

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

February 2, 2026

Andrea Travnicek
Assistant Secretary of the Interior for Water and Science
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20240

Re: Request for Declaration of Emergency for the Yakima-Tieton Main Canal Per Public Law 119-74

Dear Assistant Secretary Travnicek:

The joint explanatory statement that accompanied PL 119-74 requires the Bureau of Reclamation (BoR) to determine whether the current wildfire-damaged and landslide imperiled state of the Yakima-Tieton Main Canal (Canal), Yakima Project, Washington State is an emergency. As such we are writing today to urge you to swiftly determine that the state of the canal is an emergency and at risk of imminent failure.

The canal is 12 miles long and serves roughly 28,000 acres of irrigation in the otherwise arid upper Yakima Valley. While agriculture is the main beneficiary of the canal, it serves several purposes to the valley, including water delivery as a means of fire suppression for the surrounding municipalities and the maintenance of habitat for threatened fish species. Construction of the canal took place along the southern hillside of the Tieton River by BoR from 1908 to 1910 and it is currently managed by the Yakima-Tieton Irrigation District.

As a result of severe damage from the 2024 Retreat Fire, and landslide danger as a result of the December 2025 atmospheric river system that affected Washington State, the canal is, and remains, in a state of emergency. According to a U.S. Geological Survey post-fire debris flow hazard assessment¹ ([USGS Assessment](#)), nearly 100 percent of the canal alignment burned during the Retreat fire. Most of the drainage basins that cross the upper canal experienced high to moderate soil burn severity, increasing the risk of flooding and debris flows.

In a previous letter sent March 20, 2025 we highlighted other reports which include the Washington State Department of Natural Resources, Washington Geological Survey Report² ([WALERT Report](#))

¹ https://usgs.maps.arcgis.com/apps/dashboards/c09fa874362e48a9afe79432f2efe6fe#fire_id=ret2024

² Kate Mickelson et al, Washington State Department of Natural Resources, Washington Geological Survey, *Wildfire-Associated Landslide Emergency Response Team Report, Retreat Fire*, September 2024.

and the U.S. Forest Service' Burned Area Emergency Response report³ ([BAER Report](#)), provide data on the high likelihood of landslides, erosion, and further damage to Canal infrastructure within the next three to five years. These conditions were exacerbated by the recent atmospheric river system that hit the Pacific Northwest, which resulted in a declaration of a state of emergency for the state of Washington which was approved by the Federal Emergency Management Agency.⁴

In consideration of this information and at the directive of the language in the joint explanatory statement that accompanied PL 119-74, we ask that you move swiftly to determine that the condition of the canal constitutes an emergency and then promptly issue funding or financing authorized by section 9603(c) of Public Law 111-11 within thirty days of such determination. Further, we ask that this designation cover as much of the canal as is eminently reasonable.

The urgency of this situation is dire and requires immediate attention and intervention. Our shared constituents are counting on the Department of the Interior and Bureau of Reclamation to partner with the Yakima-Tieton Irrigation District in this critical effort to minimize the risk of imminent harm to public health and safety and economic viability for those that reside in the Yakima Basin.

Sincerely,



Dan Newhouse
Member of Congress



Patty Murray
United States Senator



Kim Schrier, M.D.
Member of Congress



Maria Cantwell
United States Senator

CC: Scott Cameron
Acting Commissioner
Bureau of Reclamation
1849 C Street NW
Washington DC 20240-0001

³ Zack Mondry, USFS Hydrologist, Burned Area Emergency Response, Retreat Fire, Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest, Naches Ranger District, *Hydrology and Watershed Specialist Report*, August 2024.

⁴ FEMA.gov. (2025, December 12). *President Donald J. Trump approves emergency declaration for State of Washington* / [fema.gov](https://www.fema.gov/press-release/20251212/president-donald-j-trump-approves-emergency-declaration-state-washington). Federal Emergency Management Agency. <https://www.fema.gov/press-release/20251212/president-donald-j-trump-approves-emergency-declaration-state-washington>