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Voinovich Subcommittee Hears Testimony on Administration WRDA 2000 Proposal

On 23 May 2000, the Transportation and Infrastructure (T/I) Subcommittee of the Senate Environment and Public Works (EPW) Committee received testimony on the [Administration's Water Resources Development Act \(WRDA\) of 2000](#) from the Department of the Army, the Corps of Engineers and non-Federal interests.

Subcommittee Chairman George V. [Voinovich](#) (R-OH) opened the hearing by emphasizing that WRDA 2000 is necessary to return Corps authorizations to the two-year cycle and keep commitments to sponsors. He reiterated the theme of the 16 May hearing on missions and backlogs: "The appropriations for the Corps' program have not been adequate and, as a result, there is a backlog of over 500 projects that will cost the federal government \$38 billion to complete." He noted, "I recognize that budget allocations and Corps appropriations are beyond the purview of this Committee. But I believe the backlog issue should impact the way we approach WRDA 2000 in three very important ways."

- "First, we need to control the mission creep of the Corps of Engineers." In this connection, the Chairman expressed concerns about environmental infrastructure and the Administration's brownfields proposal.
- "The second thing we need to do in WRDA 2000 is make sure that the projects we are authorizing meet the highest standard of engineering, economic and environmental analysis."
- "Finally, we have to preserve the partnerships and cost sharing principles of the Water Resources Development Act of 1986."

Senator Lincoln [Chafee](#) (R-RI) strongly supported authorizing Corps participation in brownfields remediation. He noted, "...more needs to be done to cleanup the 450,000 brownfields sites nationwide. To provide additional critical funding, I introduced the State and Local Brownfields Revitalization Act of 2000 . The bill authorizes \$100 million annually to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to conduct brownfields remediation and restoration at publicly-owned brownfields sites that are tied to waterways and watershed ecosystems. I believe this authority will contribute to the revitalization of a significant number of brownfields sites nationwide."

Senator Max [Baucus](#) (D-MT), ranking member of both the T/I Subcommittee and the full EPW Committee, expressed support for enacting WRDA 2000. "Mr. Chairman, it is my hope that the Committee can work to have the complete WRDA 2000 ready for full Committee consideration before the July 4th recess, including the Everglades restoration section of the Administration's bill. Although I voiced some concerns about the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan at the Committee hearing the week before last, ... I support Everglades restoration"

In his written statement, Senator Daniel Patrick [Moynihan](#) (D-NY) discussed the New York/New Jersey Harbor Navigation Study. He noted, "The Chief's Report for the New York/New Jersey Harbor (NY/NJ) Navigation Study recommends deepening the entrance channel to 53 feet, and all other major channels in the Port to a depth of 50 feet. This report represents three years of comprehensive study, authorized in WRDA 96, on the navigation needs of the Port of New York and New Jersey. I support the report in its entirety."

Senator Frank [Lautenberg](#) (D-NJ) also strongly supported the NY/NJ navigation project noting that "this is an extremely important project for our region, and I hope the Subcommittee will authorize this project..." He also emphasized deep draft cost sharing: "Mr. Chairman, as you know, the current cost-sharing for navigation projects greater than 45-feet is 50/50. This formula was established 14 years ago, before we were aware of the need to deepen our Harbors to accommodate new generations of container ships. It is time that we bring this cost-sharing into the 21st Century and include a provision that revises the cost-sharing to reflect a more fair distribution of costs, Mr. Chairman." Finally, he addressed the Administration's brownfields proposal, "I support efforts to increase the federal government's assistance with state and local brownfields projects."

Senator Joseph [Lieberman](#) (D-CT) emphasized his support for the Administration's brownfields proposal: "...revitalizing waterfront brownfields into viable parks, residences, and commercial property can hold the key to reinvigorating city cores. ...With a clear authority, and additional resources, the Corps of Engineers could bring even more to the many American communities ready and willing to step up to the plate with a matching commitment of their own resources."

While Senator Craig Thomas (R-WY) did not make an opening statement, he did express concerns during questioning about minimizing competition with the private sector, contracting and the need to involve Congress appropriately in changes to the Corps management structure.

The Federal witness panel included Dr. Joseph [Westphal](#), Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works accompanied by Mr. Michael Davis, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Policy and Legislation, and MG Hans A. Van Winkle, the Army Corps of Engineers' Deputy Commander for Civil Works. Dr. Westphal explained the [Administration's WRDA proposal](#) and also suggested principles to guide the development of WRDA 2000: (1) technically sound projects, (2) the central importance of cost sharing and (3) fiscal responsibility.

The Honorable Doug [Sutherland](#), County Executive, Pierce County, Washington, was the first witness on the non-Federal panel. He urged the Subcommittee to "authorize the Corps of Engineers to participate with local agencies in planning and implementing ecosystem restoration projects in the Puget Sound region, as proposed in S. 2228 and the Administration's WRDA proposal."

Ms Lillian [Borrone](#), Director of Port Commerce for The Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, presented data and analysis supporting the need for channel depths recommended in the recent Chief of Engineers Report. Ms Barrone posed the questions "what is the value of this project to the nation and why should the nation invest here?" She responded, "... as this Committee well knows, the purpose of an Army Corps feasibility study is to determine whether or not particular channel improvements derive national economic benefits. The Corps study found that the project would, in fact, realize an annual benefit totaling \$238.5 million in national transportation cost savings."

Mr. R. Barry [Palmer](#), Executive Director of DINAMO, the Association for the Development of Inland Navigation in America's Ohio Valley testified in support of modernizing locks and dams on the Ohio River Navigation System and the need to authorize improvements to Greenup and Myers Locks and Dams in WRDA 2000. Mr. Palmer also recommended that Congress "continue with the cost-sharing arrangements for these projects as established by the Water Resources Development Act of 1986. The tax levels on diesel fuel consumed by towboats operating on America's inland navigation system are sufficient to fund our appropriate share of the costs of lock and dam modernization."

The Honorable Dannel [Malloy](#), Mayor of the City of Stamford, Connecticut, testified on behalf of the National Association of Local Government Environmental Professionals (NALGEP) in support of Corps brownfields participation. He concluded, "NALGEP and the City of Stamford encourage Congress to move ahead to make the Corps' brownfields mission a part of your overall strategy to strengthen and empower local communities to create environmental quality, economic vitality, and federal-local cooperation. The involvement of the Corps in brownfields revitalization is needed at the local level, is consistent with the Corps' existing mission and competencies, and will bring a high return on American investment."

Mr. Howard [Marlowe](#), President of the American Coastal Coalition, testified in support of shore protection projects. He emphasized, "The American Coastal Coalition as well as most local coastal governments and private citizens want to restore America's eroded beaches and preserve the peoples' opportunity to use this outstanding environmental resource. Our preferred approach to accomplish this goal is to replenish the sand that has been lost because of 300 years of human intervention along the coast. This approach costs money, but it is far preferable to the cheaper alternative of building seawalls to protect coastal property."