

WRDA

WATER RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT ACT OF 2024

Prepared by Democratic Staff of the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure

THE WATER RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT ACT OF 2024

The Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) invests in the nation's water-related infrastructure that is essential to everyday life and to the creation and sustainability of good-paying jobs for hardworking women and men. Nearly 80 percent of the traded goods Americans rely on move through our nation's ports, harbors, and inland waterways. WRDAs include projects to strengthen the flood protection and resiliency of our communities, to invest in wastewater and stormwater infrastructure, and to complete ecosystem restoration that maintains America's vital natural resources. This work, carried out by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps), is made possible through regular enactment of WRDAs.

WRDAs have a long history of bipartisan support and this Congress is no exception. The Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure (T&I) held four hearings, incorporated feedback from over three-quarters of all House Members as well as countless local communities and stakeholders to develop the Water Resources Development Act of 2024, supported by Ranking Member Rick Larsen (D-WA), Chairman Sam Graves (R-MO), Subcommittee on Water Resources and Environment Ranking Member Grace F. Napolitano (D-CA) and Subcommittee Chairman David Rouzer (R-NC).

The final agreement negotiated with the Senate is the *Thomas R. Carper Water Resources Development Act of 2024* (WRDA 2024)—the sixth WRDA in a row since 2014—and it continues the bipartisan tradition of crafting a new WRDA every two years that responds to local water resource needs. WRDA 2024 helps communities build resilience to emerging challenges from climate change, including prolonged droughts, more severe storms and changes to local ecosystems. It will also build on previous WRDAs to advance environmental justice by bolstering support for disadvantaged, rural, and Tribal communities looking to address local water resources challenges and enhance their infrastructure.

IMPROVES CRITICAL WATER RESOURCES INFRASTRUCTURE

WRDA 2024 improves critical water resources infrastructure to protect human health, restore natural ecosystems and boost the U.S. economy. It advances projects that improve wastewater, stormwater and flood control infrastructure and strengthens America's navigational capacity by investing in ports, harbors and inland waterways.

- Authorizes the construction of projects in **21 pending Reports of the Chief of Engineers** received since the enactment of WRDA 2022. These reports are the final recommendations to Congress by the Corps on rigorously studied water resources infrastructure priorities.
- Authorizes **162 new feasibility studies** for future water resources development projects, and **40** studies to modify existing projects.
- Provides over **\$5 billion in new and modified environmental infrastructure authorities** to address the water and wastewater needs of local communities.

EMPOWERS ALL COMMUNITIES TO BENEFIT FROM WRDA

WRDA 2024 empowers all communities to navigate, engage with, and benefit from the work of the Corps. It provides technical support to communities, expands initiatives that are tailored for the needs of Tribal partners and makes projects more financially accessible.

- **Expands the Tribal Partnership Program** to better coordinate with Tribal entities to address tribal water resources needs and Treaty rights.
- **Addresses the unique challenges of remote communities** by evaluating, and where reasonable discounting, increased costs of project delivery in remote areas.
- Improves and makes permanent **cost share flexibility** for communities that need it.
- Facilitates the **protection of cultural landmarks** critical to the history of the United States.
- Designates that each Corps district maintain **a community project advisor** to help communities navigate available options and understand the nuances of the Corps' processes.

RESPONDS TO EMERGING THREATS FROM CLIMATE CHANGE

The climate crisis is causing more severe and frequent weather events that jeopardize the resiliency and efficacy of water resources infrastructure. WRDA 2024 provides communities with the tools they need to face these new threats, from enhancing drought resilience and flood control to addressing ecosystem threats like harmful algal blooms and dwindling fish populations.

- **Establishes Federal policy for the Corps to maximize opportunities for water supply, water conservation and drought resiliency** to address the growing urgency for infrastructure capable of protecting people and the environment from increasingly severe and prolonged drought.
- Encourages communities to partner with the Corps to construct and modify water resources projects to **enhance drought resilience** and to **capture, recycle, and reuse stormwater**.
- Helps communities **invest in flood control projects** in the face of more severe and frequent weather events by completing national coastal mapping to support navigation, flood risk management, environmental restoration, and emergency operations missions.
- **Addresses harmful algal blooms** by prioritizing activities that reduce nutrient pollution, use natural and nature-based approaches, and protect wetlands.
- **Continues initiatives for aquatic ecosystem restoration**, including those that benefit anadromous fish habitat passage, such as salmon in the Pacific Northwest.
- Ensures that the Corps **maximizes the beneficial use of dredged materials** obtained from water resources development projects for the creation of habitat, wetlands, and other ecologically beneficial functions.

GROWS THE ECONOMY

WRDA 2024 delivers support to communities to invest in projects that create jobs, bolster local economies, and boost U.S. economic competitiveness and supply chains.

- **Invests in harbor, inland waterway and port projects** that keep our goods moving.
- Increases federal investment in **harbor deepening projects** to allow for Panamax-sized ships and strengthen supply chains.
- Increases federal investment in **inland waterways projects** to ensure that the Corps can upgrade and modernize critical waterway connections for the exportation and movement of domestically produced goods and services.
- Expands the ability of local communities to partner with the Corps on smaller-scale water resources development projects through its' popular **continuing authority programs**.
- **Encourages public-private partnerships** to leverage private sector resources for the public good, creating and sustaining good-paying jobs.

MODERNIZES THE CORPS

Modernizing the Corps is critical to tackling America's toughest water resources infrastructure challenges. WRDA 2024 incorporates new technologies and project management strategies to empower communities to invest in smarter and more innovative ways.

- Encourages the Corps to work in collaboration with non-federal entities to develop better economic, hydraulic, and hydrologic models for use in project design and engineering, **to ensure smart, forward-thinking infrastructure investments and ensure the Corps is working with the best available data.**
- Incorporates greater use of **state-of-the-art Forecasted-Informed Reservoir Operations (FIRO)** to allow the Corps to be nimble in managing its infrastructure and balance flood risk reduction with a growing need to maximize the capture and storage of any available water in drought-prone areas.
- Makes **independent external peer review** of water resources development projects permanent.

WRDA STILL WORKS

Continuing to pass WRDAs every two years ensures that communities' water resources infrastructure needs are being met, and that Congress exercises proper oversight of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

Congress has successfully enacted five consecutive WRDA bills in 2014, 2016, 2018, 2020 and 2022. With WRDA 2024, the T&I Committee continues this bipartisan tradition and intends to make history with the most consecutive WRDA bills enacted into law.

Most of all, enactment of bipartisan WRDAs shows that WRDA still works.