

REAUTHORIZE THE WATER RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT ACT IN 2010



BACKGROUND

Our nation's water resources are critical to our economy, our infrastructure, public safety, and the preservation and enhancement of our environmental resources. Much of our water infrastructure is aging, compromising its ability to meet the needs for which it was created.

WRC MESSAGE

The Water Resources Development Act Should be Enacted on Schedule to Meet the Nation's Economic, Safety, and Transportation Needs. 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. Regular authorizations of water resources development projects fulfill these important missions. Accordingly, **Congress must regularly authorize and invest in new waterways projects to secure our nation.**

Waterways Projects Grow the Economy. 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.

Flood Control Projects Protect at Risk Communities. Failure to properly invest in flood protection efforts, which have been underway since the late 1800's, would leave hundreds of thousands of homes, businesses and other critical infrastructure vulnerable to devastating floodwaters. Flood damage reduction projects alone have prevented an estimated \$706 billion in damages – an eight-to-one return on the Federal government's investment.

Return "Trust" to the Harbor Maintenance Trust Fund. 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. The cumulative HMTF surplus exceeded \$5 billion in FY08 and grows each year. 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. Put trust back in the HMTF by enacting legislation setting the obligation limitation each year equal to projected revenues in HMTF.

Congress and the Administration Should Create and Fund a Program to Rehabilitate the Nation's Aging Dams to Ensure Public Safety. Dams are a critical part of the nation's infrastructure and provide vital benefits such as flood protection, water supply, hydropower, irrigation and recreation. The Association of State Dam Safety Officials (ASDSO) estimates that \$36.2 billion is needed to rehabilitate dams across the nation, with \$10.1 billion to address the most critical dams that pose a direct risk to human life should they fail. Needed repairs to publicly owned non-federal dams are estimated at \$5.9 billion.

Create a National Levee Safety Program. Congress should enact legislation to establish a national levee safety program that builds on the recommendations of the National Committee on Levee Safety and modeled on the successful National Dam Safety Program. The federal government must accept the responsibility for the safety of all federally funded and regulated levees. The act should require the federal and state governments to conduct mandatory safety inspections for all levees and establish a national inventory of levees.

Limit Liability for Levee Design and Construction. Congress should provide liability protection to entities directly involved in the evaluation, design, engineering, or construction of

levees built according to plans specified and approved by the federal government. Unless the liability risks to the design and engineering community are limited, resources will become unavailable to verify that levees throughout the United States comply with FEMA safety guidelines.

Increase and Facilitate Support for Greater State, Tribal, and Local Water Resources Planning. Section 22 of the Water Resources Development Act of 1974 provided the basis for comprehensive water resources planning. Congress made improvements to the program in WRDA 2007. 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.

Regional Sediment Management. 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 hamstrings 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.

Increase Funding for Beach Nourishment. Reduced funding for beach nourishment projects forces some Members of Congress to 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 within the "capability" of the Corps of Engineers, there is no process 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. Congress should mandate a report from the Corps that recommends a science-based method of prioritizing beach nourishment projects, and urges support from the Committee.

Climate Adaption Partnerships. As part of helping state and local governments address the effects of climate change, the Corps should be authorized to receive a significant proportion of the state/local carbon allowances for adaptation initiatives. Revenues from the allowances should be dedicated to preparing water resources projects for the impacts of climate change. Expected sea level rises, increased droughts, and extreme weather effects will have a particular influence on Corps projects and programs, and protecting those investments should be a key consideration.

*The **Water Resources Coalition** was established in 2007 to promote the development, implementation and funding of a comprehensive national water resources policy. With member organizations representing state and local governments, conservation, engineering and construction, ports, waterways and transportation services, the Coalition works to ensure that a comprehensive, national water resources policy is developed, implemented and funded to provide a sustainable, productive economy; a healthy aquatic ecology; and public health and safety. For more information, visit the Water Resources Coalition Web site at www.waterresourcescoalition.org.*