The Water Resources Development Act of 2016

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The Water Resources Development Act of 2016 (WRDA) authorizes 25 critical Army Corps projects in 17 states. These projects, which have undergone Congressional scrutiny and have completed reports of the Chief of Engineers, will strengthen our nation's infrastructure to protect lives and property, restore vital ecosystems to preserve our natural heritage, and maintain navigation routes for commerce and the movement of goods to keep us competitive in the global marketplace.

The bill provides critical investment in the country's aging drinking water and wastewater infrastructure, assists poor and disadvantaged communities in meeting public health standards under the Clean Water Act and Safe Drinking Water Act, and promotes innovative technologies to address drought and other critical water resource needs. The bill also responds to the drinking water crisis in Flint, Michigan, by providing emergency assistance to Flint and other similar communities across the country facing drinking water contamination.

The bill:

- **Invests in the Nation's Ports and Inland Waterways to Improve Commerce**
  Ports and waterways in the United States moved over 2.3 billion tons of goods in 2014. These ports and waterways require dredging, maintenance and modernization to ensure the efficient, safe and timely movement of goods.

  The bill authorizes improvements to ports around the country. These improvements at ports such as Port Everglades, Florida, and Charleston Harbor, South Carolina, will help expand the flow of commerce and improve goods movement.

  The bill builds on the reforms in WRRDA 14 to the Harbor Maintenance Trust Fund (HMTF) by clarifying the targets for increased HMTF funding, extending prioritization for donor and energy transfer ports and emerging harbors, and making clear that the Corps can maintain harbors of refuge.

- **Improves Flood Protection and Safety for Communities**
  The bill authorizes critical flood control and coastal hurricane protection projects across the country, including rebuilding levees in Kansas, Missouri, North Carolina, and Texas, and providing hurricane protection in Louisiana, which includes protection for I-10 -- the major hurricane evacuation corridor for the city of New Orleans.

  Our nation's dams are improperly maintained and are aging quickly, which poses significant safety and economic risks. Of the 84,000 dams in America, the average dam is 52 years old, and 14,000 are considered high hazard, meaning failure would cause significant loss of life and damage to the surrounding area. The bill authorizes the Federal Emergency Management Agency to provide assistance to rehabilitate high hazard potential dams.

  The bill updates the Corps emergency rebuilding authority for flood control projects (PL84-99) to allow the Corps to rebuild projects stronger than originally designed if it will reduce risk of loss of life and property and minimize life cycle rehabilitation costs. The bill also allows the Corps to implement nonstructural alternatives, including wetland, stream, and coastal restoration.

- **Restores Ecosystems and Promotes Public Access for Recreation**
  The bill authorizes numerous projects to restore precious ecosystems and preserve the nation's natural heritage, including a project critical to the ongoing restoration of the Florida Everglades and a project to revitalize the Los Angeles River. The bill also promotes restoration of nationally-significant water bodies and ecosystems, including the Great Lakes, Columbia River, Puget Sound, Salton Sea, Chesapeake Bay, North Atlantic Coast, Rio Grande, Lake Tahoe, and Long Island Sound.

  The bill requires the Corps to provide a plan for prioritizing ecosystem restoration projects that address identified threats to public health and preserve or restore ecosystems of national significance. It is also expands the ability of non-Federal service providers to operate Corps recreation facilities, allowing parks closed due to budget cuts to reopen.

- **Addresses High Priority, Regional Water Resources Issues**
  Waterways do not stop at the state border, and greater cooperation is needed to address issues that affect different regions of the country. The bill focuses on regional initiatives to address important water resource issues that impact communities across the country.

  In addition to restoring nationally significant ecosystems, these initiatives improve sediment management, prevent ice jams, and ensure adequate snowpack and drought monitoring in the Missouri River basin; restore oyster beds in the Gulf of Mexico and Chesapeake Bay; reduce flood risk in the Columbia River; and identify opportunities to provide system-wide flood protection in the Upper Mississippi and Illinois Rivers.

- **Streamlines Reviews and Increases Local Participation**
  The bill streamlines the process for approval of modifications to existing Corps projects and for new water withdrawals from Corps reservoirs. It also makes it easier for non-Federal partners to carry out portions of a project in advance of the Corps and receive credit for the work completed. Finally, the bill expands the role of local partners in implementation of water resource projects, including expanding the opportunity for non-Federal interests to carry out Corps projects and to contribute goods and services for a Corps project.

- **Promotes Innovative Technologies to Address Water Resources Challenges**
  Innovative water technologies, such as desalination and water reuse and recycling, can help address drought and other serious water resource challenges. The bill provides critical support for development and implementation of these technologies by allowing states to provide additional incentives for the use of innovative technologies through the State Revolving Fund programs and establishing a new innovative water technology grant program. The bill also reauthorizes successful programs that invest in water resources research and implementation of emerging technologies, including the Water Desalination Act of 2006 and the Water Resources Research Act. Finally, the bill encourages partnerships with other countries with expertise in dealing with water resource challenges.

- **Increases Flexibility and Federal Assistance to Address Drought**
  Ongoing drought is creating significant challenges for many communities across the country. The bill takes multiple steps to provide additional support to drought-stricken communities, including requiring the development of drought resilience guidelines to help communities better prepare and respond to drought and requiring the Corps to update the operation of its reservoirs to incorporate new technologies and better meet project purposes, including water supply needs. The bill also allows non-Federal interests to provide funding to the Corps to update or modify project operations to improve water supply.

- **Provides Essential Investment in Drinking Water and Wastewater Infrastructure**
  Numerous studies have shown the significant gap between water infrastructure investment needs and the funding available. The American Society of Civil Engineers gives drinking water and wastewater infrastructure in the U.S. a grade of "D". Additional investments in water infrastructure create jobs, grows the economy, and increase Federal tax revenues.

  The bill would help improve the nation's failing water infrastructure by modernizing the State Revolving Loan Fund programs, reauthorizing funding to control sewer overflows, and providing additional assistance for replacement of lead service lines and to support infrastructure needs in disadvantaged communities. The bill also helps poor and disadvantaged communities by providing technical assistance and enabling communities to plan for infrastructure investments in a manner that prioritizes public health while minimizing impacts on ratepayers.

  The bill provides direct emergency assistance to address the drinking water contamination in Flint, Michigan, and provides assistance to other communities facing similar drinking water threats.