



## National Wildlife Federation

National Advocacy Center

1200 G Street NW, Suite 900 • Washington, DC 20005 • 202-797-6800

June 1, 2021

The Honorable Peter DeFazio Chairman  
Committee on Transportation &  
Infrastructure  
U.S. House of Representatives  
2164 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Grace F. Napolitano Chair  
Subcommittee on Water Resources and  
Environment  
U.S. House of Representatives  
1610 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chair DeFazio and Subcommittee Chair Napolitano,

On behalf of the National Wildlife Federation and our more than six million members and supporters nationwide, we thank the committee for prioritizing legislation that begins to address our nation's water infrastructure challenges. The National Wildlife Federation supports the proposed substitute amendment to H.R. 1915, the *Water Quality Protection and Job Creation Act of 2021*, which would significantly increase funding authorizations for wastewater and stormwater infrastructure programs to protect water quality, enhance wildlife habitat, and create thousands of jobs across the country.

The need could not be more acute. Federal investments have not kept pace with the more than \$740 billion water infrastructure backlog our country faces, leaving local communities to bear the cost of upgrading and repairing aging water infrastructure on their own. Just this year, we saw the symptoms of the water infrastructure crisis manifest across Texas and in Jackson, Mississippi, where citizens were without water for over a month.

H.R. 1915 will help make urgently needed investments in clean water infrastructure, including by reauthorizing and significantly increasing funding levels for the Clean Water State Revolving Fund (CWSRF). This program is long overdue for reauthorization and provides critical federal funding for state-managed loans and grants to help communities address water quality infrastructure needs, including through the use of green infrastructure. Although additional investment is needed, the bill's proposed authorization of \$8 billion annually would more than quadruple current funding levels. This significant funding increase would go a long way towards more adequately addressing our nation's infrastructure challenges, made all the more urgent by impacts from climate change and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

We are deeply appreciative that the substitute amendment includes a codification of the CWSRF Green Project Reserve (GPR). As negotiations progress, we hope to see this strengthened by requiring states to use at least 20% of CWSRF annual capitalization grants for the GPR. From previous appropriations cycles, there is evidence that states have more than enough qualified projects to fulfill this requirement. Codifying this expectation in statute will guarantee the availability of funds for green projects and further accelerate and encourage the incorporation of multi-benefit green, sustainable concepts into wastewater infrastructure projects, improving water quality, reducing wastewater treatment needs, enhancing resilience, reducing flooding, and recharging groundwater supplies.

We are strongly supportive of the additional provisions in the substitute amendment that begin to make these water infrastructure funding programs easier for disadvantaged, rural, tribal, and frontline communities to access and leverage. In particular, we support language requiring that all states direct a minimum of their annual CWSRF capitalization grant to provide additional subsidization to disadvantaged communities, including in the form of grants rather than loans. We ultimately hope to see this minimum raised from ten percent to twenty percent to provide communities with dedicated access to additional subsidization. As negotiations progress, we also hope a final bill increases the current cap on additional subsidization to help communities that may not be able to afford even low interest loans receive assistance to address water quality needs, including small, rural, tribal, and historically disadvantaged communities.

We also strongly support the inclusion of language in the substitute amendment to direct the Environmental Protection Agency to carry out an equity analysis to examine how states have historically dispersed their clean water infrastructure funds to low-income, rural, tribal, and minority communities. This is a critical step to identify opportunities to make water infrastructure financing more equitable for vulnerable communities. We hope that, as negotiations progress, the final bill includes language creating a permanent rural and low-income wastewater assistance program to provide assistance to communities struggling to maintain access to affordable and reliable wastewater services.

Finally, we are deeply appreciative that H.R. 1915 remains free of any damaging regulatory provisions that would extend the terms of Clean Water Act National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permits issued to municipal wastewater dischargers from five to ten years.

Thank you for your consideration of these requests and for your work to advance the *Water Quality Protection and Job Creation Act of 2021* to help address our nation's water infrastructure challenges. Investing in water infrastructure—including natural infrastructure—protects water

quality, safeguards public health, enhances wildlife habitat, and creates quality job opportunities. We look forward to working with you as deliberations progress.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jessie Ritter". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jessie Ritter  
Director, Water Resources and Coastal Policy  
National Wildlife Federation