

June 2, 2022

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Pelosi and Leader McCarthy:

The Nature Conservancy applauds the commitment of the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure to advancing bipartisan water resources legislation every two years. This continues to be an opportunity for Congress to strengthen communities using nature-based solutions proven to lessen flood impacts, restore ecosystems, and support the economy. Specifically, we commend the committee for producing the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) of 2022 (H.R. 7776). In developing H.R. 7776, the committee used a process that incorporated input from all members of the House of Representatives to reach a bipartisan and consensus bill. We urge your support for bringing the legislation to the full House of Representatives for a vote and urge all members to vote in favor of H.R. 7776.

Water resources legislation signed into law in 2016 was a landmark success for advancing natural infrastructure within the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE). For the first time, Congress directed USACE to consider natural and nature-based features, alone or in combination with gray infrastructure, when studying the feasibility of flood risk management, storm damage reduction, and ecosystem restoration projects. WRDA legislation in 2018 and 2020 reiterated and expanded the USACE focus on nature-based solutions. Conserving and protecting natural resources often provides our most effective and cost-effective line of defense against storms and extreme weather events while also delivering a host of additional environmental and community benefits.

WRDA 2020 also began to directly address the disproportionate impacts water resources management challenges have on disadvantaged communities by, for example, lowering cost-share requirements for some programs to better account for communities' ability to pay and emphasizing natural infrastructure alternatives where appropriate. Nature-based solutions offer multiple benefits that can be particularly beneficial to disadvantaged communities.

We are pleased that H.R. 7776 continues this trend of positive policy changes for USACE while authorizing critical water resources projects. The bill will help build inland and coastal communities that are more resilient to the effects of climate change by, among other things, beneficially reusing dredged material and allowing USACE to rebuild and maintain hurricane and storm damage reduction projects to higher standards. The bill will increase USACE coordination with tribal, minority, and indigenous communities. The bill also directs USACE to study the impacts of the historic drought conditions in the West to improve water management

and supply while preparing for aridification and climate change. These changes will help ensure that USACE is partnering with communities across the country to become more resilient to the effects of climate change while increasing the environmental benefits of USACE-constructed projects.

In addition, TNC was pleased to work with the committee and other members of the House of Representatives on several provisions in H.R. 7776. As a result, the bill will enhance the effectiveness of USACE technical assistance through the Planning Assistance to States and Floodplain Management Services programs by improving public access to the programs while targeting them to the needs of disadvantaged communities; improve the resilience of inland and coastal communities by, among other things, enabling communities to partner with USACE on projects that address the multiple risks of flooding and storm damage, including from climate change; support greater use of water level management on the Upper Mississippi River and Illinois Waterway System, which will improve the health of the upper Mississippi River by making modest changes to the operations of locks and dams in the region while maintaining the navigation channel; facilitate improvements to the nation's flood control levees, including through the use of levee realignments and nature-based solutions; and advance important ecosystem restoration projects for fish passage in New Hampshire and protection against aquatic invasive species in the Great Lakes.

Taken together, these provisions and many others in H.R. 7776 will support much-needed investment in multi-benefit water resources projects, targeting federal resources to disadvantaged communities and nature-based solutions.

The Senate is also advancing a bipartisan Water Resources Development Act (S. 4136) that contains many positive changes to USACE projects and programs. We look forward to working with the House and your Senate colleagues to take the best ideas from both pieces of legislation and perfecting them to produce an even stronger bill that the president will sign into law this year.

We urge the full House of Representatives to take up and pass H.R. 7776.

Sincerely,



Jimmy Hague

CC The Honorable Peter DeFazio, Chair, Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
The Honorable Sam Graves, Ranking Member, Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
The Honorable Grace Napolitano, Chair, Subcommittee on Water Resources and Environment
The Honorable David Rouzer, Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Water Resources and Environment