

**House Transportation & Infrastructure Committee**  
**Member Testimony**  
**of**  
**Congresswoman Lisa Blunt Rochester**

*Proposals for a Water Resources Development Act of 2022: Members' Day Hearing*

**March 16, 2022**

Chair Napolitano, Ranking Member Rouzer, and members of the Subcommittee on Water Resources and Environment, good morning and thank you for the opportunity to testify at this Members' Day Hearing on the proposals for a Water Resources Development Act of 2022.

In Delaware, we feel the impacts of sea-level rise daily. As the state with the lowest mean elevation, our coastal and riverbank communities have for decades fought the effects of climate change. Every day I hear from my constituents the urgent need to protect and invest in our shorelines and riverbanks.

Thousands of Delawareans have felt the impact of shoreline and riverbank erosion. Just last September, Hurricane Ida caused historic flooding in downtown Wilmington from the overflowing Brandywine River. And last October, following a nor'easter, high tides caused extensive erosion, dune damage, and flooding to our beaches and beach communities in Sussex County. As Delawareans, we are not only concerned about the damage to our homes—but we are also concerned about how the ongoing impacts of climate change and extreme weather events will impact our state's economy and ecosystem.

Not only do Delaware beaches provide an important natural defense between the rising seawater and our homes and roads—but they also provide a recreational space for the more than 9 million visitors that come to our beaches every year<sup>1</sup> and are home to a diverse collection of plants and animals, including the horseshoe crab.<sup>2</sup>

For over twenty years, the State of Delaware and its local communities have worked in tandem with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to address shoreline and riverbank erosion and protect Delaware communities through the construction and maintenance of coastal storm risk management projects. Although the Philadelphia District has been a great partner, the Corps simply doesn't have the funding and authority they need to protect the communities in Delaware from storms and rising sea levels. Fortunately, we have the opportunity in WRDA 2022 to empower the Corps to do more.

We can provide them with the additional funding, resources, and authority to protect our shorelines and riverbanks and the communities that surround them—which is why earlier this year, I was proud to introduce H.R. 6705, the bicameral and bipartisan Shoreline, Health,

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.capegazette.com/article/record-9-million-tourists-come-delaware/151944>

<sup>2</sup> <https://dnrec.alpha.delaware.gov/outdoor-delaware/nourishing-delawares-beaches/>

Oversight, Restoration, Resilient and Enhancement Act or SHORRE Act, along with my colleague Representative Garret Graves from Louisiana—and Senators Carper and Cassidy.

The SHORRE Act elevates shoreline and riverbank protection and restoration as a primary mission of the Army Corps— and expands Corps’ existing river flood mitigation and restoration authority.

It gives the Corps the tools it needs to safeguard our riverbanks, coastlines, and coastal communities against flooding—promoting resilient and sustainable natural project that addresses climate change. Additionally, the inclusion of this legislation will make it easier for our low-income communities to partner with the Corps by reducing cost-sharing and works to ensure that project implementation is more flexible and more efficient.

I support the full inclusion of the SHORRE Act in the Water Resources Development Act of 2022.

While the SHORRE Act is my top WRDA priority, I’d also like to advocate for three additional priorities that are important for my constituents.

First, I’d like to advocate for the inclusion of New Castle County to the list of eligible entities under the Environmental Infrastructure Program, which would allow the County to pursue funding for critical wastewater and stormwater system improvements and infrastructure.

Second, I’d also like to advocate for funding to rehabilitate, retrofit, and remove dams across the country to help improve public safety. According to the American Society of Civil Engineers Infrastructure Report Card, Delaware has over 63 high-hazard dams.<sup>3</sup> Delaware also has smaller low-head dams, including dams along the Brandywine River, which are not only safety hazards, but also impact the river’s natural ecosystem and biodiversity.<sup>4</sup>

And third, I’d like to advocate for the expansion of the existing environmental infrastructure project in Southeastern Pennsylvania to include the Lower Delaware River Basin, which would expand the reach of the existing project and help abate flooding in the Lower Delaware River Basin.

I want to thank the Committee for their commitment and work on this legislation. On behalf of the First State, thank you for your consideration and I look forward to working with you all.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://infrastructurereportcard.org/state-item/delaware/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.americanrivers.org/2022/02/25-dams-to-watch-in-2022/>