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ASBPA commends House Committee on Water Bill, urges passage

The American Shore and Beach Preservation Association (ASBPA) commends the House Transportation & Infrastructure Committee for the development and markup of the 2020 Water Resources Development Act. This bill contains numerous provisions to improve the resiliency of our nation's coastlines, better manage coastal sediment, and advance natural and nature-based infrastructure that reduce flood and coastal storm risk to coastal communities. ASBPA encourages the full House of Representatives to consider and pass this legislation as soon as possible.

Almost exactly one year ago, on July 10, 2019, ASBPA testified before the House Transportation & Infrastructure Committee on the need to develop water resources legislation that would advance:

- **Regional Sediment Management (RSM)** and the **Beneficial Use of Dredged Material (BUDM)**;
- A modification of the Corps' **Benefit-Cost-Ratio (BCR)** process;
- **Natural Infrastructure**.

This week, the Transportation & Infrastructure Committee passed a bill that did exactly that.

ASBPA is particularly supportive of the following policies and sections:

The Beneficial Use of Dredged Material

The “Beneficial Use of Dredged Material” (BUDM) is one aspect of Regional Sediment Management, in which sediment dredged for navigation purposes is used to benefit a restoration and/or flood risk reduction project. Ultimately, ASBPA believes that the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) needs to evolve its budgeting and planning operations to reflect RSM principles so that **100% of uncontaminated dredged sediment is used beneficially**.

Section 125 establishes that “It is the policy of the United States for the Corps of Engineers to maximize the beneficial reuse... of suitable dredged material.” It advances this policy by:

- a) requiring each USACE district to produce an annual five-year sediment management plan that forecasts expected sediment removal (i.e., dredging) and placement needs, and includes public input;

- b) requiring USACE to consider “the suitability... of beneficial uses” and “the economic and environmental benefits... of... those beneficial uses” when evaluating the placement of dredged material;
- c) Increases the number authorized pilot projects under the WRDA 2016 Sec. 1122 BUDM pilot program.

Improving the Corps’ Benefit Cost Ratio (BCR)

Congress should modernize the criteria used by USACE to assess costs and benefits during navigation and flood risk reduction project planning by accounting for increased ecosystem services and recreation-driven economic stimulus as project benefits. While the House 2020 WRDA does not provide transformational overhaul of the Corps’ BCR process, it took some important steps to improve current operating procedures:

Section 109 directs the Corps to issue final agency procedures for the Principles, Requirements, and Guidelines (PR&G), pursuant to section 2031 of WRDA 2007. The PR&G serves as the basis for the Corps’ evaluation of project benefits and costs.

Section 124 provides a Sense of Congress that the Corps should maximize the consideration and evaluation of projects with multiple benefits.

Improving Resilience of Coastlines and Coastal Communities

From sea level rise and Great Lakes level rise to increasing coastal storm intensity, the threats facing our nation’s coastlines have never been greater. Preparing our coastlines for future conditions will mean using the best available science, long-term planning, adaptive management, and a commitment to building projects that can both adapt to a changing climate and solve multiple problems at once. In short, USACE must help our coastline and coastal communities become more resilient.

Sections 109-122 functionally serve as “Resilience Title” in the 2020 House WRDA, with numerous provisions that improve our nation’s preparedness. Here are few sections that focus on coastal resilience:

Section 112 requires the Corps to update existing planning guidance related to sea level rise based on the best available, peer-reviewed science, and when requested by the non-Federal interest, requires the Secretary to consider whether the need for the project is predicated upon or exacerbated by conditions related to sea level rise.

Section 110 allows the Corps to provide technical assistance on resiliency planning to non-Federal interests and to prioritize technical assistance to economically disadvantaged communities.

Section 206 directs the Corps to expand its comprehensive assessment of water resources needs for the Great Lakes System, and to make recommendations for potential projects and other measures to respond to changing hydrologic and climatic conditions in the region.

Advancing natural and nature-based features (NNBF) that reduce risk in coastal communities

Wide beaches, high dunes, and verdant wetlands, reefs, mangroves and seagrass beds are natural infrastructure that can improve communities' resilience and is itself resilient. Dunes and marshes can adapt to rising seas, and reefs and coastal forests regenerate after storm damage. The same can't be said for "grey" (concrete and steel based) infrastructure. USACE has been building beaches and dunes for flood risk reduction for nearly a century and restoring aquatic ecosystems for more than half a century. It should be looking at how to fully integrate these missions in combination with its mandate to maintain coastal navigation. By doing so, USACE can more effectively restore and rebuild our nation's natural infrastructure, in collaboration with other federal, state and tribal agencies.

Many sections within the unofficial "Resilience Title" serve to advance NNBF in various aspects of planning, project development and funding, including **Sections 113, 114, 115, 122 and 124.**

Conclusion

ASBPA is pleased that the 2020 House WRDA takes significant steps to direct USACE to better manage sediment, improve coastal resilience, and advance natural infrastructure. We applaud the committee for its bipartisan work in writing this bill, which also serves to authorize numerous studies and construction projects to restore coastlines and reduce communities' risk from coastal hazards. We encourage the full House of Representatives to consider and pass this legislation, and work with the Senate to join this bill with the other chamber's "America's Water Infrastructure Act" for final passage before the end of the 2020.

ABOUT ASBPA: Founded in 1926, the American Shore and Beach Preservation Association (ASBPA) is a 501(c)3 nonprofit that advocates for healthy coastlines by promoting the integration of science, policies and actions that maintain, protect and enhance the coasts of America. For more information on ASBPA, go to www.asbpa.org, www.facebook.com/AmericanBeaches or www.twitter.com/asbpa.