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December 6, 2024

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Minority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mike Johnson
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Hakeem S. Jeffries
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Majority Leader Schumer, Minority Leader McConnell, Speaker Johnson and Minority Leader Jefferies:

The Nature Conservancy applauds the bipartisan and inclusive efforts of both chambers to invest in and modernize our nation's water resource-related infrastructure and to maintain regular order of advancing water resources development 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 leadership of the Senate Environment and Public Works and House Transportation and Infrastructure committees for producing a consensus Thomas R. Carper Water Resources Development Act of 2024. (S.4367). The projects and policies included in this WRDA bill are vital to the economy, the environment, and the public safety of communities across the country. We urge you to bring this bill up for a vote as soon as possible and for Congress to pass this important piece of legislation.

We are pleased that WRDA 2024 supports many local and regional projects and programs to improve the environment and protect communities. For example, it will provide clean air, flood control, and recreation for communities along the Lower Mississippi River through the Hatchie-Loosahatchie, Mississippi River Mile 775-736 Habitat Restoration project authorization. Furthermore, the bill directs the Corps to revise its New York–New Jersey Harbor and Tributaries Feasibility Study plan to protect people and property from multiple flood hazards and maximize net public benefits. It will advance ecosystem restoration projects for fish passage in Maine. We appreciate the effort to expedite completion of the Chief's Report to enable fish passage along the Alabama River and beginning project planning, engineering, and design in partnership with the Corps and will continue to work with Congress to authorize this project. Additionally, WRDA 2024 authorizes several programs that prioritize environmental restoration, including the Upper Mississippi River Restoration Program, which will rehabilitate and enhance fish and wildlife habitat in the Upper Mississippi River system. WRDA 2024 also reauthorizes the National Dam Safety Program, ensuring that federal resources are available to assist states and dam owners with the maintenance of dams that pose the highest risks to life and property.

Lastly, the bill directs the Government Accountability Office (GAO) to initiate studies of Corps activities that are important for congressional oversight and future WRDA legislation. The report on the project lifespan and indemnification clause in project partnership agreements will address critical questions and concerns related to project partnership agreement requirements that can often restrict non-federal entities from participating as cost-share partners for water resources projects. Additional GAO studies and reports in WRDA 2024 on easements, disaster preparedness, ecosystem services, and barriers to nature-based solutions are crucial to advancing water resources projects that will support the economy, enhance the environment, and safeguard communities throughout the country.

Taken together, these provisions and many others included in the bill will support much-needed investment in multi-benefit water resources projects. We urge Congress to take up and pass WRDA 2024 as soon as possible. Thank you for your consideration of our views and for your bipartisan efforts to pass a final bill that would improve water resources management in our country to meet multiple needs, including achieving better environmental outcomes.

Sincerely,



Stephanie Bailenson
US Federal Water Policy Team Lead
The Nature Conservancy

CC: The Honorable Thomas R. Carper, Chair, Committee on Environment and Public Works
The Honorable Shelley Moore Capito, Ranking Member, Committee on Environment
Public Works
and
The Honorable Sam Graves, Chair, Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
The Honorable Rick Larsen, Ranking Member, Committee on Transportation and
Infrastructure