TESTIMONY OF COLLIN O'MARA BEFORE
THE U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC WORKS
OVERSIGHT HEARING ON IMPLEMENTATION OF CORPS OF ENGINEERS
WATER RESOURCES POLICIES

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Chairman Boxer, Ranking Member Vitter, Members of the Committee, on behalf of Delaware Governor Jack Markell, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today.

On October 28th and 29th, as Hurricane Sandy moved northward along the Atlantic coast region, Delaware experienced heavy rains, 15-20 foot waves, and 50 mile an hour winds. Yet despite these ominous conditions bearing down on our state, after the weather cleared and water receded, relatively few homes and businesses on the Atlantic Ocean side of our ocean beach communities had experienced significant property damage, compared to other parts of Delaware or the devastation in other states.[1]

The foundation of Delaware's coastal defenses is a network of engineered dunes and beaches that extend from Lewes to Fenwick Island—built by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and cost-shared by the State. Over the previous twelve months, the Corps had nourished Delaware's engineered beaches with more than three million cubic yards of sand as part of a $39 million re-nourishment projects. It was these projects that prevented much of the damage experienced elsewhere, protecting public infrastructure, natural resources, and property. Prior to the construction of engineered dunes and beaches, Delaware communities had suffered extensive property and infrastructure damage during storms with less intensity than Sandy.

Because of the protection offered by the Corps' projects, after Sandy subsided, the residents and businesses of these communities were safe, their homes and businesses had suffered little damage, and they experienced little if any interruption of utility services. And while our dunes

[1] Delaware experienced significant flooding at the Indian River Inlet Bridge where an undersized dune system washed-out and several communities and natural resource areas up and down the coast suffered flooding, including the communities situated around the Inland Bays.

lost hundreds of thousands of cubic yards of sand those couple of days, the costs of the original projects (and the subsequent restoration) are a very small fraction of the value of the assets that they protected.

I begin with this example, because it illustrates the critical work that the Army Corps perform. Like many states, we have found that working with the Corps and their policies and rules can be challenging at times, and there is room for improvement. But overall I can say with confidence that Delaware would have suffered hundreds of millions of dollars of damage if key projects had not been completed. Similarly, whether it's a navigation project to keep a river channel clear and facilitate commerce or an environmental project to restore valuable coastal marshland habitat, the Corps is an important partner to a state like Delaware.

In this and other areas that the Corps works in, it has never been more important for the Army Corps to fulfill its missions efficiently and cost-effectively. And as we face more extreme weather, more regular flooding, and rising sea-level, it is critical that we improve the resiliency of at-risk communities and vulnerable natural resources. The provisions on extreme weather preparedness drafted by Chairman Boxer are a key component of this, which we fully support. In addition, there is much we can do to build on this idea that could improve project outcomes in other Corps activities, while also reducing project costs. In particular, I believe we must improve the Corps' business model and begin to rethink the way that we approach projects on an individual basis. This includes more flexibility to work with state and local governments and agencies, better coordination with other federal agencies, and broader thinking that breaks down silos within the Corps and links projects that incorporate benefits of multiple business lines.

There are many ways that this could be accomplished. For example, along with many of my colleagues representing Atlantic Coast states, Delaware has supported a proposal to develop a North Atlantic Coastal and Marine Management Plan. This would allow the Army Corps' entire North Atlantic Division to work with states to develop an integrated management plan for essential ecosystem restoration needs in Delaware and our neighboring states. Such an approach acknowledges that our coast and coastal waters operate as a system, and should be treated like

one. This proposal will help the Corps to work with states to develop the right lists of projects, and to prioritize them to achieve the greatest impact for the money.

A similar systems-based approach could also help the Corps to consider benefits between business lines. Today, the Army Corps has three separate lines of business: 1) Navigation, 2) Flood/Coastal Storm Damage Reduction, and 3) Environmental Enhancement. The Congress has traditionally authorized projects individually and appropriated funding to these three lines separate. With growing needs and diminishing resources, it is critical that we break down silos between business lines to more formally and strategically connect navigation, flood mitigation, and habitat restoration, as well as the divisions between different levels of government.

I'd like to talk about one particular way to accomplish this that is important to coastal states like Delaware. This approach called Regional Sediment Management. Most states along the East Coast have multiple coastal projects underway or planned in the same region. In Delaware, for example, there are areas where there is an inlet or harbor (like Roosevelt Inlet at Lewes, Indian River Inlet, or Mispillion Harbor), a protective beach and dune that is eroding in front of a waterfront community, and an adjacent salt marsh wildlife habitat that is starved of sediment and drowning. All of these elements act as a system, with sand, silt, and sediment moving from one area to another based upon natural processes. Under current practice, policies and stove-piped funding, the Corps could receive separate funding to maintain the channel, to nourish the beach, or to restore a coastal wetland. But these projects would each be managed separately, with little formal coordination, directive, or funding to address them as a system.

Not only would the systems-based approach improve the management of each project, but would also likely lower the price tag. Individually, these three projects may cost $5 million each, or $15 million total; but collectively they may only cost $7.5 million, if implemented simultaneously—saving the taxpayers 50% of project costs. Just eliminating the need to mobilize and demobilize dredging equipment one additional time could save $3-$4 million. Yet, the current "least cost" mandate prevents this type of efficiency, unless the authorization and appropriation for all three projects happen to align perfectly, which rarely happens.

Too often, we treat clean and safe dredged sediment like it's a waste byproduct to be dropped overboard or sequestered in a confined disposal facility, rather than clearly identifying the most beneficial use of the sediment deposition. We need to adopt a systems approach that connects regional projects, treats sediment like a valuable resource, and uses the sediment where it creates the most value.

With a few changes to the Corps authorization, it is possible to complete projects much more effectively and save millions of dollars in the process. We are grateful for Senator Carper's efforts in this area and encourage the Committee to work with him to develop suggestions for improvements to Regional Sediment Management as well as a regional sediment framework that addresses policy, regulatory, and institutional impediments across fragmented jurisdictions and authorities.

We respectfully recommend to:

1. Provide authority to prioritize RSM projects in WRDA, including recognizing and rewarding projects with multiple-benefits that cross business lines.

2. Formally recognize the link between storm damage mitigation, environmental enhancements, and navigation projects—and the value of sediment.

3. Continue progress toward modernizing the Corps approach to fulfilling their mission by encouraging systems management approaches rather than the current project-by project, single business line approach.

4. Expand the definition of "least cost" mandate for navigation projects to include full-benefits analysis for RSM projects to provide a true and clear picture of what is gained by Corps' work.

5. Provide greater discretion to the Secretary to expand boundaries of authorized projects if greater cost-efficiencies are possible.

Delaware, and the nation, benefit tremendously from the work conducted by the Corps. We appreciate the thoughtful way that the Energy and Public Works Committee has helped forge direction and policy for the Corps and we are optimistic that the WRDA reauthorization process will further evolve the Corps planning and construction process into a more modern approach to reducing storm risk at the coast. We, in Delaware, believe that improved management of coastal assets through a systems-based, multi-business line approach will be more effective and efficient in accomplishing what the Administration, Congress, the States, and the American people expect the Corps to accomplish. In this new reality, it will be critical that states work collaboratively, especially in the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic, and strive for greater regionally consistency in evaluating coastal needs, scoping projects, and implementing projects that improve regional resiliency. With greater budget reductions likely, we must find more efficient ways of getting critical projects done, rather than simply doing less work.

WRDA reauthorization represents an opportunity for Congress to modernize the way the Corps works. We strongly encourage expanding the opportunity for the Corps to manage sediment as the asset it is, to not be restricted to "least cost disposal" options for deposition of dredged material, to make funding available to use dredged sediment to improve the resiliency of both man built and natural communities on our shores, and to modernize the Corps' practices to reflect a nation's better understanding of the coastal "system" and it value to our nation. By doing so, we will better prepare our nation for future storms and other extreme weather in the years ahead in the most cost-effective manner.

Thank you.