduce water supply-demand  
2 imbalances;
- 3 (v) to promote water recycling and  
4 other advanced water treatments to aug-  
5 ment water supplies;
- 6 (vi) to improve management or deliv-  
7 ery of water resources;
- 8 (vii) to address risks to water infra-  
9 structure from weather-related events and  
10 climate change;
- 11 (viii) to provide or improve access to  
12 safe drinking water in communities that  
13 lack reliable access to adequate clean water  
14 supplies;
- 15 (ix) to promote investment in the  
16 economies of rural communities, Tribal  
17 communities, or disadvantaged commu-  
18 nities through water projects;
- 19 (x) to enhance water-based rec-  
20 reational opportunities for the benefit of  
21 community members and the local rec-  
22 reational economy; or
- 23 (xi) to encourage sustainable surface  
24 water or groundwater management; and

1 (B) provides benefits to ecosystems and  
2 watersheds, including through activities—

3 (i) to conserve or enhance fish and  
4 wildlife habitat;

5 (ii) to protect or improve water qual-  
6 ity;

7 (iii) to improve watershed health and  
8 function;

9 (iv) to protect against invasive species;

10 (v) to restore aspects of the natural  
11 ecosystem; or

12 (vi) to maintain sustainable ground-  
13 water supplies for multiple uses, including  
14 for riparian or wetland ecosystems.

15 (6) NATURAL FEATURE.—The term “natural  
16 feature” means a feature that is created through the  
17 action of physical, geological, biological, and chem-  
18 ical processes over time.

19 (7) NATURE-BASED FEATURE.—The term “na-  
20 ture-based feature” means a feature that is created  
21 by human design, engineering, and construction to  
22 provide a means to reduce water supply and demand  
23 imbalances or drought or flood risk by acting in con-  
24 cert with natural processes.

1           (8) PROGRAM.—The term “Program” means  
2           the Water Project Navigators Program established  
3           under section 3(a).

4           (9) RURAL COMMUNITY.—The term “rural  
5           community” means a community or group of com-  
6           munities, each of which has a population of not  
7           more than 50,000 inhabitants, which may include  
8           Indian Tribes, Tribal organizations, dispersed home-  
9           sites, and rural areas.

10          (10) SECRETARY.—The term “Secretary”  
11          means the Secretary of the Interior (acting through  
12          the Commissioner of Reclamation).

13 **SEC. 3. WATER PROJECT NAVIGATORS PROGRAM.**

14          (a) ESTABLISHMENT.—Not later than 180 days after  
15          the date of enactment of this Act, the Secretary shall es-  
16          tablish a program to support the development and imple-  
17          mentation of multi-benefit water projects within eligible  
18          States, to be known as the “Water Project Navigators  
19          Program”.

20          (b) AUTHORITY.—In carrying out the Program, the  
21          Secretary may award grants or cooperative agreements to  
22          eligible entities to support the creation or continuation of  
23          multi-benefit water project navigator positions.

24          (c) CRITERIA AND GUIDELINES; PRIORITY.—

25                (1) CRITERIA AND GUIDELINES.—

1 (A) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary shall de-  
2 velop criteria and guidelines for awarding  
3 grants and cooperative agreements under the  
4 Program that consider—

5 (i) the potential of the eligible entity  
6 to accelerate development and implementa-  
7 tion of multi-benefit water projects with-  
8 in—

9 (I) the jurisdiction or service  
10 area of the eligible entity; or

11 (II) in the case of an eligible en-  
12 tity that is a nongovernmental appli-  
13 cant, an area in which the eligible en-  
14 tity has a demonstrated history of  
15 productive engagement with the com-  
16 munity and stakeholders;

17 (ii) any history of development of  
18 multi-benefit water projects by the eligible  
19 entity; and

20 (iii) any potential multi-benefit water  
21 projects identified to meet needs in the  
22 area to be served by the multi-benefit  
23 water project navigator that the eligible  
24 entity has not yet implemented due to lack  
25 of capacity.

1 (B) PUBLIC COMMENT.—Before finalizing  
2 the criteria and guidelines developed under sub-  
3 paragraph (A), the Secretary shall make the  
4 criteria and guidelines available for public com-  
5 ment.

6 (2) PRIORITY.—In awarding grants or coopera-  
7 tive agreements under the Program, the Secretary  
8 shall prioritize applications from eligible entities that  
9 would directly serve Indian Tribes, disadvantaged  
10 communities, rural communities, and other eligible  
11 entities with limited resources and capacity to de-  
12 velop multi-benefit water projects, including—

13 (A) applications from eligible entities—

14 (i) with a demonstrated intent and  
15 ability to incorporate improvements to the  
16 condition of a natural feature or nature-  
17 based feature in multi-benefit water  
18 projects designed under the Program;

19 (ii) with demonstrated support from  
20 multiple stakeholders, including Indian  
21 Tribes, representatives of irrigated agricul-  
22 tural production, hydroelectric production,  
23 municipal and industrial water users, local  
24 governments, community-based organiza-



1                   tions, and nonprofit conservation organiza-  
2                   tions;

3                   (iii) that may promote job creation  
4                   and retention in Tribal communities, dis-  
5                   advantaged communities, and rural com-  
6                   munities; and

7                   (iv) with the capability to work in co-  
8                   ordination with other projects that have  
9                   been funded under, or help advance the ob-  
10                  jectives of, other Department of the Inte-  
11                  rior programs, including programs focused  
12                  on drought resilience and watershed  
13                  health; and

14                 (B) applications that address any other  
15                 priorities that the Secretary determines to be  
16                 appropriate.

17                 (3) PROHIBITION.—The Secretary may not  
18                 award a grant or cooperative agreement under the  
19                 Program that would fund activities to meet existing  
20                 environmental mitigation or compliance obligations  
21                 under Federal or State law.

22                 (d) DUTIES OF NAVIGATORS.—A multi-benefit water  
23                 project navigator funded under the Program shall assist  
24                 the eligible entity in planning, developing, and imple-  
25                 menting multi-benefit water projects, including—

- 1 (1) grant writing;
- 2 (2) project management;
- 3 (3) technical assistance, such as feasibility, de-
- 4 sign, preliminary environmental review, and engi-
- 5 neering; and
- 6 (4) any other necessary activities.

7 (e) DURATION OF GRANTS AND COOPERATIVE  
8 AGREEMENTS.—

9 (1) LIMITATION.—Subject to paragraph (2), a  
10 grant or cooperative agreement under the Program  
11 shall be limited to a period of not more than 3  
12 years.

13 (2) CONTINUATION AND EXTENSION.—At the  
14 discretion of the Secretary, the Secretary may issue  
15 a continuation grant or extend a cooperative agree-  
16 ment awarded under the Program for not more than  
17 2 additional years, with additional funding to be  
18 awarded, as determined to be appropriate by the  
19 Secretary, if the recipient of the grant or cooperative  
20 agreement has demonstrated satisfactory perform-  
21 ance with implementation of the proposal under the  
22 initial grant or cooperative agreement, as determined  
23 by the Secretary.

1 (f) CONTINUOUS ENROLLMENT.—The Secretary  
2 shall make funding opportunities for the Program avail-  
3 able on a regular basis.

4 (g) COST SHARE.—

5 (1) IN GENERAL.—Except as provided in para-  
6 graph (3), the Federal share of the cost of any activ-  
7 ity awarded a grant or cooperative agreement under  
8 the Program shall not exceed 75 percent of the cost  
9 of the activity carried out under the grant or cooper-  
10 ative agreement.

11 (2) FORM OF NON-FEDERAL COST SHARE.—The  
12 non-Federal share of the cost of an activity awarded  
13 a grant or cooperative agreement under the Program  
14 may be in the form of cash or in-kind contributions.

15 (3) REDUCTION; WAIVER.—With respect to a  
16 grant or cooperative agreement awarded to an In-  
17 dian Tribe, acequia, land grant-merced, disadvan-  
18 taged community, or any other eligible entity work-  
19 ing in partnership with or on behalf of those entities,  
20 the Secretary may reduce or waive the non-Federal  
21 share of the cost of any activity that is the subject  
22 of the grant or cooperative agreement if the Sec-  
23 retary determines that contribution of the non-Fed-  
24 eral share would result in a financial hardship for  
25 the entity.

1 (h) COORDINATION.—In administering the Program,  
2 the Secretary shall coordinate, to the maximum extent  
3 practicable, with other Federal, Tribal, State, and local  
4 government technical assistance programs to enhance  
5 multi-benefit water project development.

6 (i) COMPLIANCE.—A multi-benefit water project nav-  
7 igator funded under the Program shall comply with all ap-  
8 plicable Federal and State laws in carrying out the duties  
9 of the multi-benefit water project navigator under the Pro-  
10 gram.

11 (j) REPORT TO CONGRESS.—Not later than 5 years  
12 after the date of enactment of this Act, the Secretary shall  
13 submit to the Committee on Energy and Natural Re-  
14 sources of the Senate and the Committee on Natural Re-  
15 sources of the House of Representatives a report that de-  
16 scribes—

17 (1) the ways in which the Program assists the  
18 Secretary in—

19 (A) reducing basin-wide water supply-de-  
20 mand imbalances;

21 (B) enhancing drought and ecosystem re-  
22 silience; and

23 (C) supporting multi-benefit water project  
24 development and capacity building by disadvan-

1           tagged communities, Indian Tribes, rural com-  
2           munities, and other eligible entities; and

3           (2) the benefits that the Program provides, in-  
4           cluding, to the maximum extent practicable, a quan-  
5           titative analysis of the multiple benefits advanced  
6           under the Program.

7   **SEC. 4. AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.**

8           There is authorized to be appropriated to carry out  
9   this Act \$15,000,000 for each of fiscal years 2027 through  
10  2032, to remain available until expended.