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(Original Signature of Member)

119TH CONGRESS  
2D SESSION

**H. R.**

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

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IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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

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**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 taged 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.

- (A) a State;
- (B) an Indian Tribe;
- (C) any acequia, land grant-merced, local government, water supplier, special district, conservation district, or municipal water district located in an eligible State;
- (D) any State, regional, or local authority located in an eligible State, the members of which include 1 or more organizations with water or power delivery authority;
- (E) a nonprofit conservation organization with a demonstrated history of working in partnership with 1 or more entities described in any of subparagraphs (A) through (D); or

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

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;

- (iv) to reduce water supply-demand imbalances;
- (v) to promote water recycling and other advanced water treatments to augment water supplies;
- (vi) to improve management or delivery of water resources;
- (vii) to address risks to water infrastructure from weather-related events and climate change;
- (viii) to provide or improve access to safe drinking water in communities that lack reliable access to adequate clean water supplies;
- (ix) to promote investment in the economies of rural communities, Tribal communities, or disadvantaged communities through water projects;
- (x) to enhance water-based recreational opportunities for the benefit of community members and the local recreational economy; or
- (xi) to encourage sustainable surface water or groundwater management; and

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

- (i) to conserve or enhance fish and wildlife habitat;
- (ii) to protect or improve water quality;
- (iii) to improve watershed health and function;
- (iv) to protect against invasive species;
- (v) to restore aspects of the natural ecosystem; or
- (vi) to maintain sustainable groundwater supplies for multiple uses, including 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.

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.—

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.

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-

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 Inter-  
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.

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.—

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.

6 (i) COMPLIANCE.—A multi-benefit water project nav-  
7 iger 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-

## 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.