

June 6, 2022

The Honorable Peter DeFazio  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Chair, Committee on Transportation and  
Infrastructure  
1610 Longworth  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Sam Graves  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Ranking Member, Committee on  
Transportation and Infrastructure,  
2333 Rayburn  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Grace Napolitano  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Committee on Transportation and  
Infrastructure, Chair, Subcommittee on  
Water Resources and Environment  
1610 Longworth  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable David Rouzer  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Committee on Transportation and  
Infrastructure, Ranking Member,  
Subcommittee on Water Resources and  
Environment  
2333 Rayburn  
Washington, DC 20515

**Re: Water Resources Development Act of 2022, Section 117 - National Low-Head Dam Inventory**

Dear Chair DeFazio, Ranking Member Graves, Subcommittee Chair Napolitano and Subcommittee Ranking Member Rouzer,

The undersigned organizations write to thank you for inclusion of a national low-head dam inventory as Section 117 of the Water Resources Development Act of 2022 (WRDA). While there is no reliable nation-wide inventory of how many low-head dams exist in the United States, several state and organization run inventories indicate that these structures are ubiquitous in nature. Low-head dams affect fish and wildlife habitat by disrupting connectivity and water quality, and in addition, negatively affect recreation and public safety. A nationwide inventory of low-head dams to enhance the US Army Corps of Engineers' (USACE) existing National Inventory of Dams (NID) database is a critical step to better understanding and documenting the issues associated with these high-risk structures. We are particularly pleased that this section includes criteria for the inventory to improve public safety conditions and provide information on the dangers of low-head dams

Over the past two centuries, tens of thousands of low-head dams were constructed across rivers and streams to provide services such as diverting water for irrigation, municipal, or industrial water uses. Others were built to prevent erosion of embankments or to control flooding impacts. Many of these low-head dams no longer serve their original beneficial purpose and remain only as hazards to life and public safety, and compromise fish and wildlife habitat.

Low-head dams can be difficult to detect by upstream water recreators, including drift boaters, kayakers, rafters, and anglers,<sup>1</sup> and yet there is no coordinated federal response to addressing low-head dam concerns. Already this year, several fatalities have occurred as a result of these structures including on the James River in Virginia, Delaware River in Pennsylvania, and Long Tom River in Oregon. Low-head dams are generally not captured in the NID database because they do not meet statutory height requirements, do not impound water, or would not cause life or property loss downstream upon failure. The national inventory, as proposed in Section 117 of WRDA, would provide public information resources regarding low-head dam hazards, generate data that could be used to inform state mapping of low-head dams, and provide information on available funding and technical resources to remove and rehabilitate these structures. This section would authorize the USACE to work with state and local partners to enhance its NID Database and maintain a nationwide inventory of public and privately owned low-head dams.

Addressing the impacts of low-head dams throughout the nation remains a top priority of our organizations. These provisions would greatly enhance the nation's ability to identify and address the structures that pose the highest risk and impact to people and ecosystems. Thank you for responding to our request to include this important provision in WRDA. As you reconcile House and Senate language, we ask for inclusion of Senate language to include funding authorization for agency costs associated with database development. Please do not hesitate to contact our organizations as your Committee works towards passage of the 2022 WRDA bill.

Sincerely,

Jack West  
Policy and Advocacy Director  
Alabama Rivers Alliance

Brett Mayer  
Public Policy Director  
American Canoe Association

Mark Zakutansky  
Director of Conservation Policy Engagement  
Appalachian Mountain Club

Kelly Catlett, J.D.  
Director of Hydropower Reform  
American Rivers

Kevin Colburn  
National Stewardship Director  
American Whitewater

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<sup>1</sup> American Whitewater's database of whitewater accidents and fatalities, maintained since 1972, documents that 10% of river fatalities nationwide are a result of individuals getting caught in a low-head dam hydraulic.

Ron Regan  
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