



Nor'wester newsletter

Issue #635 | May 8, 2018

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Senate Environment & Public Works Committee releases 2018 water resources legislation

Today, the Senate Environment & Public Works Committee released their 2018 water resources infrastructure legislation titled "[America's Water Infrastructure Act of 2018](#)". The intent of the bill is to increase coastal and inland port competitiveness, address water storage issues, increase flood resiliency and provide clean drinking water. This legislation serves as a vehicle to address Corps of Engineers policies and authorize Corps projects, and has been referred to as WRDA in the past. We are so pleased to see a return to the biennial process for this authorizing legislation and we appreciate the work of the Committee Members, including Sen. Jeff Merkley of Oregon, who serves on EPW's Transportation and Infrastructure Subcommittee charged with drafting the bill.

"America's Water Infrastructure Act of 2018" appears to be aimed at providing a more transparent Corps process with regard to project authorizations and funding prioritization. It also encourages increased participation at the local and regional levels, to allow for more stakeholder input throughout various Corps processes. Notable provisions of interest for PNWA members include:

- Funding authorization for the [Columbia River Basin Restoration Act](#) at a level of \$5M in FY2019, and \$30M in both FY2020 and FY2021. The grant program in the CRBRA provides for toxics reduction in the

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Columbia River Basin. PNWA supported the authorization of this program.

- \$30M authorization for watercraft inspection stations in the Columbia River Basin, to prevent the spread of invasive species. PNWA supports federal efforts to block the spread of invasive species into lakes, rivers and coastal waters along the West Coast.
- A Sense of Congress encouraging the Corps to complete a number of Chief's Reports in a timely fashion, including for the Seattle Harbor deepening project, which is supported by PNWA.
- Increase in authorized appropriations for the Corps' Continuing Authorities Program (CAP), including Section 107 which has been an extremely useful tool in our region to gain additional stern buoys on the Lower Columbia River.
- Reauthorization of the Water Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act (WIFIA). The program would be authorized at \$50M for FY2020 and FY2021.
- A requirement that the Corps finalize implementation guidance for both WRRDA 2014 and WRDA 2016 within 120 days of enactment, with further language that the Corps has one year to develop implementation guidance for this bill.
- \$150M authorization to purchase a new government hopper dredge, for beach nourishment and shoreline protection. This dredge would be used primarily in areas with extreme weather events.

In past water resources legislation, PNWA members were keenly interested in changes to the Harbor Maintenance Trust Fund (HMTF). For the past year several years, stakeholders in the Pacific Northwest and throughout the nation have been discussing how to reach full spending of annual HMTF receipts to maintain coastal and deep draft navigation, while also balancing the needs of donor ports. While this bill does not address the HMTF, we do anticipate continued conversation on this issue as the House releases their legislation and the bills are conferenced.

As *Nor'wester* readers will recall, PNWA executive director Kristin Meira and a number of PNWA members recently participated in a [House roundtable](#) on WRDA, and HMTF was a central piece of that discussion.

A [hearing on the Senate bill](#) is scheduled for tomorrow morning at 7am Pacific, and bill markup is scheduled for May 24th. The House is expected to release their water resources

legislation on May 18th, with markup on May 23rd. PNWA will keep *Nor'wester* readers updated as additional details are released and the bills continue to move forward.

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