



July 20, 2020

The Honorable Peter DeFazio, Chairman
U.S. House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
2251 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Sam Graves, Ranking Member
U.S. House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
2251 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman DeFazio and Ranking Member Graves:

On behalf of Resources Legacy Fund (RLF), I want to congratulate you on successfully reporting the Water Resources Development Act of 2020 (WRDA) out of your committee. RLF is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that works with philanthropists to conserve land, water, and ocean resources, while advancing healthy communities and social equity. As the nation continues to grapple with the devastating economic impacts of COVID-19, RLF supports several WRDA provisions that would advance nature-based infrastructure and rebuild the resilience of our natural systems to prevent future pandemics and natural disasters. Such programs and investments also would create jobs and stimulate the economy.

In particular, RLF strongly supports **Sections 110 and 112** to improve resiliency planning, as well as **Sections 113-115** and **Sections 122-124** to ensure agencies consider and develop natural and nature-based infrastructure projects more consistently in the future. Such policy actions to increase resilience to sea level rise and other climate impacts and prioritize funding for planning and implementation of nature-based infrastructure projects often have multiple benefits that improve habitat restoration, reduce risks from flooding and other natural disasters, promote recreation, and save money in the long term.

Other WRDA provisions are specifically aligned with RLF's goals to remove obsolete dams, modernize infrastructure, and restore rivers across the West. Through RLF's Open Rivers Fund—a 10-year, \$50 million program launched in 2016—we work with local communities and leverage resources and partnerships to advance projects that maximize economic, community, and ecological benefits. WRDA provisions that would support our work and the overarching priorities of the program include:

- **Section 126** to amend the Army Corps Continuing Authorities Program for aquatic ecosystem restoration to maximize benefits for anadromous fish, including improved fish passage;
- **Section 135** to widen the scope of the national dam safety program;
- **Section 215** to require the Government Accountability Office to conduct a study on the mitigation of fish, wildlife, and environmental impacts of constructing water resources projects; and

- **Section 301** to establish a process to deauthorize old, inactive water resources development projects, including dams.

In addition, RLF has worked with federal, state, and local governments, local businesses, community leaders, and private philanthropies to restore and conserve San Francisco Bay wetlands since 2001, which provide flood protection, fishery habitat, recreation, and many additional public and economic benefits. This work has included the development of \$500 million in dedicated local funding to serve as a match for any federal dollars, as well as direct engagement on planning and field studies, improved permit coordination, restoration, land acquisition, and public education. A recent analysis by the Bay Area Council Economic Institute found that restoration programs along San Francisco Bay can create between 3,300 and 6,600 jobs, improve quality of life for residents, restore natural ecological functions, and protect the region's communities and businesses from flooding and sea level rise. WRDA 2020 provisions that would advance these broadly supported conservation and economic outcomes include:

- **Section 125** regarding the beneficial use of dredged material for Corps projects and associated dredged material management plans;
- **Section 203** to modify the scope of feasibility studies to investigate and potentially mitigate flood risks and related problems to low-lying lands along the San Francisco Bay.

Finally, RLF supports the broad inclusion of language that prioritizes federal support for rural and economically disadvantaged communities, enhances tribal consultation and community engagement, updates environmental justice considerations, and fosters partnerships with non-federal interests (e.g., Sections 110, 118, 119, 125, 303).

As WRDA moves forward in the House and is conferenced with the Senate America's Water Infrastructure Act of 2020, we welcome opportunities to work with you and your staff to protect the existing provisions we support. Together, these provisions will incentivize natural and nature-based infrastructure solutions, enhance river restoration in the West, improve the health and resilience of San Francisco Bay and surrounding areas, and promote cost-effective, publicly supported solutions for addressing risks from flooding and water insecurity throughout the western United States.

We look forward to enactment of this important legislation. Thank you, again, for your time and attention to our nation's water infrastructure.

Sincerely,



Michael A. Mantell
President