

## House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee Member Day Hearing Testimony

Rep. Rick W. Allen (GA-12)

Thank you, Chairman Graves and Ranking Member Larson for the opportunity to provide this testimony and highlight water issues that are critical to the 12<sup>th</sup> District of Georgia, namely the consistent issues we have experienced with the Corps of Engineers regarding the New Savannah Bluff Lock and Dam, or in short, the Lock and Dam. I'd also like to thank my colleague from Georgia, Representative Collins, for raising this issue with the Committee.

Many of you may recall that I have testified before this committee in years past on this very issue, which should only underscore the importance of the Lock and Dam to the residents of my district.

I want to thank Congressman Mike Collins for raising this issue in a T&I hearing in June, with the Corps of Engineers, and would also like to thank Congressman Hank Johnson for being a willing partner on this issue in the past, too.

Due to environmental mitigation from the Savannah Harbor Expansion Project, or SHEP, the Corps is responsible for constructing a mitigation feature that would allow sturgeon and other endangered fish to access their historic spawning grounds above the Lock and Dam near Augusta, Georgia.

Dating back to the 1930s, the dam was originally authorized for navigation purposes, but after it was no longer used for commercial navigation, many of the Central Savannah River Area's largest job creators and municipalities draw from the pool that the Lock and Dam has created.

In the 2016 Water Infrastructure Improvements for the Nation, or WIIN, Act, the language required the fish passage structure to "maintain the pool for navigation, water supply, and recreational activities, as in existence on the date of enactment of this Act" for either a "repair of the lock wall of the New Savannah Bluff Lock and Dam and modification of the structure" or "removal of the New Savannah Bluff Lock and Dam on completion of construction of the [fish passage] structure."

The Corps selected a rock weir as an alternative to replace the Lock and Dam, which I strongly opposed as it would drop the pool level far below the needs of the community. Lowering the pool does not meet the requirements outlined in the WIIN Act and is unacceptable.

Additionally, in a disastrous simulation carried out by the Corps, we saw firsthand the dreadful impacts of the lower water level that would result from the installation of a rock weir. From marooned boats and docks to excess debris and mudflats exposed throughout the river, the Corps was forced to abandon the simulation due to instability on the riverbank.

To my relief, the United States District Court of South Carolina later ruled against the Corps' proposed plan to remove the Lock and Dam in favor of the rock weir. However, the appeals court remanded the case back to the district court for further action, placing us back in legal limbo.

Throughout this tenuous process, Congressman Joe Wilson and I have worked closely with local community leaders and stakeholders who have all agreed that maintaining the water level of the pool above the Lock and Dam is critical, so our water users are not affected. The Cities of Augusta and North Augusta, as well as Richmond and Aiken Counties, have come together supporting resolutions to protect the Lock and Dam and maintain the pool at the level of 114.5 feet.

If the committee takes anything away from my testimony today it should be this: the Corps is not in compliance with the WIIN Act law by choosing an alternative that does not maintain the pool at the 114.5 level as it was in December of 2016 when the law was enacted, despite repeated bicameral reiterations of Congressional intent.

I urge the committee to work with me to include language that will repair and maintain the Lock and Dam and keep the pool level that our community needs, while still accommodating the modest fish passage required by SHEP.

I would also like to flag for the committee a WRDA priority of mine. I am seeking a new feasibility study authorization or modification to an existing study authorization to examine the benefit of both widening and deepening the harbor at the Port of Savannah to better accommodate today's commercial demands and to prepare for meeting tomorrow's trade needs.

Thank you again to the committee for holding this member day and I look forward to continuing to work with you on this issue.