



# **The Water Resources Reform and Development Act of 2014 Conference Report**

By

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The bipartisan, bicameral conference report on the Water Resources Reform and Development Act (WRRDA) authorizes 34 critical Army Corps projects. These projects, which have undergone Congressional scrutiny and have completed reports of the Chief of Engineers, will strengthen our nation's infrastructure to protect lives and property, restore vital ecosystems to preserve our natural heritage, and maintain navigation routes for commerce and the movement of goods to keep us competitive in the global marketplace. The highlights include:

- **Improvements for Commerce and Increased Investments in Ports**

Ports and waterways in the United States moved over 2.3 billion tons of goods in 2012. These ports and waterways require dredging, maintenance and modernization to ensure the efficient, safe and timely movement of goods.

The conference report authorizes improvements to ports around the country. These improvements at ports such as Jacksonville, FL and Boston, MA, will help expand the flow of commerce and improve goods movement.

Each year only roughly half of the \$1.8 billion collected in the Harbor Maintenance Trust Fund (HMTF) for maintenance and dredging is being used to support projects. The conference report establishes minimum authorization levels for HMTF funding in future fiscal years, with the goal of achieving full use by 2025.

The conference report sets priorities that address the needs of larger ports, like Los Angeles, Long Beach, and New Orleans, which are some of the busiest ports in the world. The conference report also addresses smaller ports, the Great Lakes, and the sea ports that are large donors to the fund, which will improve the flow of commerce at our ports and waterways. It also helps underserved ports that have not been maintained at their authorized depths or widths in the last six years.

- **Protection for Communities from Extreme Weather and Natural Disasters**

After the devastation caused by Hurricane Katrina and Superstorm Sandy, it became clear that communities needed assistance to protect lives and property and improve infrastructure resiliency from the impacts of extreme weather and natural disasters.

The conference report encourages the Corps to use resilient construction techniques that are more durable and sustainable in the face of extreme weather. It also requires the National Academy of Sciences and Government Accountability Office to evaluate options for reducing risk from extreme weather events and ensure the Corps is using best practices to address threats from floods, droughts, and storms. The conference report improves responses to extreme weather events by providing the Corps with new authority to conduct rapid, post-disaster watershed assessments and implement small flood control and ecosystem restoration projects.

- **Flood Protection and Safety Improvements for Communities**

The conference report authorizes critical flood control and coastal hurricane protection projects across the country, including rebuilding the levees in the Natomas Basin of

Sacramento, CA, and constructing the Morganza to the Gulf project, which will protect coastal communities across Louisiana.

Of the 100,000 miles of levees across the country, almost 85 percent of these are locally owned, operated, and maintained -- making it extremely difficult to collect information about the levees or estimate their reliability and leaving the public at risk if a levee fails. The conference report enhances the safety of our Nation's levees, establishing a National Levee Safety Initiative that promotes consistent safety standards and effectively communicates to the public the risks of living behind a levee.

Another challenge that communities face is that our nation's dams are improperly maintained and are aging quickly, which poses significant safety and economic risks. Of the 84,000 dams in America, the average dam is 52 years old, and 14,000 are considered high-hazard, meaning failure would cause significant loss of life and damage to the surrounding area. The conference report increases funding for dam inspections and maintenance, provides stronger safety requirements, upgrades emergency preparedness plans in order to prevent dam failures, and improves recovery plans in the event of dam failures.

- **Ecosystem Protection**

The conference report authorizes numerous projects to restore our precious ecosystems and preserve our natural heritage, including four projects critical to the ongoing restoration of the Florida Everglades and multiple projects to restore Louisiana's valuable coastal wetlands.

The conference report prioritizes ecosystem restoration projects that address identified threats to public health and preserve or restore ecosystems of national significance. It is also addresses important ocean and coastal resiliency issues, allowing the Corps to carry out ocean and coastal resiliency projects in coordination with a broad range of stakeholders, including states, federal agencies, and NGOs.

- **Initiatives to Address High Priority, Regional Water Resources Issues**

Waterways do not stop at the state border, and greater cooperation is needed to address issues that affect different regions of the country. The conference report focuses on regional initiatives to address important water resource issues that impact communities located near river basins and coastal areas across the country.

These initiatives authorize restoration of important ecosystems along the Atlantic coast, control invasive species in the Columbia River, repair water infrastructure in Western states, authorize environmental restoration and navigation on the Middle Mississippi River, address extreme weather impacts in the Northern Rockies, and reauthorize successful programs to restore the Chesapeake Bay, the Rio Grande River, and the Lower Columbia River.

- **Innovative Financing Tools for Infrastructure Investments**  
The conference report creates innovative financing tools to invest in water infrastructure. The Water Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act (WIFIA) is a five-year pilot program to allow the Corps and the Environmental Protection Agency to provide direct loans and loan guarantees for construction of critical water infrastructure projects, including levee and flood control projects, drinking water systems, and wastewater treatment plants. This program is modeled after the successful Transportation Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act (TIFIA) program.
- **Accelerated Project Delivery, Increased Flexibility, and Local Participation**  
The conference report requires concurrent environmental reviews and ensures collaboration among all agencies involved to accelerate delivery of Corps projects. It also establishes a three-year deadline for feasibility studies and increases the flexibility for non-federal sponsors of Corps projects. The conference report creates two pilot programs to expand the local role in project implementation.