

WRDA Hearing – Wednesday Mar. 16, 10:00 am

Statement of Senator James M. Inhofe

This is our second hearing on the 2016 Water Resources Development Act or WRDA. At our February 10th hearing, we heard about the importance of rebuilding America's crumbling waterways and flood control infrastructure and the national economic benefits that this infrastructure supports.

Today we will hear from the Assistant Secretary of the Army, Jo-ellen Darcy, and the Chief of Engineers, Lt. General Bostick, about new water resources projects to improve that infrastructure and the Corps' policies that can help -- or hinder -- the delivery of project benefits.

As I mentioned at our February 10th hearing, we are back on schedule to pass a Water Resources Development Act every two years. This allows Congress to help meet the demands for navigation, flood control and ecosystem restoration projects around the country.

Since we passed the last WRDA in June 2014, the Chief of Engineers has completed 22 reports recommending new water resources projects or changes to existing projects and has submitted these reports to Congress. We are considering these projects for the 2016 WRDA. All of them will provide significant benefits.

In addition, under the new process established in WRDA 2014, our states and local governments have submitted 172 requests for studies

that can lead to new water resources projects or modifications to existing projects. Of these, the Corps determined that 49 met the criteria set forth in WRDA. The Corps has sent those study requests to Congress and we are reviewing them.

These projects and studies, if requested by a Senator, will form the core of the 2016 WRDA and the staff already has put together that base text. We also are reviewing the policy and programmatic issues that Senators have brought to our attention.

We all know that the Corps is operating under constrained budgets. At our February 10th hearing we heard from witnesses, including Bob Portiss the Director of the Port of Catoosa, that in some cases even the operational status of our navigable waterways can be at risk. That is why we want to make sure that you have the authority to accept money, goods and services from your non-federal sponsors when they are willing to supplement your resources on a voluntary, non-reimbursable basis. I look forward to working with you and your staff to help craft language to achieve this goal.

We also want to work with you to do more to encourage public private partnerships. This can include privately funded expansion of infrastructure to produce new and greater benefits, like expanding water supplies or energy production.

The private sector is willing to invest, with the understanding that they can market what they create. Under the current process it seems like the Corps looks for ways to say “no.” I want to work with you to encourage partnerships where the Corps is looking for ways to say “yes.”

As you know there is a lot of interest in water supply issues. The Corps does not own water, but it currently manages about 9.8 million acre feet of water that can be used for municipal water supply or irrigation purposes. In WRDA 2014, we required reports on how the Corps manages its reservoirs. One report was due last June and the other is due this June, but we have not seen any progress yet.

We want to work with you to help optimize the use of water that is already available, while meeting existing project purposes and honoring existing water rights. Like many states, Oklahoma has suffered in previous years due to drought. Yet, we have unused water in 12 lakes in Oklahoma. I want to work with you to ensure that this unused water can be repurposed for use in Oklahoma. It is important to Oklahoma that WRDA is one of many tools to enact policies which plan for meeting water supply demands in the future.

Senator Boxer and I are committed to working together to find solutions where we can. That is why I am confident that we move a bill through committee this Spring and pass a WRDA in 2016.