



U.S. House Passes Water Resources Development Act, Urging Completion of the Coyote Valley Dam Feasibility Study

(September 18, 2026 – Potter Valley, CA) -- One of the region's core long-term water strategies moved a step closer to reality this week. The U.S. House of Representatives passed the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) of 2026, directing the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to expedite a feasibility study for Coyote Valley Dam.

IWPC's mission is to protect long-term water reliability for the communities, farms, and ranches across the Russian River watershed, a responsibility that has taken on new urgency as PG&E moves to decommission the Potter Valley Project. IWPC has focused its efforts on securing the diversion rights and storage capacity needed to put that water to use and has identified modernizing and raising Coyote Valley Dam as the most important long-term investment in the region's water future. Raising the dam could roughly double the storage capacity of Lake Mendocino to its originally authorized height, increasing it up to 240,000 acre-feet or more of storage that would benefit the entire watershed. Modernizing it will provide important benefits to the community and listed salmon by addressing the persistent turbidity because of the dam's current design. A federal judge recently found that the Army Corps' operation of Coyote Valley Dam violated the Endangered Species Act because of the shocking amount of turbidity it releases downstream.

The Coyote Valley Dam provision was among several Northern California water and infrastructure priorities Rep. Jared Huffman advanced in this year's bill, reflecting his ongoing push for expedited review of the project to boost water supply and drought resilience across Mendocino County. Congressman Huffman's actions have also included seeking a dedicated appropriation for Fiscal Year 2027 to continue advancing the study.

Coyote Valley Dam was first authorized under the Flood Control Act of 1950, when Congress authorized it to be twice the size it is now, holding twice the water. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has been studying raising the dam, in partnership with IWPC, starting in 2025. The WRDA provision directs the Secretary of the Army to expedite that study, or general reevaluation report, and upon completion of the Study and further appropriations allow the Corps to move directly into preconstruction planning, engineering, and design if the completed study finds the project justified.

"This is a significant step forward for a project our region has identified as essential to our water future," said Dave Koball, an IWPC Alternate Commissioner. "Expanding storage at Coyote Valley Dam is the most important long-term investment we can make to secure water reliability for our communities, farms, and ranches, and has the added benefit of improving the health of the Russian River at the same time. It's a win-win for all of us, and this provision helps move that work forward."

The bill now moves to the U.S. Senate, which has introduced its own reauthorization measure, S. 4949, currently awaiting a floor vote.

IWPC recently retained a Federal lobbyist who will now be engaged in advancing the legislative and administrative actions required to move a Lake Mendocino expansion from concept to reality.

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