

WRDA Member Day Testimony- Rep. Rick W. Allen

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Thank you, Mr/Ms Chairman/woman, and thank you to the committee for allowing me to provide this testimony and highlight water issues that are critical to the 12<sup>th</sup> Congressional District of Georgia – namely the issues we have experienced with the Corps of Engineers regarding the New Savannah Bluff Lock and Dam.

This project, which is required for environmental mitigation as part of the Savannah Harbor Expansion Project, or SHEP, is an issue with which my community has been at odds with the Corps of Engineers for more than six years. The Corps' insistence on removing and replacing the Lock and Dam with a rock weir that will significantly lower the existing pool would be catastrophic for my community.

This historic lock and dam's importance to the Augusta River Region cannot be overstated. Two states- both Georgia and South Carolina- are affected; and businesses and municipalities rely on the pool of water maintained by the dam. If the dam were to be removed, quality of life for an entire region of the country would be negatively impacted. Flooding, which is normally mitigated using the Lock and Dam, could affect multiple cities on both sides of the river in times of heavy rain. And when the Corps conducted a simulation of their selected alternative, the effect on water level was so drastic that boats were marooned, businesses had issues being able to draw water and banks were unstable to the point where they were falling in, resulting in the simulation being abandoned earlier than planned. As the world gets a glimpse at Augusta in a few weeks as home of the beautiful Masters golf tournament, to cause the view from beautiful downtown Augusta to be that of areas of dry mud and silt instead of a flowing river would be unconscionable.

In 2019, an Independent Peer Review was conducted, and the report highlighted that there have been inconsistencies in cost analysis, lack of consideration of other mitigation alternatives that would not lower the pool, and lack of information on whether or not the leading alternatives would successfully pass fish overall. We should not spend taxpayer dollars on a rock weir that this report says may even kill the fish we're trying to protect!

The Corps and local stakeholders are now in court-ordered mediation after a federal judge ruled that the Corps was not following the word of the law of the 2016 WIIN Act when it comes to maintaining the pool. The WIIN Act states that with modifications to accommodate fish passage, "the structure is able to maintain the pool for navigation, water supply and recreational activities, as in existence on the date of enactment of this Act." This ruling was a win for our local communities and I am hopeful for a positive outcome that maintains the pool and the lock and dam.

I ask the members of this committee to work with me and my colleague, Congressman Joe Wilson, to ensure that the interests of our local communities are protected when it comes to the New Savannah Bluff Lock and Dam. I appreciate your attention to this important priority for our home states of Georgia and South Carolina and look forward to working with you throughout this process.