

Congresswoman Elissa Slotkin

Testimony

Transportation and Infrastructure Committee Member Day Hearing:

Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) Member Priorities

February 27, 2020

- J Thank you Chairman DeFazio, Ranking Member Graves, Chairwoman Napolitano, and Ranking Member Westerman for the opportunity to share my priorities for the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) reauthorization.
- J Michiganders are the stewards of the Great Lakes. The Great Lakes are the backbone of our economy and our way of life.
- J In Michigan, protecting our Great Lakes is one of the most bipartisan issues, because it's about our economy and who we are as a state. This is all of our responsibility and I'm proud that it's a commitment Michiganders share regardless of party.
- J We may not always think about it when we're enjoying our beautiful Great Lakes, but protecting and maintaining them takes investment and commitment.
- J In line with that goal, there are two key priorities that I want to advocate in support of today as the Committee considers the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) reauthorization.
- J First, in order to prevent Asian carp from reaching the Great Lakes, I support authorization at full federal cost share and appropriation of funds to begin the preconstruction, engineering, and design for the Brandon Road Lock and Dam Project.
- J As many of my colleagues from other parts of the country know, Asian carp are an invasive species that have devastated ecosystems in the bodies of water they have been able to infiltrate.
- J If this devastating species were to invade the Great Lakes, it would cause irreparable harm to our tourism industry, the recreational economy, and way of life for fishers, lakeside communities, and the countless Michiganders who enjoy our Great Lakes every year.

- J The Brandon Road Lock and Dam project would function as a critical choke point to halt the spread of this invasive species, using electric barriers, noisemakers, and an air bubble curtain to block its passage into the Great Lakes.
- J This past summer, I joined a bipartisan group of members of the Michigan delegation to tour the Brandon Road Lock and Dam Project in Illinois.
- J During this tour, I had the opportunity to see the site on foot and from the air, and to hear from the Army Corps of Engineers about the full suite of both technological and structural measures that can and must be put into place.
- J The cost of action to prevent the spread of Asian Carp is high, but the price for inaction would be ruinous for the millions of Michiganders who depend on our waterways for their livelihoods.
- J The Brandon Road Lock and Dam Project represents our best opportunity to prevent Asian carp from ever reaching the Great Lakes, and I urge the committee to do everything in its power to expedite its funding and construction.
- J Second, I support the existing authorization and future appropriations of full funding to modernize the Soo Locks, which is a cornerstone of the Great Lakes commercial-navigation waterway.
- J The Army Corps has done excellent work in beginning the necessary construction on this project, and now it is up to Congress to provide consistent and efficient funding to make sure the project is completed in a timely and cost-effective manner.
- J The Soo Locks are essential to both our national economy and our national security.
- J The Soo Locks are the only waterway connection from Lake Superior to the Lower Great Lakes.

- J According to the Army Corps of Engineers, approximately 90% of the iron ore used in the United States transits through the Soo Locks. This iron ore is essential to U.S. steel production, which plays an important role in our national security and economy.
- J In fact, it is estimated that the Soo Locks supports economic activity that represents over 3% of the U.S. Gross Domestic Product.
- J Currently, 86% of the tonnage passing through the locks is limited to one lock, the Poe Lock, which is large enough to accommodate the massive carriers needed to transport iron ore.
- J The Poe Lock is nearing the end of its 50-year useful lifespan, increasing the risk for failure that would have significant implications for U.S. national security and the economy.
- J For this reason, it is absolutely essential that Congress works with the Army Corps to ensure that the Soo Lock modernization project receives consistent and efficient funding.
- J Thank you for prioritizing these programs that are so important to Michiganders.
- J Before I yield back the remainder of my time, I wanted to take this opportunity to express my support for two other issues that are vital for the water infrastructure of communities in my district: the Clean Water State Revolving Fund and the Wastewater Infrastructure Workforce Development program.
- J I know that these issues are outside of the jurisdiction of the Water Resources Development Act, but I wanted to take this opportunity to speak before the Committee to express my support for robust funding to support these programs.
- J I recently met with the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments, to discuss the status of our water infrastructure in Michigan. We know that our roads are in desperate need of repair, but in Michigan it's also the infrastructure that we can't see -- our water infrastructure -- that needs updating.

- J The council emphasized the importance of the State Revolving Fund for under-resourced local communities that need to replace and repair aging infrastructure.
- J They also expressed the importance of supporting and expanding our water workforce: 30-50% of our water workforce community nationwide will retire in the next ten years.
- J I know the Committee recently approved by voice vote the Water Quality Protection and Job Creation Act, H.R. 1497, which would not only reauthorize the Clean Water State Revolving Fund, but would also allow State's to reserve up to 1% of funds from the program to support water workforce development.
- J I thank the Committee for taking initiative on this issue that affects nearly every Michigander, and urge leadership to bring this bill to the full House for a vote.
- J Thank you for your time and for allowing me to relay some of these concerns about water and our Great Lakes that unite us all as Michiganders. I look forward to continuing to work with the Committee to support these priorities.