

**The Honorable Glenn “GT” Thompson (PA-15)**  
**Testimony before the House Subcommittee on Water Resources and Environment**  
**Member Day Hearing on Priorities for the Water Resources Development Act of 2020**  
**Thursday, February 27, 2020**

Chairwoman Napolitano, Ranking Member Westerman and Members of the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure’s Subcommittee on Water Resources and Environment:

Good morning and thank you for providing the opportunity to share my priorities for the Water Resources Development Act of 2020 (WRDA 2020). In order to strengthen and maintain the water resources of the United States, it is crucial we support programs that invest in water infrastructure needs in our local communities.

**U.S. Fish and Wild Services’ Endangered Species List:**

The Endangered Species Act (ESA) provides for the conservation of threatened and endangered plants and animals as well as their habitats. Additionally, the legislation established the endangered species list, maintained by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), which contains all the endangered species found throughout the world. The ESA also requires federal agencies to ensure that any action they carry out does not harm or jeopardize the presence of any listed species or destroys their habitat.

The ESA has brought fundamental conservation practices to our local communities. While we must continue to improve and strengthen these strategies, we should also strive to provide resources to states and industry to help navigate some of the more nuanced regulations within the ESA.

For example, the Allegheny River and other navigable waters in and around my district need to be dredged in order to prevent flooding, allow safe passage of vessels, and for economic development in rural communities. Environmental restoration efforts of these waterways have improved quality of the water to a level that now sustains populations of endangered mussels. The repopulation of this species is increasing throughout the river, specifically in the riverbed. It has been brought to my attention that many industry stakeholders have left the region due to prohibitive costs associated with mitigating the endangered mussels, resulting in missed opportunities of jobs and revenues for local communities.

Being good environmental stewards should not be an “either-or” situation. As we look toward WRDA 2020, it is my hope that the Committee will explore voluntary conservation plans that provide strong safeguards for these endangered and threatened species, but also create an opportunity for industry to partner with federal, state, and local governments to address the cost issue and invest in local communities.

**Levee Assistance:**

The Flood Control and Coastal Emergency Act (PL 84-99) provides the United States Army Corps of Engineers the discretionary authority to undertake activities including disaster preparedness, emergency operations, as well as rehabilitation of areas destroyed or threatened by floods.

Under this legislation, local sponsors of a flood control project are required to provide and maintain the necessary land, easements, and rights-of-way necessary to perform the required construction and must secure all necessary permits prior to any construction activities done by the Army Corps of Engineers. The local sponsor is also responsible for any operation and maintenance cost incurred by the flood control project and must contribute 20 percent of the construction cost for any rehabilitation.

It is my understanding that many local sponsors, including those found in my district, specifically Ford City, PA and Punxsutawney, PA, are unable to financially meet these requirements to maintain their projects. Due to the lack of financial resources, many of these projects do not achieve a minimally acceptable rating on their inspection, which is done on a biannual basis by the Army Corps, to be considered for Army Corps rehabilitation assistance. Furthermore, FEMA uses these ratings to inform the National Flood Insurance Program when they update flood insurance rates. Since these projects receive an unacceptable rating, FEMA considers these areas unprotected, which results in higher premiums for homeowners and local businesses. This is a drag on the existing local economy and has real impacts on future economic development in these small, rural communities.

It is my hope that the Committee considers authorizations which permit the Army Corp to conduct maintenance on these types of projects. This would reduce the financial burden on these small communities to sustain operations and receive acceptable ratings from USACE in order to qualify for rehabilitation assistance when needed.

**Remote Lock Operations:**

The Pittsburgh District of the Army Corps began plans for a pilot project in January 2017 at Gray's Landing Lock and Dam, located along the Monongahela River in Fayette County, PA. The goal of this project is to demonstrate the viability of remote lock operations on a large-scale commercial waterway within the inland navigation system.

This project will consist of two phases. Phase I will involve remotely controlling the lock from a location onsite that is out of view of the lock. Phase II will then involve remotely controlling the lock from an offsite location. Automating and remotely operating locks will significantly reduce operation costs without negatively impacting transit through the inland navigation system by allowing one set of operators in a central location to operate multiple facilities. Furthermore, the reduced operation costs would allow for more flexibility in funding for maintenance and other capital investments.

If successful, this project should be expanded to other locations, including the Upper Allegheny Locks located in Armstrong County, PA, where this technology has the potential to increase the availability and capacity of the locks and support other economic drivers, like recreational boating, in the surrounding counties.

Again, thank you to Chairwoman Napolitano, Ranking Member Westerman, and Members of this Subcommittee for allowing me to express my priorities for WRDA 2020. I appreciate your consideration and look forward to working together on these and other issues.