



Action Item: Consideration of Letter to the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure in Support of Federal Water Resources Development Act of 2013

Background

On May 15, 2013, the Senate voted 83-14 to approve S. 601, the \$12.2 billion Water Resources Development Act (WRDA). Senators Barbara Boxer (D-CA) and David Vitter (R-LA) led the debate on the first WRDA bill to pass in six years.

The legislation will fund U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) activities on flood protection and levee projects, ports, drinking water, levees, dams and environmental restoration projects. One of the largest projects identified for funding is the American River Watershed Common Features Project in the Natomas Basin which would improve flood protection for the Sacramento region. The bill would also support the pilot Water Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act program which would provide low-interest loans for large water projects such as water recycling, habitat restoration, and groundwater cleanup.

The House will now consider its own WRDA though the specific timeline for action has not been announced. While there is significant momentum, some House Republicans have expressed concern that Senate version gives too much authority to the Corps on project selection and environmental organizations have stated that the bill's project streamlining provisions could limit input by other federal agencies, stakeholders and the public.

California Water Commission staff has contacted and will be working with Congress member Matsui's office to obtain updated information. Staff is also coordinating with DWR which is actively working to represent California's interests in the proposed WRDA legislation.

Commission staff has drafted a general letter of support for consideration at the July meeting.

Legislative Summary of S. 601, Water Resources Development Act of 2013 (prepared by Congressional Budget Office April 2013)

S. 601 would provide federal funding and authorize the Army Corps of Engineers to construct water projects for mitigating storm damage, restoring ecosystems, and reducing erosion on inland and intracoastal waterways. The legislation also would authorize the agency to establish grant programs to assist local and state governments with levee safety and rehabilitation programs. Finally, it would provide loans or loan guarantees to state and local governments and certain nongovernmental entities to complete water infrastructure projects.

Water Resource Projects. Provides \$3.4 billion from 2014-2018 to construct water projects that are in the federal interest if certain conditions are met. According to the Corps, 27 projects meet the criteria. The four largest are the Mississippi Coastal Improvement Program, the American River Watershed Common Features Project in Natomas Basin, California, the Sabine Neches Waterway in Texas and Louisiana, and the Fargo-Moorhead Metro in Minnesota and North Dakota.

Policy Reforms. Authorizes the Corps to implement pilot programs to stabilize riverbanks and reduce erosion on inland and intracoastal waterways; to construct projects to manage risk from floods; reduce damage from storms; and improve navigation of the nation's harbors. It would increase funding for other activities, including flood control, floodplain management, project modifications to improve the environment, ecosystem restoration, and assistance to states for water resource development. The Congressional Budget Office estimates the cost at about \$1 billion over the 2014-2018 period.

Regional and Nonproject Provisions. The Corps would establish regional partnerships with state and local governments, other federal agencies, and interested parties to address regional priorities for water resources, including restoring ecosystems, controlling invasive species, and mitigating impacts from floods and extreme weather. The bill would authorize the Corps to conduct studies and construct projects that meet the water resource priorities in each region. CBO estimates that implementing this title would cost \$271 million over the 2014-2018 period.

Levee Safety. The Corps—in consultation with FEMA—will develop a levee safety program, including a national database to classify flood risk at federal and nonfederal levees, levee safety guidelines, and a public education program. The agencies would create an independent board to advise the Corps and Congress on consistent approaches to levee safety. The Corps also would provide technical assistance and training to state and tribal governments for safety programs to reduce flood damage. Under the bill, the federal share of costs for those activities would be limited to 65 percent of total costs. Finally, it would authorize the Corps to establish grant programs to state and tribal governments to develop safety programs for levees and provide funding assistance to nonfederal partners for rehabilitating levees. CBO estimates that implementing this title at \$443 million over the 2014-2018 period.

The bill also provides funding and policy direction for harbor maintenance, pilot projects for loans or loan guarantees to state and local governments to complete water infrastructure projects, reduce storm damage and flood risk, improve navigation, restore ecosystems, reauthorize the national dam safety program, and authorize the Corps to carry out water resources projects to restore water infrastructure and natural features, such as wetlands that help mitigate storm damages.

Contact

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Attachment: Draft Letter to House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure

DRAFT LETTER

Dear _____:

The California Water Commission, whose mission is to support projects and programs that further the development of sustainable water resources management and a healthy environment in California, respectfully requests your support of comprehensive federal Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) legislation.

The bipartisan bill approved by the Senate in May will help modernize and preserve our nation's critical water infrastructure, provide critical flood protection, fund innovation in water management, and protect ecosystems and habitat. We urge the House to continue the momentum to advance the federal government's strategic investments in our nation's water future.

One of the statutory responsibilities of the California Water Commission is to present information to Congress on appropriations for flood control projects under the jurisdiction of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and reclamation projects planned by the Bureau of Reclamation. In recent years, the state, federal and local governments have made significant progress to improve flood management and protection, especially in the San Joaquin Valley which has one of the highest flood risks in the nation. As outlined in the recently-released *California's Flood Future Report* prepared by the Department of Water Resources, there still exists an immediate need for more than \$50 billion to complete flood management improvements and projects in the state, or face tremendous loss of life, property, infrastructure and ecosystems from the inevitable flooding. The federal government, working with state and local agencies, must take steps now to reduce risk and lay the groundwork for long-term solutions. Passage of a WRDA bill will go a long way toward meeting these objectives.

In addition to flood protection and related investments, California is on a path of significant progress to ensure better and more efficient water management. Recent actions include implementing statewide conservation requirements for urban users and agriculture, making significant new state and local investments in infrastructure and integrated water management, and developing a comprehensive Bay Delta Conservation Plan to help meet the co-equal goals of ecosystem restoration and water supply reliability for 25 million Californians and 3 million acres of farmland.

We strongly urge the passage of a WRDA bill that will provide critical funding and improve the federal-state coordination and cooperation that is necessary to manage our vital water infrastructure resources.

Sincerely,

Joseph Byrne
Chairman, California Water Commission