

House Transportation & Infrastructure Committee
Member Testimony
of
Congresswoman Lisa Blunt Rochester

Proposals for a Water Resources Development Act of 2024: Members' Day Hearing

January 11, 2024

Chairman Graves, Ranking Member Larsen, and members of the Subcommittee on Water Resources and Environment, thank you for the opportunity to advocate for stronger water infrastructure on behalf of the state of Delaware, especially for my constituents in vulnerable coastal and riverbank communities.

Congress has one of the best bipartisan track records in crafting the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) – in fact, Congress has passed a bipartisan reauthorization of WRDA every two years since 2014.

As the state with the lowest mean elevation in the country, WRDA is especially important to Delawareans, who feel the impacts of rising sea levels with every passing day. By 2050, the Delaware Geological Survey predicts that our sea level will rise by 1.3 feet.¹ And by the late century, climate change will cost Delaware well over \$1 billion annually, with cumulative costs of high tide flooding across the century sitting at \$17 billion alone.² These astronomical projections, the loss of habitation, water contamination, surges, and severe flooding are why I address the Committee with such urgency today.

In fact, the reality of this proved true just this week, as Winter Storm Finn tore across the United States and Delaware's coasts and cities. This powerful storm's high winds, heavy rain, and widespread flooding threatened to upend the lives of so many Delawareans. I urge the Committee to pass a strong WRDA that meets this moment head-on. WRDA is crucial to protecting communities across the country, especially in Delaware.

In previous WRDAs, the Delaware delegation worked to strengthen our shorelines and make our communities less susceptible to flooding and erosion. I'm particularly proud of what we accomplished together in WRDA 2022 through the inclusion of major provisions of the Shoreline Health Oversight, Restoration, Resilience, and Enhancement (SHORRE) Act,³ a bill I coauthored with Chairman Graves and Senators Carper and Cassidy to protect coastal communities from the devastating impacts of climate change.

¹ *The Delaware Geological Survey*. Determination of Future Sea-Level Rise Planning Scenarios for Delaware | The Delaware Geological Survey. (2017, November). <https://www.dgs.udel.edu/projects/determination-future-sea-level-rise-planning-scenarios-delaware>

² Industrial Economics, Incorporated. 2021. An Economic Analysis of the Impacts of Climate Change in the State of Delaware. Prepared for the Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control.

³ <https://bluntrochester.house.gov/news/documentsingle.aspx?DocumentID=2927>

Since then, Members from both sides of the aisle have continued to recognize the importance of increasing the coastal resiliency of the First State to protect against the numerous environmental threats to our livelihoods and natural heritage. We've ensured the operation of Delaware's ports and waterways, reinforced our Bay Beaches, and implemented environmental infrastructure authorities across the state. And for that, I am deeply grateful.

Securing the safety, economic security, and long-term viability of Delaware's coastal and riverbank communities means building on our progress and fulfilling our commitment to once again passing a strong WRDA without delay. Because the reality is that extreme storms and flooding are increasing in frequency, and when disaster strikes, it costs taxpayers even more.

Delaware's partnership with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is a strong one, but we need to do more to meet the challenges of today and the individualized needs of our most at-risk communities.

That is why I am advocating for new authorities for the City of Wilmington and the City of Rehoboth under the Environmental Infrastructure Program so these hard-hit localities can pursue critical wastewater and stormwater system improvements and infrastructure.

I am also requesting flood resilience feasibility studies for the Town of Milton and the City of Wilmington. Although they have already worked tirelessly to address persistent flooding, more must be done. They require comprehensive solutions so that when it rains or storms, livelihoods aren't on the line.

As this Committee knows, coastline degradation of Delaware's famed beaches poses a threat to residents and tourists alike. That is why I am requesting the addition of Broadkill Beach to the existing Delaware Beneficial Use of Dredged Material for the Delaware River project authorization for beachfill and restoration purposes.

Finally, I ask the Committee to authorize a watershed-wide ecosystem restoration study for the Delaware Inland Bays. This will create a path forward for critical salt marsh restoration, shoreline stabilization, and stormwater management.

I want to thank the Committee for their incredible work on this legislation and their partnership over the years. On behalf of the First State, thank you for your consideration and I look forward to working with you.