

WRDA “Member Day” Draft Remarks

Thank you, Chairman DeFazio and Ranking Member Graves, for this opportunity to bring to the Committee’s attention several issues that are critical not only for Coastal Virginia, but for America.

The Eastern Shore of Virginia is home to is home to unique waterways, including many navigable channels. These waterways are vital to the economic viability of the Eastern Shore. Unfortunately, insufficient funding for the Army Corps of Engineers has undermined upkeep and maintenance of these important waterways.

There are over 800 shallow draft navigable waterway projects nationwide, 70 of which are located in the Commonwealth. However, only eight shallow draft navigable waterway receive funding in my district. It is extremely difficult to secure funding for smaller waterways, including those in the Eastern Shore.

I ask the Natural Resources Committee to mark up H.R. 3596, the Keeping American’s Waterfronts Working Act, and consider accepting amendments to benefit shallow draft navigable waterway maintenance.

I encourage the Committee to reevaluate how the benefit-cost analysis (BCA) is calculated. As sea level rise and increased rainfall drive federal projects, and as a broader range of federal agencies become involved, the current BCA process is no longer the best solution. Since 1983, The Principles, Requirements and Guidelines for Water and Land Related Resources Implementation Studies has been the standard. The application of conventional BCA determinations does not include numerous social and economic justice factors, nor does it use alternative approaches to infrastructure solutions. Further, federal agencies have different ways of calculating BCA, thus creating a confusing situation for local governments seeking to implement flood control projects.

In 2007, Congress instructed the Secretary of the Army to develop a new standard of guidelines for calculating the BCA. Finalized December 2014, the guidelines incorporated extensive input from the public as well as key stakeholders. Renamed the Principles, Requirements, and Guidelines (PR&G), the new guidelines would have included economic and social factors, as well as requiring an analysis of alternative approaches, such as nature-based solutions. However, the new PR&G process, has yet to reach full implementation.

Lastly, I ask for full use of the Harbor Maintenance Trust Fund, including expanded use for donor and energy transfer ports, regional funding floors, and emerging harbors funding. In recent years, appropriations have exceeded 90 percent, but six years ago, appropriations were barely at 50 percent. Today, the Harbor Maintenance Trust Fund has accumulated over \$9 billion. I ask that the funds are used for their intended purpose; to help eliminate the backlog of maintenance and channels and related infrastructure while providing equity for ports who generate significant revenue with minimal dredging needs.