

**American Sportfishing Association · Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies ·
B.A.S.S. · Ducks Unlimited · The Nature Conservancy · Theodore Roosevelt
Conservation Partnership · Trout Unlimited**

September 4, 2013

The Honorable Bill Shuster, Chair
The Honorable Nick Rahall, Ranking Member
Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
2165 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515-6256

Dear Chairman Shuster and Ranking Member Rahall:

As organizations representing a broad range of conservation, sportsmen/sportswomen, recreation, and outdoor industry interests, we are writing to ask you to ensure the next Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) promotes the protection and restoration of fish and wildlife habitats across the country as part of a comprehensive approach to water resources management. Every year hunting and fishing contribute \$200 billion in total economic activity to our nation's economy. Water resource projects and associated programs are critical to maintaining and improving the natural resources that support these activities.

We recognize that our water resource projects are designed to meet many needs, including water supply, flood control, navigation, and hydropower as well as recreation and wildlife purposes. Ensuring these projects are designed, built and operated to sustain and improve the environment is critical to the health of our rivers and other waterways.

Current budget conditions require us to think carefully and creatively about our water resource projects. There are three areas where the next WRDA can make important improvements to the existing programs and do so in ways that are more cost-effective, facilitate project delivery, empower state and local governments and help meet the many needs associated with our waters and waterways. If implemented, these suggestions can enhance recreational opportunities while saving taxpayer dollars. We suggest the next WRDA:

1. Improve U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) mitigation practices for civil works projects so that mitigation is designed in a way that assures effective natural resource and habitat outcomes and facilitates efficient and timely delivery of needed infrastructure projects. Encouraging both watershed scale and advanced mitigation can help speed up project delivery and reduce costs by ensuring environmental requirements are met early and that compensatory mitigation activities have significant lasting benefits for fish and wildlife.

2. Utilize natural infrastructure as an integral part of how we meet our water resource needs. Natural infrastructure, such as wetlands, natural floodplains, dunes and reefs, when used in conjunction with more traditional 'hard' infrastructure often provides a cost-effective means of meeting our water resource needs. By ensuring such approaches are equally considered during project design we can help

reduce risks from flood and storm events, improve water quality, and enhance habitat and recreational opportunities while saving taxpayer dollars. For example, directing the Corps to consider levee re-alignments and other non-structural approaches during emergency response can simultaneously improve flood control, storm resilience and fish and wildlife habitat, providing a more sustainable long term solution.

3. Optimize the use of U.S. Army Corps of Engineers dams and other water control structures to maximize benefits for society and nature while continuing to meet their authorized purposes. Most of our existing dams, locks and other infrastructure were built decades ago and operations have not been updated. The Corps must work with state, local and effected communities in seeking opportunities to optimize the operations of existing infrastructure to enhance benefits, like conservation, increased hydropower, better flood and storm protection, and expanded recreational opportunities, while continuing to provide the services for which they were constructed. The Corps lacks the clear direction to actively seek out and realize these benefits. Especially in these difficult financial times, such direction from Congress can increase the returns on previous investments in water infrastructure.

These three improvements will help ensure the Corps has the flexibility and direction to make the smartest possible choices about building, repairing and operating our infrastructure and using our limited resources in the most effective way. They can also facilitate broad support for delivery of projects while ensuring a comprehensive approach to water resource management. Improving the health of our water resources is necessary to sustain our national, regional and local economies and, particularly, to provide ongoing opportunities for hunting and fishing, which are important economic drivers for local economies. We encourage your support for ensuring the next WRDA helps us meet these goals.

We look forward to working with you as you develop this legislation.

Sincerely,

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