

**Prepared Testimony of Rep. Paul D. Tonko (NY-20)
before the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure Subcommittee on
Water Resources and Environment Members' Day Hearing
Wednesday, March 16, 2022**

Chair DeFazio, Ranking Member Graves, Chair Napolitano, Ranking Member Rouzer, and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify. As the Committee considers a reauthorization of the Water Resources Development Act, I am pleased to appear before you to highlight projects and studies of critical importance to my district in New York's Capital Region.

My constituents reside at the confluence of the mighty and historic Hudson and Mohawk Rivers that helped shape America centuries ago by powering factories and mills and supporting the Erie Canal that transported goods from the coast to the rest of the nation. The region is part of the New York-New Jersey Watershed, an economic engine home to 20 million people, six major rivers, and more than 200 fish species and several endangered and threatened species.

For too long, our watershed has faced extreme pressures from sea-level rise and flooding, hundreds of outdated and obsolete dams, and legacy pollutants. The deaths of dozens of New York and New Jersey residents from Hurricane Ida and \$100 billion of damage to our coastal areas from Superstorm Sandy remain fresh in our minds and must compel us to take action to prevent such tragic and costly events in the future. If we do not, sea level rise is expected to impact 9,000 acres of riverfront lands and more than 19,000 people this century in the Hudson Valley alone. It is also estimated that 40 dams in the region will need to be targeted for removal each year, costing \$20 million annually.

I am proud to have worked closely with a coalition of more than 50 community organizations, state and local governments, and a bipartisan coalition of Members spanning the Watershed to learn from and replicate successful federal programs—such as the Delaware River Basin Conservation program signed into law in the 2016 WRDA—to fill a critical conservation gap here in New York and New Jersey. The requested bill language will coordinate and fund restoration activities to improve water quality, restore or remove obsolete dams, improve critical flood controls, promote healthy ecosystems, and support research.

Our watershed must be considered among our nation's most significant waterbodies and receive the same federal support and critical cooperation between the Army Corps, the Fish and Wildlife Service, and other entities so that it can remain a vital water resource and national economic engine for generations to come. I respectfully urge the Committee to consider this request as well as a targeted study of the Mohawk River Basin to make recommendations for the protection of its water and cultural resources.

In addition, I am grateful for the work the Army Corps is doing not just to protect our shores and waterways, but also to make meaningful use of these treasured resources to produce clean energy and combat climate change. There is so much more we can and must do in this area for the health of our ecosystems and communities, and for that reason, I respectfully urge the Committee to incorporate floating solar energy in this year's WRDA reauthorization.

Floating solar offers tremendous opportunity to expand our renewable energy deployment while benefitting threatened water systems, including preventing harmful algal blooms and reducing evaporation. According to the National Renewable Energy Laboratory, 10 percent of America's electricity needs could be met by deploying floating solar on our country's human-made reservoirs. The Army Corps owns and operates reservoirs across the country. I acknowledge that not every Army Corps facility will be appropriate to host a floating solar array, but I believe it is important that the Corps begin to consider the possibility of these projects, which may be able to take advantage of existing grid infrastructure and complement existing hydropower resources. I urge the Committee to adopt language that I was pleased to submit alongside my colleague, Congressman Jared Huffman, to identify promising reservoirs and launch a demonstration project.

This technology is already yielding impressive benefits in other countries, and is beginning to emerge as a promising industry at home. I am thrilled that a community in my district, Cohoes, New York, received funding in the Fiscal Year 2022 Omnibus Appropriations package to install floating solar panels on a municipal reservoir. This effort should serve as a model for the Army Corps and communities across the nation as we scale this technology, implement smart, clean energy systems, and drive down consumer costs.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify and for your continued work to strengthen and protect our nation's vital water resources. I am happy to provide additional information to the Committee about these requests, and I look forward to working with you throughout the WRDA process.

Appendix A

January 19, 2022

The Honorable Jared Huffman, Chair
Subcommittee on Water, Oceans and Wildlife
Committee on Natural Resources
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Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Cliff Bentz, Ranking Member
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Committee on Natural Resources
1329 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

RE: New York-New Jersey Watershed Protection Act (H.R. 4677)

As representatives of a diverse cross-section of organizations involved across New York and New Jersey, we're writing in support of the New York-New Jersey Watershed Protection Act. NY-NJ Harbor and the watersheds draining into this natural and economic resource provide enormous benefits not just to the region but the entire nation.

Along with supplying clean water to some 15 million Americans living in one of the country's most densely populated and economically diverse regions, the harbor and its watersheds — including the Hudson, Mohawk, Raritan, Passaic, Hackensack, and Bronx rivers — host some of the busiest U.S. ports, provide opportunities for tourism and outdoor recreation that attract people from around the world and improve public health, sustain significant fisheries and critical wildlife habitat, and protect businesses and vital infrastructure from flooding and rising sea levels.

H.R. 4677 offers a once-in-a-generation opportunity to secure a coordinated, watershed-wide program built upon decades of efforts to restore some of the nation's most impaired and degraded waters. Federal partnerships in the watersheds of Chesapeake Bay, Delaware River, Long Island Sound, Lake Champlain, the Great Lakes, and others have successfully demonstrated how such a program can deliver direct benefits to the environment, local communities, and state economies. Notably, the grant program authorized by this legislation is directed to provide resources specifically to environmental justice communities. Maintaining a progressive cost-share formula as envisioned in the legislation is an important component of building an equitable and just watershed grants program. Our organizations stand ready to implement projects and deliver tangible benefits to communities within our region.

These waterways play a critical role in enhancing Americans' quality of life, health, and prosperity, and in restoring communities disproportionately challenged by climate change. Local partnerships are strong and regional priorities have been established through dozens of science-based, consensus-driven plans to manage these natural resources and protect fish and wildlife habitats, improve water quality, increase public access to the water, mitigate flood risks, and develop public outreach and educational activities. In addition to helping to implement these locally approved plans, federal

leadership, coordination, and resources will amplify their impacts by promoting collaboration that will ensure on-the-ground public benefits span the entire region. The NY-NJ Watershed Protection Act is vitally important to the region's future. We thank you for taking the time to review our comments and urge you to support H.R. 4677.

Sincerely,

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Bruce Westerman, Ranking Member, Committee on Natural Resources The
Honorable Paul Tonko, Member, Committee on Natural Resources