

Water Resources Bill Helps Achieve Development and Conservation Goals

The Nature Conservancy encourages passage of bill, applauds inclusion of beneficial provisions addressing conservation and a watershed approach

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Today, a congressional conference committee released its final Water Resources Reform and Development Act (WRRDA). This legislation will direct federal water resource and infrastructure projects that meet the nation's water needs, helping control and protect from floods and storms, enable navigation, and restore freshwater and coastal ecosystems.

"The Water Resources Reform and Development bill released today addresses water infrastructure needs while providing conservation and environmental benefits. It contains important ecosystem restoration projects and is a step forward in adopting a more cost-effective approach to water resource investment. We encourage Congress to pass this bill quickly," said Lynn Scarlett, Managing Director of Public Policy for The Nature Conservancy.

"Increasing demands for water and the impacts of shifting weather patterns make the importance of effective water management clearer than ever. At the same time, tight budgets and the tremendous backlog of projects compel us to find better ways of doing business, including those that utilize natural solutions as a cost-effective alternative or adjunct to traditional 'gray' infrastructure, where possible," added Scarlett.

The Nature Conservancy has protected and managed water resources across the United States for many years and sponsors more projects with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers than any other non-profit organization.

"While we still have some concern about the need for changes to the environmental review process reflected in the bill, the conference bill addresses many of our previous concerns. We believe the overall bill will produce substantial net conservation and environmental benefits by **modernizing our water resource infrastructure** and putting it on a more sustainable financial and environmental footing," Scarlett concluded. "We appreciate the efforts of the congressional leaders who worked hard to meet the needs of today and prepare for the needs of tomorrow, while fostering both environmental sustainability and economic prosperity."

Incorporating **nature-based solutions** into water management and infrastructure projects is often a cost-effective means to meet the many needs we have for our rivers and waters – such as water supply, navigation, recreation, and energy. In addition, restoring natural floodplain areas can improve flood management by providing more room to store and convey floodwaters and can help protect against the adverse effects of drought by providing areas for recharging groundwater.

In particular, the Conservancy strongly supports the provisions of the bill that:

1. Help address water resources in an integrated and comprehensive manner;
2. Clarify and facilitate watershed-scale and programmatic approaches to mitigating impacts of civil works projects, allowing greater timeliness, efficiency and cooperation while improving environmental outcomes;
3. Increase project authorization levels for "continuing authority" programs for ecosystem restoration.
4. Provide for new studies and plans related to dam management, risk reduction and post disaster watershed studies.
5. Provide new ways to finance, fund and deliver water resources investments that allow a wide range of partners to participate, including non-profit organizations; and
6. Authorize regional and multistate authorities that address water resource needs, such as the North Atlantic Coastal Region, and the continuation of the restoration of the Everglades and Chesapeake Bay ecosystems.

Versions of this water resources development legislation were **approved in the U.S. Senate** and House of Representatives last year with bipartisan support. A conference committee met during recent months to iron out differences between the two bills and produce the final language released today. It will now need final approval by both chambers of Congress, and then must be signed into law by President Barack Obama.

The Nature Conservancy urges quick action by Congress and the President to enact this important legislation.

The Nature Conservancy is a leading conservation organization working around the world to protect ecologically important lands and waters for nature and people. The Conservancy and its more than 1 million members have protected nearly 120 million acres worldwide. Visit The Nature Conservancy on the Web at www.nature.org.