

BIG RIVER COALITION



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The Honorable Barbara Boxer
Chairman
Committee on Environment and Public Works
410 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Bill Shuster
Chairman
Committee on Transportation and
Infrastructure
2167 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable David Vitter
Ranking Member
Committee on Environment and Public Works
410 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Nick Rahall II
Ranking Member
Committee on Transportation and
Infrastructure
2167 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Boxer, Chairman Shuster and Ranking Members Vitter and Rahall,

The Big River Coalition (BRC) strongly supports the landmark legislation that has been produced by the Water Resources Reform and Development Act of 2014 Conference Committee (H.R. 3080). The entire membership of the BRC expresses their sincere appreciation for your leadership and congratulates you for finalizing this historic piece of legislation.

The transportation infrastructure of the United States suffers from decades of under-investment and deferred maintenance both of which have contributed to our inability to maximize our inherent economic potential. The Mississippi River system connects American farmers, miners, chemical companies and steel producers to world markets and the reduced transportation costs associated with properly maintained waterways and navigational structures (locks and dams) promotes international trade and strengthens our economic competitiveness.

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The BRC has promoted full allocations from the Harbor Maintenance Trust Fund (HMTF) since its inception, although we appreciate that this must be accomplished through incremental annual increases. The methodology proposed by H.R. 3080 that begins with 67% of the total HMTF revenues being allocated to the United States Army Corps of Engineers' (Corps) to fund the Operations and Maintenance (O&M) Budget in Fiscal Year 2015 (FY), with increased annual allocations culminating with full allocations in FY 2025 represents monumental progress in being able to maintain full channel dimensions on our nation's deep-draft waterways. The Sense of Congress language established to protect the annual Corps O&M budget from possible reductions to neutralize the impact of increased HMTF allocations offers an excellent balance to protect other Corps' missions.

The efforts to modernize the HMTF through expanded uses and increasing the federal channel depth responsibility limitation from 45 feet to 50 feet will serve to modernize U.S. harbors to match the maximum draft of the future locks on the Panama Canal and to increase our ability to benefit from the reduced transportation costs.

The Big River Coalition applauds you for your unwavering efforts through the entire process and looks forward to experiencing the benefits that shall be born through the Water Resources Reform and Development Act of 2014. We remain hopeful that this Conference Report is quickly adopted and implemented so that the benefits of reduced transportation costs, economic growth, increased navigational safety, improvements to maritime infrastructure, and the cornerstone creation of increased jobs are substantiated.

Sincerely,



Sean M. Duffy, Sr.
Executive Director
Big River Coalition

www.bigrivercoalition.org