



November 18, 2009

The Honorable Jason Altmire
332 Cannon House Office Building
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Re: Considerations for the Next Water Resources Development Act (WRDA)

Dear Representative Altmire:

On behalf of the Water Resources Coalition (WRC), the leading coalition working to ensure that a comprehensive, national water resources policy is developed, implemented, and funded to provide a productive economy; a healthy aquatic ecology; and ensure public health and safety. Our organization is comprised of groups representing state and local governments, engineering and construction companies, ports, waterways, transportation services and conservation organizations that have an interest in a national water resources policy, we respectfully urge you to consider the following as the Congress begins to work on a new Water Resources Development Act (WRDA).

WRC believes first and foremost that a WRDA bill should be enacted on time and on schedule. WRDA reaffirms the government's pledge to authorize, modify, and improve projects, programs, and policies protecting the nation from floods and keeping our waterways open to navigation. Congress passed the last WRDA in 2007 and that was a critically important step towards expanding and modernizing the nation's water resources infrastructure. Regularly enacted WRDA authorizations fulfill these important missions.

Waterways programs foster economic development, facilitate trade and commerce, aid international competitiveness, stimulate employment, provide water recreation opportunities, enhance agricultural and industrial productivity, and augment our national defense. Historically, such programs have had numerous benefits - Flood damage reduction projects alone have prevented an estimated \$706 billion in damages - an eight-to-one return on the Federal government's investment; and Operations and Maintenance work provides an average of \$14.10 return for every dollar invested. In the Mississippi Valley and Tributary System, more than \$24 in damages is saved for each dollar spent.

Consider that the Harbor Maintenance Tax (HMT) and Harbor Maintenance Trust Fund (HMTF) were established in 1986 to fund the operation and maintenance of Federal ports and harbors. Since 2002, there has been a growing gap between the annual amount of HMT collected and the annual amount of appropriations from the HMTF. Enough HMT is collected each year to meet all of the nation's authorized harbor maintenance needs, but only a little more than half of it is appropriated for harbor maintenance. Congress should enact legislation setting the obligation limitation each year equal to projected revenues in the Harbor Maintenance Trust Fund. It is vital that this principal be included in the next WRDA bill.

improve, prevent, save
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We urge you to oppose efforts to add additional layers of regulation designed to create impediments to improving waterways infrastructure. All waterways projects undertaken by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers already undergo unparalleled economic and environmental review. Corps environmental policies require a thorough cost/benefit analysis which seeks to maximize net national economic development benefits, consistent with protecting the environment. The data show that the Corps is meeting its obligations and complying with the law.

Increased funding to the states for water resource planning is vitally important to encourage statewide collaborative efforts to avert future crisis such as flooding or drought. Preparedness is a cornerstone for ensuring future water supply availability for population and economic growth and new challenges to address environmental needs. At least \$100 million should be provided on a cost-shared basis in the Civil Works program to help states develop strategies to address their future challenges and needs.

Section 22 of the Water Resources Development Act of 1974 provided the basis for comprehensive water resource planning. Congress made improvements to the program in WRDA 2007 and small additional adjustments would provide state, tribal, interstate organizations and local leadership tools to establish and sustain Corps/non-Federal partnerships for integrated and coordinated planning, design and management. Congress should facilitate the partnership by specifying that Corps assistance be available as the non-Federal partner may request except the cost of Federal assistance may not exceed a state's expenditure on a state water resources plan. The annual appropriation ceiling for the program should be increased to help meet the water resource challenges of the 21st Century.

Section 2037 of WRDA 2007 made a major step in the right direction by providing the Corps of Engineers with a regional sediment management authority to accomplish the objectives of coordinating projects and their impacts. However, it is severely limited in that it only applies (a) where there is a Federal navigation project, and (b) where there is sufficient sand available from the dredging of that project to meet the regional water resource planning and management needs. This restriction hamstring non-Federal interests and the Corps in making sure the multiple purposes of reducing coastal hazards, using adaptive management for existing projects, coordinating new and existing water resource projects to save significant taxpayer costs, and assuring that the impacts of planned or existing projects have a beneficial, rather than a harmful, impact on environmental resources. The restriction contained in Section 2037 also limits affected stakeholders from having input into the planning and management of Federal water resource projects.

Finally, Reduced or excluded beach nourishment projects in the President's budget has led to a situation where Members of Congress make requests to add funding for projects in their districts based on requests from their constituents. While there is a process in place to assure that these requests are with the "capability" of the Corps of Engineers, there is no process in existence that enables the Corps to provide Congress with information that would prioritize beach nourishment projects based on factors such as public safety, sea level rise, environmental resources, etc.

We appreciate the challenging process that the Committee is undertaking and offer our assistance as the process moves forward.

Sincerely,



Brian Pallasch
Co-Chairman
American Society of Civil Engineers



Marco Giamberardino
Co-Chairman
The Associated General Contractors of America