

**TESTIMONY OF THE HONORABLE JENNIFFER GONZALEZ-COLON  
REPRESENTATIVE OF PUERTO RICO. AT- LARGE  
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND WATER DEVELOPMENT  
MEMBER DAY HEARING. TUESDAY APRIL 9, 2019**

Chairwoman Kaptur, Ranking Member Simpson and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for holding this important hearing and allowing me to testify regarding my requests for the FY20 appropriations bill and accompanying report.

U.S. Army Corps projects are instrumental for restoring critical infrastructure and maintaining financial stability. In the case of Puerto Rico, the Army Corps oversees multiple projects in several municipalities on the island. Also, as you are probably aware, reconstruction and recovery efforts remain underway, and my constituents continue to face challenges tied to the devastation of the 2017 hurricane season.

One of the Corps projects that remains a priority is the Caño Martín Peña Ecosystem Restoration Project, located in the San Juan metropolitan area. The Caño Martín Peña community is located alongside a 3.75-mile-long tidal channel and is home to over 26 thousand residents, making it one of the most densely populated areas on the island. For decades, the community has struggled with frequent flooding resulting from debris and wastewater accumulation in the channel. Flooding also negatively impacts other neighboring communities in San Juan and the Luis Muñoz Marín International Airport.

To make matters worse, the hurricanes in 2017 exacerbated flooding problems by increasing the amount of debris that already clogged the channel and therefore increased the levels of pollution and health concerns that existed prior to the storms.

As you know, my district was not the only one affected by natural disasters in 2017 and 2018. Several other states and territories were impacted and most likely share similar hardships. It is partly due to projects like this that securing proper funds for the Corps is essential. As an effort to achieve this goal, I submitted a request to maintain the enacted level of funding of \$2.18 billion for the Corps construction account in Fiscal Year 2020. Additionally, I respectfully requested these funds be used to authorize no less than five new construction starts, or New Starts, and that no less than two of the five New Starts be an ecosystem restoration project.

According to the US Army Corps of Engineers, restoring ecosystem to their normal, self-regulated function remains a priority. Therefore, they should have the resources available to undertake this important task.

Lastly, I requested the inclusion of report language about the Caño Martín Peña Ecosystem Restoration project that recognizes the importance of the project, including its flood protection benefits, and encourages the Corps to work with the non-Federal sponsor to continue to the next phase at the earliest practicable opportunity.

In closing, the Government of Puerto Rico has already invested over \$100 million dollars in this project. It is currently on track to finalize the Preconstruction, Engineering and Design phase by

the end of the current fiscal year. I would like to acknowledge the leadership of my colleagues on the House and Senate with this issue, which has helped get the Caño Martín Peña Project to this stage. I would also like to recognize the diligent and dedicated work of ENLACE, the non-federal sponsor. I am confident their hard work and commitment will remain as an example for similar projects on the island and will continue to propel the project forward.

Thank you.