

Congressman Andy Levin
Testimony before the House Committee on Transportation &
Infrastructure
Subcommittee on Water Resources and Environment
February 27, 2020

Chairman DeFazio, Ranking Member Graves, Chairwoman Napolitano, Ranking Member Westerman, members of the subcommittee: thank you for allowing me to testify before you today regarding Michigan's priorities in the upcoming Water Resources Development Act (WRDA).

As a nation, we have so much to do in the space of water infrastructure, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) are vital in helping update water infrastructure across the nation.

In Michigan's Ninth District, the Chapaton Retention Basin is emblematic of the long-overdue need to update our wastewater infrastructure to protect our water sources and roads. Chapaton is a 28-million-gallon Combined Sewer Overflow (CSO) Facility that currently services Interstate 94 (I-94), businesses, and approximately 92,000 residents in Eastpointe, St. Clair Shores, and Roseville, Michigan.

The Basin protects residents by moving stormwater out of the community and into nearby Lake St. Clair, thereby preventing flooding. It also protects the environment. In the absence of much-needed expansion to this CSO, however, preventable sewage overflows have led to water quality problems that include E. coli pollution and have hastened the deterioration of essential roadways like I-94.

Chapaton is an example of a stormwater sewer project eligible for USACE assistance available through Section 219, "Environmental Infrastructure" WRDA authority granted to the State of Michigan. Section 219 authority is important because it authorizes USACE to assist with updates to local, non-federally owned and operated facilities,

including drinking water systems, stormwater and wastewater facilities, and surface water development.¹

This authority allows USACE to provide helpful assistance to many projects across Michigan, and I urge the committee to continue to support Section 219 authority for our State.

The upcoming WRDA legislation will also be an important opportunity to authorize USACE's long-awaited plan to block Asian carp from reaching the Great Lakes at a chokepoint in the Chicago Brandon Road Lock and dam waterway system. The plan proposes fortifications that include an electric barrier, a bubble barrier, acoustic deterrents, and a flushing lock meant to reduce the chances of Asian carp reaching Lake Michigan while still allowing barge traffic through.²

While I am eager to see Congress authorize this plan, I want to be clear that the current proposal will reduce the chances of Asian carp entering the Great Lakes—it does not eliminate this risk. I understand that part of the rationale for opposing a physical barrier to Asian carp—even though it remains the most effective solution, according to USACE—is that it could impact water levels in Chicago and cause flooding.³ But Chicago is already facing severe flooding because of climate change; this year, the city even declared a climate crisis as a result of record high water levels and disappearing shoreline.⁴ It seems clear that the current proposal is a prudent first step to address Asian carp that will need an additional long-term viable solution.

We must be clear-eyed about the damage climate change is already doing and invest in the necessary flood mitigation infrastructure to

¹ <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IF/IF11184>

² <https://www.mvr.usace.army.mil/Missions/Environmental-Protection-and-Restoration/GLMRIS-BrandonRoad/>

³ <https://prairierivers.org/articles/2014/01/study-physical-barrier-most-effective-way-to-stop-invasive-species-from-ravaging-great-lakes-mississippi-river/>

⁴ <https://abcnews.go.com/US/city-chicago-declares-climate-crisis-storms-millions-dollars/story?id=68907649>

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protect the people of Chicago now. At the same time, we must consider the best way to tackle the issue of Asian carp long-term. It will only take a couple Asian carp making it through the fortifications to destroy vital boating, fishing, and coastal communities on the Great Lakes. Thus, I urge the committee and USACE to consider the authorization of a long-term, permanent plan at the Brandon Road Lock and Dam that fully and effectively stops Asian carp and addresses the urgent need for climate crisis flood mitigation infrastructure for the city of Chicago.

Again, I thank all the members of the committee for giving me the opportunity to testify and look forward to working with the committee on the upcoming Water Resources Development Act.

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