

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

June 27, 2024

The Honorable Linda L. Fagan
Commandant
United State Coast Guard
2703 Martin Luther King Jr. Avenue, SE
Washington, DC 20593

Dear Admiral Fagan:

We write today regarding the impending removal of the Monongahela Locks and Dam 3 (“Elizabeth Locks and Dam”) in Elizabeth, Pennsylvania, specifically to encourage the Coast Guard to continue its engagement with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) and provide whatever assistance it can to ensure safety along the river throughout the process of removing the locks and dam. We appreciate your partnership on this matter.

The Elizabeth Locks and Dam have been an integral component of the inland waterways system in Southwestern Pennsylvania for more than 100 years. However, the facility is prone to flooding which leads to shutdowns during high-water events. Removal of the Elizabeth Locks is part of a broader effort to modernize the river and will create a 30-mile-long stretch of continuously navigable waterway between Charleroi and Braddock, thereby reducing travel times for commercial and recreational vessels alike throughout the region.

Keeping this waterway safe and navigable in the long run is critical to the region’s economy and way of life. For decades, the Monongahela River has moved important materials that have helped build our infrastructure and power our economy, such as coal and steel. The river has also brought generations of families and loved ones together for recreational boating and fishing close to home. The Coast Guard is a valued partner on waterways projects, and their continued collaboration and support will be key to the success of the removal of the Elizabeth Locks and Dam and the broader efforts to modernize the Monongahela.

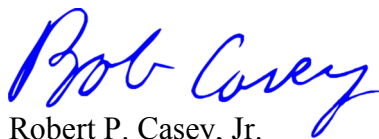
Starting in July, USACE will begin the lengthy process of removing the Elizabeth Locks and Dam. From conversations with USACE staff, we understand that the removal of the dam will take place between July and December, and that, after the first blast to remove an initial 50-foot section of the dam, water levels along the Monongahela River will fluctuate significantly for anywhere from 3 to 12 days. USACE staff have made it clear to us that the lock chamber will be closed during that period, and that it will be extremely dangerous for vessels to try to pass over the dam. As such, it will be critical to establish a robust enforcement presence along the river during that time frame to deter any commercial or recreational vessels from approaching the locks and dam. As part of our concern for boaters and commercial vessel safety, we are also aware that in this section of river the Aids to Navigation (ATON) are in need of the Coast Guard’s immediate attention, particularly those that are not drafting properly and need to be repositioned.

We understand and appreciate that the Coast Guard has expressed a willingness to enforce a “safety zone” near the blast site during that 3-to-12-day window. We know that with the Coast Guard facing staffing and recruitment challenges, moving boats and Coast Guard members to the Monongahela River will require detailed planning and coordination to ensure adequate coverage in other parts of the Nation. We recognize these challenges and encourage the Coast Guard to continue productive conversations with USACE, Pittsburgh District, to assure the safety of the public as the Elizabeth Locks and Dam removal is initiated and proceeds to completion.

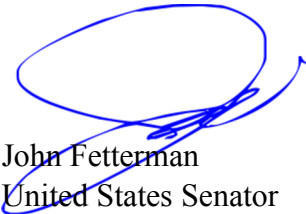
Additionally, it is our understanding that the Coast Guard anticipates needing 11 Coast Guard members to provide proper enforcement of the safety zone, which it anticipates being able to cover with funding already appropriated. However, should the Coast Guard encounter any budgetary issues that prevent it from deploying members or performing work on the Monongahela River for this safety zone, please alert us and our staffs as soon as you are able.

Thank you again for your assistance on this issue. Should you have any additional questions, comments, or concerns, do not hesitate to reach out to us or our staffs.

Sincerely,



Robert P. Casey, Jr.
United States Senator



John Fetterman
United States Senator



Chris Deluzio
Member of Congress