



Fact Sheet: The Water Resources Development Act of 2013

Legislative Background on the Water Resources Development Act of 2013 (S.601)

The Water Resources Development Act of 2013 (WRDA) authorizes water resources projects related to flood and storm risk reduction, coastal and inland navigation, and ecosystem restoration. This legislation establishes priorities for the Army Corps of Engineers (ACE) to maintain waterways for transportation and commerce, reduce flood and storm damage, restore fragile aquatic systems, and accelerate project delivery. S. 601 was introduced by Senators Boxer and Vitter and approved by a unanimous vote (18-0) of the Environment and Public Works Committee (EPW) on March 20, 2013.

The Congressional Budget Office estimates that WRDA would authorize \$7.7 billion in spending over five years and result in additional outlays of \$5.7 billion over five years. [CBO, [4/17/13](#)]

Creating Jobs and Rebuilding America's Water Infrastructure

America's ports and waterways are critical to economic growth, moving \$78 billion in goods and commodities - totaling 2.3 billion tons in FY2011 alone. The American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) estimates that if we continue to underinvest in our ports and waterways, one million jobs and \$270 billion in exports could be threatened by 2020. WRDA would foster economic growth and sustain an estimated 500,000 jobs by making critical investments in our nation's water infrastructure. [EPW; ASCE, [5/1/13](#); EPW, [1/31/13](#); NAM, [4/18/13](#)]

- **WRDA authorizes vital water infrastructure projects.** This legislation would currently authorize 19 projects referred to Congress by the Assistant Secretary of the Army of Civil Works that would address flood risk management, environmental restoration, including restoration of the Florida Everglades, hurricane and storm damage prevention, and construct ship channels to maintain navigation and commerce. The annual benefits would exceed \$762.6 million for the flood and storm risk management reduction projects alone. The bill also creates new regional programs to address high priority water resource issues 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 reauthorizes successful programs to restore the Chesapeake Bay, the Rio Grande River, and the Lower Columbia River.
- **WRDA authorizes needed investments in America's ports.** The ASCE gave America's ports a grade of "C" and has projected that at current funding levels there will be a \$28 billion dredging shortfall by 2040. However, each year only half of the \$1.8 billion collected in the Harbor Maintenance Trust Fund (HMTF) for maintenance and dredging is being used to support projects. WRDA would address this issue by establishing minimum authorization levels for HMTF funding in future fiscal years with the goal of achieving full use by 2020. It would ensure investment in the nation's highest priority ports and also help underserved ports by creating a 10% set aside for ports that have not been maintained at their authorized depths or widths in the last six years. [CQ, [3/20/13](#)]

- **WRDA reauthorizes the National Dam Safety Program.** Thousands of our nation's dams are improperly maintained and are aging quickly, posing 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. WRDA would increase funding for dam inspections and maintenance, provide stronger safety requirements and upgrade emergency preparedness plans in order to prevent dam failures, and improve recovery plans in the event of dam failures. [ASCE, [3/13](#)]
- **WRDA establishes a National Levee Safety Program.** Currently, there is no national safety program to determine the reliability of the 100,000 miles of levees across the country. While many of the levees were built to protect farmland, over the last 50 years there has been significant development on lands protected by levees. Almost 85% of these levees are locally owned, operated, and maintained making it extremely difficult to collect information about the levees or estimate their reliability, leaving the public at risk if the levee fails. The creation of a National Levee Safety Program is crucial to developing formal government oversight, sufficient safety standards, and effectively communicating to the public the risks of living behind a levee. [ASCE, [3/13](#)]
- **WRDA creates innovative new ways to invest in infrastructure.** The bill would establish a Water Infrastructure Finance Innovations Authority (WIFIA) as a five-year pilot program to allow the ACE and the EPA 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.
- **WRDA protects communities from extreme weather and natural disasters.** The bill requires the ACE to work with the National Academy of Sciences to evaluate options for reducing risk from extreme weather events, requires evaluations of response measures to mitigate extreme weather, and requires GAO to ensure ACE is using best practices to address threats from floods, droughts, and storms. It would also improve responses to extreme weather events by providing the ACE with new authority to conduct rapid, post-disaster watershed assessments and implement small flood control and ecosystem restoration projects.
- **WRDA reduces the ACE's project backlog.** The ACE currently has an estimated backlog of over 1,000 outdated projects with \$60 billion in authorized funding. This legislation would create a Commission to review and identify existing water resource projects authorized before 1996 that can be deauthorized, such as projects that are no longer feasible or in the interest of the federal government. The Commission would hold public hearings and solicit public comments before making final recommendations to Congress, which would have the opportunity to disapprove of the Commission's proposals. [CRS, [3/22/13](#)]
- **WRDA reforms ACE's project approval process.** This legislation includes multiple reforms that would alter the way projects are approved, authorized, and executed.
 - Projects currently require two separate congressional authorizations, one for a project study and one for construction, in addition to appropriations from Congress. This bill would allow a non-Federal interest, such as a local government, to ask the ACE to submit a certification to Congress that it intends to begin a new project study and allow the ACE to proceed with the study when Congress appropriates funding for the requested study.
 - The legislation would require concurrent environmental reviews and ensure collaboration among all agencies involved, including resource management agencies, to accelerate delivery of ACE projects, establish a three year deadline for feasibility studies, and increase the flexibility for non-Federal sponsors of Corps projects. WRDA would also create two pilot programs to expand the local role in project implementation.

Additional Key Facts

- America's inland waterways and rivers carry the equivalent of about 51 million truck trips each year. [ASCE, [3/13](#)]
- More than half of America's locks are over 50 years old, and there is an average of 52 service interruptions a day throughout the system. [ASCE, [3/13](#)]
- The ASCE recently awarded America's inland waterway infrastructure and dam infrastructure a grade of "D," and America's levees a grade of "D-." [ASCE, [3/13](#)]
- The Corps of Engineers estimates that full authorized channel dimensions at 59 of the U.S.'s busiest ports are available less than 35% of the time. [CRS, [1/10/11](#)]