



WRITTEN STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD

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ON BEHALF OF THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF COUNTIES

AT THE HEARING

AMERICA'S WATER INFRASTRUCTURE NEEDS AND CHALLENGES

**BEFORE THE COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC WORKS
UNITED STATES SENATE**

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Thank you Chairman Barrasso, Ranking Member Carper and members of the committee, for the opportunity to testify on “America’s Water Infrastructure Needs and Challenges” within the context of the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA).

My name is Julie Ufner. I have served as Associate Legislative Director for Environment, Energy and Land Use at the National Association of Counties (NACo) for more than 15 years. During that time, I have worked on many issues related to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps), National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), U.S. Department of Energy and more.

On behalf of NACo, we are pleased to weigh in on water infrastructure needs and challenges in our counties, especially our rural western counties, and to address potential next steps for a WRDA package that may be considered in Congress in the coming months.

About NACo

Founded in 1935, NACo is the only national organization that represents county governments in the United States, bringing together county officials to advocate with a collective voice on national policy, exchange ideas and build new leadership skills, pursue transformational county solutions, enrich the public’s understanding of county government and exercise exemplary leadership in public service.

About America’s Counties

Counties are highly diverse across the nation, and vary immensely in natural resources, social and political systems, cultural, economic and structural circumstances, and public health and environmental responsibilities. Counties range in area from 26 square miles (Arlington County, Virginia) to 87,860 square miles (North Slope Borough, Alaska). The population of counties varies from Loving County, Texas, with just under 100 residents, to Los Angeles County, California, which is home to nearly ten million people. Of the nation’s 3,069 counties, approximately 70 percent are considered “rural,” with populations less than 50,000, and 50 percent of these have populations below 25,000. At the same time, there are more than 120 major urban counties, which collectively provide essential services to more than 130 million people each day.

County governments exist to deliver public services at the local level, and we are accountable to our constituents and communities as well as to state and federal authorities. At the leadership level, county elected officials are tasked with shaping county and community policies and investments that drive economic and community development, safeguard our citizens and community investments, and promote public health and wellbeing. In fulfilling this mission, counties are not only subject to state and federal regulations, but also help to implement these regulations at the local level.

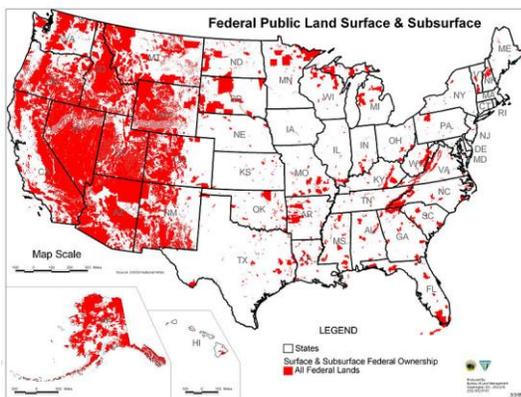
In the West, the federal government owns roughly 635-640 million acres – through the Bureau of Land Management (248 million acres); the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Forest Service (193 million acres); the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (89 million acres); and the National Park Service (80 million acres) – or one-third of all land in the United States. Approximately 62 percent of counties have federal public land within their jurisdictions.

Unlike private property, this land is not taxable by local governments, but removing this land from the local tax rolls does not relieve local governments of their mandated responsibilities. Counties with public lands in their jurisdictions often provide critical services on those lands, including law enforcement, search and rescue, fire management, solid waste disposal and emergency medical services.

Counties of all sizes play a key role in water issues.

The subject of today’s hearing is important to counties across the United States, because counties and water issues are inextricably linked, and counties are tasked with protecting the environment, ensuring public health and safety, and strengthening the economic vitality of our communities.

In western counties, the water issues only become more crucial. The first map, on the left, shows the public lands ownership in the United States and the second map, on the right, shows the differences in topographic elevations.



The differences you see in these maps create additional issues related to water for western counties. First, counties are unable to collect property taxes on any of the federal public land within their boundaries, severely limiting their ability to raise revenue to meet local infrastructure needs. Further, not only are population centers further apart, the land in the West is often more mountainous and arid, often leading to higher cost for roads, power lines, water and other public services. Perhaps the most notable of these challenges is access to clean, reliable sources of water.

While water resources are a huge issue in all counties, today I will focus my remarks on the specific sets of challenges western counties face and how these issues can be addressed in WRDA.

Water infrastructure is integral to counties' ability to protect public safety and grow our economies.

As major owners of public infrastructure – we own and operate 45 percent of public roads and nearly 40 percent of bridges, and are involved in the operations of a third of the nation's transit systems and airports – counties play an essential role in America's transportation and water infrastructure networks. Every year, we invest more than \$120 billion on our infrastructure to facilitate everything from Americans' daily commutes to the shipping of goods around the globe.

Our western counties own a wide variety of infrastructure that is directly impacted by WRDA and Corps policies – from a port in the Borough of Juneau, Alaska to the Lowndes County Port in inland Mississippi, from Los Alamos County, New Mexico's drinking water service to wastewater treatment facilities in Maui County, Hawaii, and from dams in King County, Washington to levees in Navajo County, Arizona and flood control channels in Orange County, California.

Counties and our local economies are huge economic drivers for the nation, especially in the West. Counties directly employ 3.6 million people, and invest \$554.4 billion each year in services and programs to help our communities remain dynamic and protect our residents' safety and quality of life. But, none of this would be possible without the tax base to support it.

Rural counties' economies are often built on a foundation provided by agriculture, manufacturing and natural resources, and benefit from a robust, safe transportation system that includes harbors, ports and inland waterways.

A good example of this hails from the Borough of Juneau in the panhandle of southeast Alaska, 900 air miles north of Seattle and 600 air miles southeast of Anchorage. With a current population of 33,026, it is comprised of 3,254 square miles, of which 96.8 percent is federal land. Since there is only 3.2 percent of taxable land in the borough, the economy is heavily dependent on government, tourism, mining and fishing, and the Borough's Docks and Harbor played an integral part in the county's \$2.6 billion economy in 2016.

In the realm of water, counties play a key role as both co-regulators and regulated entities in protecting the environment and providing public water services for our residents and businesses. As regulators, counties are often responsible for controlling water pollution at the local level. We may enact floodplain and illicit discharge rules, set building code requirements, adopt setbacks for land use plans, and may be responsible for environmental restoration, water recharge areas, green infrastructure, water conservation programs and other programs. Additionally, as owners of public safety infrastructure, counties are often required to comply with federal and state requirements.

Counties play an indispensable role in addressing public health and safety issues such as preparing and responding to flooding threats and other water challenges and hazards.

While state statutes and organizational structures vary, local emergency management responsibilities are most commonly vested in county governments. Following a disaster, local emergency managers are often first on the scene and play a key role in coordinating local emergency management efforts and working to mitigate damage from disasters. Other key county staff involved in pre- and post-disaster efforts include local police, sheriffs, firefighters, 911 call center staff, public health officials, floodplain managers and others.

When flooding occurs, pipes burst, levees break or dams overflow, residents, businesses and visitors call us for help. This was demonstrated over and over in 2017 with Hurricanes Harvey, Irma and Maria, as well as the massive wildfires in both Northern and Southern California. In the aftermath of disasters such as these, we coordinate and help fund clean-up, recovery and rebuilding so that our residents can return to their lives as quickly as possible.

Custer County is a rural county of 11,135 residents and over 3,793 square miles in southeastern Montana that is heavily dependent on ranching and agriculture. In 2016, it contributed \$519.7 million to the nation's GDP. Approximately 80 percent of residents and businesses in its county seat, Miles City, are located within the natural floodplain or floodway at the confluence of the Yellowstone and Tongue Rivers. In 2015, the city and the county joined forces and in 2016 a contract was signed with the Corps to undertake a Section 205 Feasibility Study on how to protect the community from a 500-year flood. The study is anticipated to be completed in 2019. Although the Study and potential related levee construction are relatively standard, Miles City and Custer County are the first in Montana to undertake a project of this significance, cost, and duration.

The bottom line is, decisions that county leaders make every day about water, land use and economic development influence local and national prosperity, shape how communities grow and contribute to Americans' quality of life.

Throughout the West, counties face unique water challenges.

Counties across nation are facing a combination of factors that impact their ability to deal with water issues, such as increased federal and state mandates, reduced revenue from property taxes, and the growing cost of services and aging infrastructure.

This is further complicated in the West, where counties have huge tracts of federal lands within their borders. While the federal government does provide payments to counties to replace forgone property taxes and to defray the costs incurred by counties for services they provide on public lands, these funds are typically less than what counties would receive from property taxes and are unreliable for budget purposes since they are tied up in the annual appropriations process. For example, both McKenzie County, North Dakota and Owyhee County, Idaho

receive just \$0.37 cents per acre of public land; the federal government owns 33.1 percent of lands in McKenzie County and 74.1 percent in Owyhee County.

The landscape in the West is dominated by forests and mountains, which leave counties vulnerable to wildfires and ice jams, and ultimately flooding events. WRDA projects can help them strengthen local resiliency.

This past year, Park County, a rural county of 29,228 residents in northwestern Wyoming, was beset by both mountain flooding and ice jams in its five rivers and tributaries – North and South Fork, Shoshone, Greybull, Wood and Clarks Fork Rivers. Since 80.9 percent of the county’s 6,979 square miles is public lands, including a large portion of Yellowstone National Park, the county’s 29,228 residents live on just 19.1 percent of the county’s land and a portion of that is designated as floodplain. Spring of 2017 brought some of the worst flooding in memory, and a disaster declaration was signed by the president that summer to address the damage caused to the county’s roads and bridges. The county is now working closely with the Corps and the Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA) to repair the roads. While most of the funding will come from FEMA, the Corps has been involved in the review and permitting of specific infrastructure improvements impacting the rivers.

While El Paso County, Colorado is considered “urban,” with a population of close to 640,000 residents, it includes a very diverse mix of urban, suburban and rural areas. The county lies in east central Colorado and encompasses more than 2,100 square miles, twice the size of Rhode Island, and contains over 113,857 acres of land within its jurisdiction. The western part of El Paso County is extremely mountainous and the eastern part is largely prairie land with strong agricultural components. Despite being one of the most populous counties in Colorado, El Paso County faces constant risk of wildfires, drought and flooding. In the past several years, the county has had major wildfires in the Waldo Canyon and Black Forest areas, totaling about \$40 million in damage and burning more than 32,500 acres. These fires have significantly changed the landscape; the trees and vegetation that once protected the area from stormwater runoff is now gone, resulting in dangerous flash floods. Since then, the county has worked with several federal agencies, including the Corps, to strengthen pre- and post-disaster mitigation in the county.

While not a WRDA project, Tuolumne County, California, with a population of just under 54,000, is working with their utilities district to ensure an adequate water supply to approximately 90 percent of the county’s residents and businesses. Currently, the only water source in the county for both irrigation and consumption is an old wooden flume and ditch system constructed in the 1850’s that spans more than four miles in heavily forested lands near Stanislaus National Forest. Unfortunately, the Stanislaus National Forest is dramatically overgrown in the area containing the wooden flume, leaving it vulnerable to wildfire. Destruction of the flume would take more than 500 days to repair. This would completely devastate the local economy, which contributed nearly \$2 billion to the national GDP in 2016. Further, the county serves several disadvantaged communities that would be particularly impacted by a major disaster.

Our nation's water infrastructure in the West is aging rapidly and replacement needs are fast outpacing available funds. According to the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE), infrastructure such as harbors and ports, inland waterways, dams, levees, water and wastewater, and roads and bridges are failing. This is especially relevant in the West where there are large tracts of land, which raises infrastructure construction costs significantly. Consider these facts from ASCE: California, Texas, North Carolina and Pennsylvania have the largest number of high-hazard dams; the highest drinking water infrastructure needs are in Montana, Idaho, New Mexico, North Dakota and South Dakota; and California has the highest total of known levees in need (9,560 miles).

Much of this infrastructure is constructed and/or maintained by local governments, but many of our systems and facilities were built over 75-100 years ago. With limited funding, it has been more challenging for local governments to undertake needed upgrades. In some cases, WRDA can be instrumental in helping counties upgrade these systems.

This is playing out all across the West with flood control, water and sewage projects in Missoula County, Montana; levee projects in Lander County, Nevada, Tulsa County, Oklahoma and Hill County, Montana; flood control in Cass County, North Dakota, and Clay County, Minnesota; and restoration projects in Kitsap County, Washington, to name a few.

The number of complex federal requirements and unfunded mandates on western counties has risen sharply, and directly impact water projects. While there are numerous federal laws that directly impact counties – like the Stafford Disaster Relief, Medicaid Inmate Exclusion, Affordable Care Act Excise Tax, Clean Air Act and the Clean Water Act – none impact western counties as much as the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

The ESA was enacted in 1973 with the promise that our nation could do a better job of protecting and conserving its resident species and the ecosystems that support them, and counties across the United States recognize the importance of the ESA as a safeguard for conserving our nation's wildlife, fish and plants. However, the requirements of the ESA often result in socioeconomic impacts that are shouldered squarely by local governments and our residents.

In Richland County, Montana, with a population of 11,960, agriculture is the county's economic backbone, contributing \$926.5 million to the economy in 2016. The county's irrigation district, which provides water to agricultural users in the county, partnered with the Corps and the Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) on the Lower Yellowstone Project, which was authorized in WRDA 2007 for ecosystem restoration. Due to concerns over the pallid sturgeon's habitat, a species of fish protected under the ESA, several environmental groups sued. Though it took almost ten years, this case was recently resolved and the project will move forward this spring.

In Sonoma County, California, the County's Water Agency has partnered with the Corps on the Russian River Water Supply and Flood Control Project, which provides flood protection and drinking water to over 600,000 people in Sonoma and northern Marin Counties. In 2008, the

National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) issued a Biological Opinion (BO) listing 23 actions the agencies must undertake to protect three endangered species of salmon – the coho, steelhead and chinook – that were impacted by the project. The total cost is estimated at approximately \$158 million (\$60 million federal/\$98 million non-federal).

Additionally, county water and transportation infrastructure projects in the East and West trigger review under the Corps Section 404 dredge and fill permit program. In recent years, the Section 404 permit program has been fraught with difficulties ranging from complex permit requirements; lengthy and costly permit reviews; inconsistent application of Corps rules across Corps districts; and general confusion by both the Corps and regulated entities over what types of waters and activities must obtain a Section 404 permit.

Based on our counties' experiences, while the jurisdictional determination process may create delays, lengthy and resource intensive delays also occur *after* federal jurisdiction is claimed. Once jurisdictional, the project triggers application of other federal laws like environmental impact statements, the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and ESA. Additionally, there might be special conditions attached to the permit for routine ditch maintenance activities, even though these activities are supposed to be exempt under existing regulations. Many Corps offices have narrowly interpreted that the exemption does not apply to routine maintenance of sediment, debris and vegetation in flood protection facilities.

This narrow interpretation creates a dragnet capturing almost all routine flood maintenance work into permitting; increases Corps' workload; and causes significant permit backlog, thwarting counties' ability to perform flood maintenance. Permit approvals can take up to three years and Section 404 general permits are limited to five year terms and as a result, counties are in a constant costly cycle of permitting. Meanwhile, vegetation continues to grow and becomes habitat, triggering additional permits, mitigation and further delays.

These specific required conditions result in a lengthy negotiation process with counties. For example, a number of California counties have stated that process can easily take three or more years, with costs in the millions for a single project. A nationwide Section 404 permit to maintain San Diego Creek Channel in Orange County, California, required three years for approval, while flood protection was reduced to a ten-year protection level. Clearing 13 acres of vegetation cost \$700,000 but required 20 acres of mitigation at a cost of \$2.8 million. The mitigation cost was four times the maintenance cost.

Since 2007, the Borough of Alaska has been working with the Corps to secure a Section 404 permit to dredge and dispose of approximately 40,000 cubic yards of spoils in its harbor. It took seven years and over one million dollars spent on environmental studies to get the project approved. But, the requirements imposed by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency on capping and monitoring ultimately made the project financially infeasible.

In Oregon, eight counties – Clatsop, Tillamook, Lincoln, Lane, Douglas, Coos, Columbia and Curry – have tide gates to drain tidelands areas for agriculture use. Landowners and tide gate

owners in those counties indicate that the federal and state permitting process can take years and involve six to seven agencies in both Oregon and the federal government. This is beyond the capacity of many landowners and small jurisdictions and threatens both public safety and local economies if repair and replacement projects cannot be approved in a timely fashion.

Ultimately, permitting delays magnify simple maintenance into complex and costly projects. This makes it more difficult for counties to complete projects to maintain public safety facilities and infrastructure, which places our residents and businesses at risk.

Due to arid conditions and drought in the West, many counties are actively working to mitigate the impact of drought on local communities. For over a decade, the West has been dealing with extreme drought. These challenges have had a disproportionately large impact on the ecological, social and economic life of our counties' residents. For example, fire seasons now last an average of 78 days longer compared to 40 years ago. These fires have devastated local communities, drained emergency management budgets, damaged valuable infrastructure and put further strain on local water resources. Drought conditions have also led to major water shortages in many communities, leaving them scrambling to respond.

Kings County, California is one of the counties in the Central San Joaquin valley dealing with drought. The county is located in a very productive farming region. In fact, the San Joaquin Valley holds roughly two-thirds of California's most productive farmland, and Kings County alone yielded over \$2 billion in agricultural products in 2016. Behind this agricultural production, however, is a serious problem: the county's current water storage system is insufficient for the needs of the community, and some of the county's most disadvantaged communities simply no longer have reliable access to clean drinking water.

In Nye County, Nevada, a rural county of 42,477, comprised of 18,199 square miles, residents and businesses are currently facing water scarcity issues due to a lack of available water resources coupled with a rapidly growing population. Even though 73.5 percent of the county is federal lands, due to its proximity to Las Vegas, the county's population density has risen significantly in the past 20 years, and water resources have suffered as a result. In December, the state of Nevada prohibited the drilling of new residential wells. The county is trying to find new salvageable water resources for both local/regional alluvial and carbonate aquifers to supply increased demand.

WRDA helps local communities help themselves.

Prior to this testimony, NACo sent out an informal survey to our membership. One of the questions on the survey asked, "If the project had not been authorized through WRDA and/or technical assistance was not offered by the Corps, would the county have been able to undertake the project alone?" Overwhelmingly, both rural and urban counties indicated that they would not be able to move forward with projects without their partnership with the Corps.

Here is a sampling of their answers: Without the financial backing by the Corps, this 53-year old harbor would have continued to exponentially deteriorate; the Corps brought an expertise and funding that we did not have readily available; without the funding we received over the past five years, this would be impossible to achieve; it is unlikely that my county or the state would be able to sustain or undertake any beach construction projects without federal participation; there is no way my rural county could fund a \$57 million fish bypass without Corps help; and the cost of the project is beyond our local capability and the results we expect to achieve would not be possible without the Corps and WRDA.

Without WRDA, our counties could not have accomplished the multitude of projects we have been able to carry out over the past several decades. Simply put, WRDA is a partnership that works.

To build upon past successes and address current challenges, there are a number of ways that Congress can improve and strengthen WRDA to help western counties.

In conversations with counties, it is clear that WRDA has helped tremendously in addressing key water needs with navigation channels, harbors and ports, inland waterways, dams and reservoirs, beach management, levee repair, aquatic ecosystems, flood emergency and water infrastructure projects. However, many counties note that there are remaining issues that make it more difficult for them to undertake and complete WRDA-related projects. These comments have included the following:

- Not enough funds are available to undertake water studies and projects;
- Corps studies take a long time (Note: each version of WRDA changes the rules for project implementation, creating additional funding obligations for local governments and lengthening the time needed to undertake the project);
- Federal requirements from other federal agencies under the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP), ESA, and others often create conflicting federal requirements, outcomes and justifications;
- The existing Corps regulatory structure is cumbersome;
- Disconnect between agencies (i.e. Corps and FEMA on levees);
- While previous WRDA bills addressed specific concerns, the Corps has not released guidance for those bills, which slows our efforts to move forward with critical water infrastructure projects.

To address the above issues and improve WRDA's value for western counties, we respectively offer the following recommendations:

Authorize WRDA on a biannual basis: Historically, WRDA bills are passed every two years. However, in the past decade, these measures have become increasingly difficult to pass due to the congressional earmark ban. Only three WRDA bills — WRDA 2007, the Water Resources Reform and Development Act of 2014 (WRRDA) and the Water Infrastructure Improvements for the Nation Act of 2016 (WIIN) — have been enacted in the past decade.

NACo is grateful that Congress has kept WRDA on its two-year authorization schedule since 2014 and the nation's counties urge Congress to stay this course, approve a WRDA 2018, and we encourage Congress to authorize WRDA every two years moving forward.

Meaningful consultation with states and local governments will create greater consensus around and increase the effectiveness of the Corps overall: Throughout the testimony, we highlighted some of the challenges western counties have working with the Corps. We believe that many of these issues would be resolved if there were a better process for the Corps to engage with its state and local partners.

Over two decades ago, Congress passed the Unfunded Mandates Reform Act (UMRA) to address the impact of unfunded mandates. While UMRA resulted in progress in Congress, UMRA leaves the responsibility up to each administrative agency to develop its own consultation process and provides no uniform standards for agencies to follow. As a result, the requirement has been inconsistent and each agency's internal process is different.

To our knowledge, the Corps has no internal policy governing its interactions with its intergovernmental partners – state and local governments – nor do they have an Office of Intergovernmental and External Affairs (IEA) where counties, states, and other local governments and stakeholders can easily interface with the Corps. Many of the issues raised in this testimony could be prevented if the consultation process was improved.

To that end, we recommend that the Corps be required to comply with UMRA by consulting with state and local government partners early and often in policy discussions and urge Congress and the Corps to authorize and staff an Office of Intergovernmental and External Affairs within the agency.

Both of these options will work to break down existing barriers within the Corps and would also result in more pragmatic and successful strategies for implementing federal policies.

Increase overall authorized funding levels for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers: Many water resource issues across the U.S. remain unaddressed because of the limited availability of funds.

Enhance the federal-state-local financial partnership for water resources projects: NACo supports federal matching funds for local governments to plan for reducing flood damage risks under WRDA. NACo asks that the federal share of water resource projects not be shifted to state and local governments because most state and local governments do not have the fiscal resources to assume the federal share.

Fix Section 404 permitting issues for public safety infrastructure: NACo supports efforts to streamline the current Section 404 permitting process to address the delays and inconsistencies that exist within the current decision-making process and to shorten the Corps timeline to review

and issue these permits. We recommend that the Corps provide a clear-cut, national exemption for routine ditch maintenance activities and remove routine maintenance of flood protection facilities and infrastructure from the Section 404 permit process when no endangered species habitat are present. We further recommend that permit terms for routine maintenance be extended from five to ten years and we ask that Congress set in place a mechanism in WRDA to allow counties and other local government partners to obtain new permits and modify existing non-controversial federal permits for construction and maintenance activities for flood control systems.

Continue focus on levee safety and management: Even though levees have been addressed in previous WRDA packages, including the National Levee Safety Program for levee rehabilitation, the Corps has yet to implement the program, indicating that this is due to a lack of funding or appropriations specifically for the program. We recommend that the Corps be instructed to release this report and guidance, with an opportunity for review and comment on the guidance now. This action is far overdue and public safety and the use of resources at the local levels are being threatened by this inaction. Additionally, we believe that additional funds should be allocated toward repair and rehabilitation of America's non-federal, publicly-owned levees (including those constructed in partnership with the Army Corps of Engineers and now operated and maintained by the non-federal partner).

Finally, while we know that the Corps vegetation management policy was addressed in a previous WRDA package, the agency has yet to act on it. We recommend that the Corps be instructed to release this report and guidance, with an opportunity for public review and comment. This action is overdue, and threatens our ability to effectively manage levees.

Address ongoing threats from high hazard dams: NACo supports increased federal commitment to fund the repair and rehabilitation of America's non-federal, publicly-owned dams, with priority funding given to structures presenting the highest risk of failure. Federal grants, loans and cost-share programs should be designed to assure that unsafe or deficient dams and levees are brought into compliance with national minimum safety standards. Finally, federal and state governments should consult with and include counties in the decision-making process when undertaking the rehabilitation of unsafe or deficient dams and levees located within the jurisdiction of the county.

Maintain focus on drinking water and wastewater needs: NACo supports the State Revolving Loan Fund (SRF) programs, the Clean Water State Revolving Loan Fund (CWSRF), and the Drinking Water State Revolving Loan Fund, as supplements to, and not a substitute for, federal grant programs. Grants and technical assistance should be made available to those small, rural, disadvantaged communities that are unable to meet their needs solely with loans. States should provide adequate funds to match federal grants to the SRF program and assure flexibility in the administration of such loans. NACo supports passage of legislation that codifies the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's ("EPA") 2012 Integrated Municipal Stormwater and Wastewater Planning Approach Framework ("Integrated Planning Framework"), under which sewer districts can seek more efficient and affordable solutions to CWA compliance, and that

creates demonstration projects under which local communities will be allowed more flexibility in their efforts to comply with the regulatory requirements of the CWA.

We sincerely appreciate this Committee's leadership on the issue of Integrated Planning. This could prove to be a valuable tool for communities facing costly unfunded mandates. We would like to ensure that all communities are able to utilize this tool if needed.

Water conservation and storage: NACo supports federal water conservation strategies that provide federal financial and technical assistance to state and local governments to design, implement and evaluate appropriate water conservation measures, including the rehabilitation of water supply systems. Water conservation should be given priority in the planning and evaluation of water projects where there are limited sources of supply. Federal research and grant programs should focus on water reclamation, recycling, reuse and desalination.

Beaches, shorelines and sand replenishment: NACo supports additional authorization and funding for beach and dune restoration projects. Additionally, we urge Congress to enable the Secretary of the Corps to allow counties to acquire sand by purchase, exchange or otherwise from non-domestic sources for the purpose of beach renourishment.

Strengthening local ports and waterways: NACo supports the full expenditure of harbor maintenance trust fund collections on dredging and harbor maintenance, and providing equity for deep draft ports that contribute collections to the fund but do not have significant dredging needs by allowing them to utilize trust fund dollars for limited port-related uses other than dredging. We also encourage increased funding and regulatory relief to facilitate the revitalization, modernization and maintenance of port facilities, including legislation that ties the expenditure of harbor maintenance trust fund revenues to their intended purpose of harbor maintenance projects.

In conclusion

Even though communities have made significant strides in addressing water resource issues, our water needs and requirements in the West and across the nation have grown significantly.

To address these issues, Congress has the opportunity to revise and update WRDA in 2018 to ensure that local governments and other entities have the tools they need to move their communities seamlessly into the 21st century. Together, we can work together on a unique partnership that works to solve complex problems in a cost-effective way, to benefit both the national economy and local communities.

This concludes my remarks and I am happy to take any questions.