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HEARING TO EXAMINE THE WATER RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT ACT OF 2026 AND U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS' PROJECTS, PROGRAMS AND PRIORITIES

HEARING

BEFORE THE

COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC WORKS

UNITED STATES SENATE

ONE HUNDRED NINETEENTH CONGRESS

SECOND SESSION

FEBRUARY 25, 2026

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COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC WORKS

ONE HUNDRED NINETEENTH CONGRESS

SECOND SESSION

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HEARING TO EXAMINE THE WATER RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT ACT OF 2026 AND U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS' PROJECTS, PROGRAMS AND PRIORITIES

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 25, 2026

U.S. SENATE
COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC WORKS
Washington, DC.

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10 a.m. in room 562, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. Shelley Moore Capito (chairman of the committee) presiding.

Present: Senators Capito, Whitehouse, Cramer, Lummis, Sullivan, Ricketts, Boozman, Merkley, Kelly, Padilla, Schiff, Blunt Rochester, Alsobrooks.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. SHELLEY MOORE CAPITO, U.S. SENATOR FROM THE STATE OF WEST VIRGINIA

Senator CAPITO. Good morning, everybody. I would like to call this hearing to order. I appreciate everybody being here.

I would like to welcome our witnesses, Secretary Telle and General Graham. I appreciate both of you being here. I also appreciate the back and forth that we have had with your offices over the last several months.

The purpose of today's hearing is to help the committee develop the next Water Resources Development Act (WRDA). Yes, it is that time again. We call that WRDA. WRDA not only authorizes water resources studies and projects, but sets national policies for the U.S. Corps of Engineers Civil Works Program.

Since 2014, this committee has kept to a biannual schedule of passing this bipartisan legislation and I look forward to continuing that track record today.

Earlier this year, or this Congress, earlier this year, Ranking Member Whitehouse and I sent a letter to our Senate colleagues soliciting their requests for WRDA 2026. I am pleased to say that we received a significant number of requests, more than last time, which demonstrates the strong interest and the necessity of this legislation.

To help us kickstart the WRDA process, this hearing will allow the committee to learn more about the Trump administration's recently announced priorities for the Corps, examine the agency's implementation of prior WRDAs, and then discuss ongoing projects and programs of the Corps.

Secretary Telle, I appreciate and applaud your willingness to closely examine what changes need to be made to allow the Corps to better deliver water resources solutions with our non-Federal partners. I look forward to learning more about those changes today.

The Corps does critical work across the Nation through its navigation, flood risk management and ecosystem restoration missions. This work protects the lives and livelihoods of millions of Americans and facilitates commerce throughout our Country and internationally. Last week, actually, I visited the Winfield Locks and Dams to see the great work the Corps is doing on the Kanawha River there. There is nothing like getting eyes on a project.

As I previously stated, it is important that any WRDA bill supports the timely and efficient delivery of water resource projects while continuing to meet national missions. Flexibility is key to ensuring that the Corps can identify and carry out solutions that are tailored to the needs of each community.

We must also continue to preserve the role of our non-Federal partners and sponsors in this process. To achieve this goal, WRDA 2026 will advance studies and projects, without forcing a one-size-fits-all solution.

In September, I stressed the importance of the timely implementation of WRDA 2024 and prior WRDAs, consistent with congressional intent. Secretary Telle, throughout your two decades as a Senate staffer and your confirmation process, you heard how important the Corps' work and the policies enacted in WRDA are to communities across the Country. Now that you have had more time on the job, I look forward to an update on the Corps' implementation efforts.

I also want to acknowledge and thank the staff across the Corps enterprise for their ongoing efforts to provide the committee with technical assistance on the WRDA requests that we received from our Senate colleagues. Technical assistance is a vital part of our legislative process, and we greatly appreciate timely responses from the Corps.

The work of the Corps has and will continue to make a difference in communities, and that is certainly true in West Virginia. The Corps is actively working on a number of studies and projects that are critically important to my home State.

The fifth and final stage of the Bluestone Dam Safety Assurance Mega Project, it is a huge project, in the city of Hinton, continues to make significant progress. Once completed, that project will protect more than 150,000 people and $20 billion worth of infrastructure.

I am also pleased that work on the Lower Mud River Flood Risk Management project in Milton, where Secretary Telle joined us there, could resume this summer. Unfortunately, there is still more to be done. West Virginia continues to experience devastating flooding.

I am thankful to the Corps, and the Huntington District in particular, for the progress they are making on the Kanawha River Basin and Upper Guyandotte feasibility studies. These studies are exploring potential solutions to manage the flood risk in these areas.

I look forward to making sure that the next WRDA bill contains the necessary authorizations and authorities for the Corps to continue to carry out this important work. And I thank the witnesses for being here today.

Our Ranking Member is not, here is his little sign, I will put it up here, he is here virtually today, he is in Rhode Island, where he is snowed in with 37 inches of snow. While we do not typically—which sounds like nothing in North Dakota.

Senator CRAMER. No, it sounds like plenty.

[Laughter.]

Senator CAPITO. While we typically do not provide for virtual participation, this is an extraordinary circumstances for an extraordinary person. And we are glad to have Ranking Member Whitehouse with us for this important hearing.

So, Ranking Member Whitehouse, I heard your voice from above here as we were starting, so I know you are listening. I look forward to continuing our partnership to develop the next bipartisan WRDA bill, and I now will recognize you for your opening statement.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. SHELDON WHITEHOUSE, U.S. SENATOR FROM THE STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

Senator WHITEHOUSE. Thank you, Chairman, for the hearing today to discuss the Water Resources Development Act of 2026. Thank you particularly for the courtesy of allowing me to participate remotely and to your team for making all of this wonderful technology actually work. I appreciate it very much.

Just to give you a sense of what is going on up here, the guy who plows my driveway had his plow snowed in, and is only now starting to get out. We found another team to take a whack at my driveway last night, a plow and a front-end loader. They were defeated, and went away after pushing in maybe 30 yards.

So we are in, I would say, hip deep here. Largest snowfall ever recorded in Rhode Island. So I appreciate the courtesy.

Thank you, also, Assistant Secretary Telle, and Lieutenant General Graham, for appearing before the Committee. I do wish we were convening under better circumstances.

Mr. Telle, as you will recall, I supported your nomination. I look forward to working with you. You committed to work collaboratively with this committee to tackle our priorities and deliver the Corps' missions to all American people.

Yet, communications between the Corps and congressional offices have been largely shut down. Your office does not answer requests for information from my staff. Letters from members of this committee receive no response. Questions for the record from last September's hearing remain unanswered.

As we convene today to discuss the WRDA Act of 2026, your office has issued implementation guidance for just 3 of over 180 provisions in the Water Resources Development Act of 2024. This seems ridiculous. when Congress passes a law, the relevant agency must move swiftly to implement it. And 3 out of 180 does not seem to measure up.

Most egregiously, in the 7-months since the Senate confirmed your nomination, we are seeing what I consider to be the worst

politicization of the Corps of Engineers in modern times. Like many other Federal agencies, the Corps' permitting processes have been corrupted to stymie safe, affordable renewable energy, and to give advantage to the President's big fossil fuel donors. I do not think that is fair, and I do not think that is right.

Wielding the permitting authority granted to the agency by Congress in this manner violates the law and contravenes the Corps' own regulations, which State that it is neither a proponent nor an opponent of any permit proposal.

You announced an unprecedented pause on $11 billion in funding for Corps studies and projects in Rhode Island and 11 other States represented by Democrats in the Senate, including six other members of this Committee, for the reason, according to Russell Vought at OMB, that we are Democrats. This is not just an attack on the opposition party but, because of our geography, it is an attack on our Nation's coasts as well.

Annual funding for inland flood projects has long outpaced funding for coastal projects, by 20 to 1, even 100 to 1. Instead of addressing this problem, the Corps has made things worse by pausing work on large-scale non-structural flood risk projects, the vast majority of which protect coastal areas. With our coasts facing severe increases in flood risk from rising sea levels and worse ocean storms, it is just wrong for you to so disfavor coastal areas.

A rumored Administration proposal to fund inland waterway projects off the backs of coastal ports, by significantly increasing the Harbor Maintenance Tax and merging the Harbor Maintenance Trust Fund with the Inland Waterways Trust Fund, would actually worsen the Corps' reputation as the bureaucratic tributary of the Mississippi River, with no regard for America's coasts.

The U.S. economy relies on global trade, and that global trade comes through our coastal ports. Please, you should not be party to administration schemes that would jeopardize our Country's long-term economic security just to harm coastal states as retribution for not bowing to the President's will.

It is hard for me to imagine what your theory is, pursuing a bill that requires bipartisan support to pass while engaged in this kind of conduct. I know it comes from OMB, but somebody along the line has to say no. A hard, fast and convincing course correction is required to get yourselves on track.

Please remember that you lead the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, not the Donald J. Trump Corps of Engineers.

Thank you, Chairman.

Senator CAPITO. All right. Okay. I want to thank the Ranking Member, and hope he finds somebody else to tow him out of there.

We are now ready to hear from our witnesses. Our first witness is the 14th Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works, Adam Telle. Secretary Telle was confirmed to serve in this role by the Senate in a bipartisan vote last August.

Prior to his confirmation, Secretary Telle spent two decades in public service with roles in the U.S. Senate and in the Trump Administration. He now oversees the civil engineering functions of the United States Army.

Welcome, Secretary Telle. You are recognized for 5 minutes to deliver your opening statement.

STATEMENT OF HON. ADAM R. TELLE, ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF THE ARMY FOR CIVIL WORKS, DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY

Mr. TELLE. Thank you, Chairman Capito, Ranking Member Whitehouse, and distinguished members of the committee. I appreciate the opportunity to be here today to discuss the development of the proposed Water Resources Development Act of 2026.

I am eager to share with you my perspective after 6 months, 7 months, as the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works, including what the Corps of Engineers is doing well and where significant reform is warranted. I hope my perspective is valuable to you as you develop WRDA 2026.

I also wish to share an update on the implementation of past WRDAs, which remains a topic of critical interest to members of this committee. Since my last appearance before this committee, the Army Civil Works Program has finalized implementation guidance for all of the remaining provisions of WRDA 2020 and 2022. WRDA is the law of the land, when it is signed by the President, and we are implementing the law today.

Of the 552 provisions included in the three most recent WRDAs, we are developing additional guidance for 19 of the provisions to ensure they are consistently implemented. I remain committed to completing the implementation guidance as soon as practicable and look forward to working with this committee to identify opportunities to improve the process for the future.

One thing I have observed at this point is that the Army Corps of Engineers is at its very best when responding to emergencies, where it is unburdened by red tape, and enters what we like to call Army mode. Specific examples come to mind. They include the Corps' execution of assignments to clear and remove debris after Hurricane Helene throughout Appalachia, in particular in western North Carolina, and after the 2025 Los Angeles wildfires.

Last August, the Corps successfully supplemented State and local efforts in anticipation of glacial outburst flooding in Juneau, Alaska. And just last month, the Corps executed assignments in response to winter storm Fern across the southeast. And today, we are busy responding to the ecological disaster in the Potomac River.

When it comes to our primary missions, our everyday missions, for decades, the Army Civil Works Program has not really had a plan. The status quo has been to execute everything all at once, moving each project down the yellow brick road of red tape one inch at a time, resulting in inexplicable delays, including the projects that are of strategic national importance.

Meanwhile, reaching paperwork milestones has been elevated as evidence of achievement. This is simply unacceptable for an agency that is so important to the safety and prosperity of the American people. Stacks of important government paperwork have never saved an American life or community, except perhaps in very cold weather when no other fuel is available.

We have to change the way the Army Civil Works Program conducts its business, or the next decades will be more of the same. The stars are aligned under President Trump's leadership to change this. We have in hand $45 billion that the Congress has previously appropriated to our programs that we have not yet exe-

cuted. Shockingly, $15 billion of this funding is more than 6 years old.

We also have many ongoing projects that the Congress has authorized and the Corps is attempting to build but which will require significant additional funding to complete.

The status quo approach is insufficient, meaning we will never deliver on what you expect of us without fundamentally changing our behavior. To meet this challenge, on Monday we unveiled a plan we call Building Infrastructure, Not Paperwork. It is comprised of approximately 27 individual but complementary initiatives to start. It is designed to reimagine and rejuvenate the Army Civil Works program. And with your support, this will be the most significant transformation of the program since at least 1986.

Much of the content of this product was informed by the feedback I heard from members of this committee, the frustrations that they have experienced. And through this suite of strategic initiatives, it is my goal to harmonize the Army Civil Works Program and to realign and right-size the incentive structures of the Corps of Engineers, with an emphasis, again, on building infrastructure, not paperwork.

This new plan is driven by a sense of urgency. Our strategy is centered on a fundamental cultural transformation to enhance our effectiveness and restore discipline. We are sharpening our focus on our primary under a strategic plan that will deliver on the mandate you have given us.

To accelerate project delivery, we are implementing smarter contracting practices, upholding higher design standards, and reforming our partnership pipeline to build what America needs, faster and more effectively. As President Trump has directed, and as bipartisan members of this committee have called for, we are cutting bureaucratic red tape by reforming our entire regulatory and permitting system to provide fast, clear, and consistent decisions to the public. This will eliminate costly delays and accelerate our economy at a time that we find ourselves in a global competition that will determine whether the United States of America remains the greatest nation in the history of the world.

Finally, we are instilling a discipline by fundamentally overhauling our financial and operational practices to attack waste and inefficiency. We are committed to executing our mission with a higher standard of integrity, ensuring every dollar is spent with purpose to achieve clear, measurable results for the American people.

President Trump, Secretary Hegseth, and Secretary Driscoll want to deliver infrastructure now, and our partners in Congress are tired of decades-long delays and cost overruns. The time is right for this change, and we have a unique opportunity to transform the way the Corps of Engineers conducts its business to meet this moment in history.

Thank you, and I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Telle follows:]

DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY

WRITTEN STATEMENT
OF

HONORABLE ADAM TELLE
ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF THE ARMY
(CIVIL WORKS)

BEFORE
COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC WORKS

UNITED STATES SENATE
ON
THE U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS' CIVIL WORKS PROGRAM AND PRIORITIES FOR THE NEXT WATER RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT ACT

FEBRUARY 25, 2026

Chairman Capito, Ranking Member Whitehouse and distinguished members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to be here today to discuss the development of the proposed Water Resources Development Act of 2026. I am eager to share with you my perspective after six months as the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works, including what the Corps of Engineers is doing well and where significant reform is warranted. I hope my perspective is valuable to you as you develop proposals for WRDA 2026.

I also wish to share an update on the implementation of past WRDAs, which remains a topic of critical interest to members of this committee. Since my last appearance before this committee, the Army Civil Works Program has finalized implementation guidance for the remaining provisions of WRDA 2020 and 2022 that warranted such guidance, with the exception of provisions from WRDA 2020 that were modified in

WRDA 2024. WRDA is the law, and we are implementing the law. Of the 552 provisions included in those three laws, we are developing additional guidance for 19 provisions to ensure consistent implementation across the Corps. I remain committed to completing the implementation guidance as soon as practicable and look forward to working with this committee to identify opportunities to improve the processes for implementing future WRDAs.

One thing I've observed in my short tenure is that the Army Corps of Engineers is at its very best when responding to emergencies, where it is unburdened by red tape, and enters Army mode. Specific examples that come to mind include the Corps' execution of Federal Emergency Management Act (FEMA) assignments to clear and remove debris after Hurricane Helene in Western North Carolina and throughout Appalachia and after the 2025 Los Angeles wildfires. Last August, the

Corps successfully supplemented state and local efforts under PL 84-99 in anticipation of glacial outburst flooding in Juneau, Alaska. Finally, just last month, the Corps executed FEMA assignments in response to winter storm Fern.

But when it comes to our primary missions, for decades, the Army Civil Works Program hasn't really had a plan. The status quo has been to execute everything all at once, moving each project down the yellow brick road of red tape one inch at a time, resulting in inexplicable delays, including projects that are of strategic national importance. Meanwhile, reaching paperwork milestones is elevated as evidence of achievement. This is simply unacceptable for an agency that is so important to the safety and prosperity of the American people. Stacks of important government paperwork have never saved an American life or community, except perhaps in very cold weather when no other fuel is available. We have to change the way the Army

Civil Works Program conducts business, or the next decades will be more of the same.

We have in hand $45 billion that the Congress has previously appropriated, but the Corps has not yet delivered. Shockingly, $15 billion of this funding is more than six years old. We also have many ongoing projects, which the Congress has authorized and the Corps is building, which will require significant additional funding to complete. The status quo approach is insufficient, meaning we will never deliver on what you expect of us without fundamentally changing our behavior.

To meet this challenge, we have unveiled a plan comprised of approximately 27 individual but complementary initiatives to reimagine and rejuvenate the Army Civil Works program. This will be the most significant transformation of the program since at least 1986, which was a watershed year for the authorities of the Program.

Through this suite of strategic initiatives, it is my goal to harmonize the Army Civil Works Program and to realign and right-size the incentive structures of the Corps of Engineers, with an emphasis on building infrastructure, not paperwork.

This new plan is driven by a sense of urgency. Our strategy is centered on a fundamental cultural transformation to enhance our effectiveness and restore discipline. We are sharpening our focus on core missions that serve the national interest under a strategic plan that will deliver on the mandate you've given us. To accelerate project delivery, we are implementing smarter contracting practices, upholding higher design standards, and reforming our partnership pipeline to build what America needs, faster and more cost-effectively.

A key component of this transformation is overhauling our internal processes. As President Trump has directed, and bipartisan members of this committee have called for, we are

cutting bureaucratic red tape by reforming the entire regulatory and permitting system to provide fast, clear, and consistent decisions. This will eliminate costly delays and accelerate our economy at a time that we find ourselves in a global competition that will determine whether the United States of America remains the greatest nation in the history of the world. Internally, we are making the organization leaner and more effective by optimizing our assets, modernizing operations, and ensuring all messaging aligns with our primary missions.

Finally, we are instilling a new culture of fiscal discipline and operational excellence by fundamentally overhauling our financial and operational practices to attack waste and inefficiency. We are committed to executing our mission with a higher standard of integrity, ensuring every dollar is spent with purpose to achieve clear, measurable results for the American people.

President Trump, Secretary Hegseth, and Secretary Driscoll want to deliver infrastructure now, and our partners in Congress are tired of decades-long delays and cost overruns. The time is right for this change, and we have a unique opportunity to transform the way the Corps of Engineers conducts its business to meet this moment in history.

Thank you, and I look forward to your questions.

Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works
hearing entitled, "*Water Resources Development Act of 2026: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Projects, Programs, and Priorities*."
February 25, 2026
Questions for the Record for the Honorable Adam Telle

Senator Cramer:

1. An often-overlooked benefit and many times authorized purpose of the Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) projects is recreation. Demand continues to grow in the outdoor recreation economy and USACE property has opportunities in spades. Despite the opportunity, USACE policy or lack of funding inhibits progress. Over the years I've tried to work with the USACE on individual projects and enacted new policies, such as the Lake Access Keeping Economies Strong (LAKES) Act to allow the USACE to enter into cooperative agreements with local stakeholders and retain recreation fees.

    a. Will you work with me on allowing locals to grow outdoor recreational opportunities at USACE projects and getting the USACE to meet the moment on restoring deteriorating USACE sites, like Government Bay at Lake Sakakawea?

    Response: Yes.

Senator Wicker:

1. The "Building Infrastructure, Not Paperwork" initiative emphasizes overhauling the project delivery pipeline and centralizing smarter dredging contracts to reduce delays and cost overruns. For the Port of Gulfport deepening project specifically, how will these reforms change the way dredging contracts are structured and awarded, and what measurable improvements in timeline and cost certainty would result compared to the Corps' traditional approach?

    Response: The implementation process for reforming project delivery and centralizing dredging is underway. Since the deepening project is not yet authorized, it is premature to determine the impacts of these reforms. The "Building Infrastructure, Not Paperwork" initiative will focus on the most effective and efficient procurement approaches and use of dredges in the Port of Gulfport project area.

2. I appreciate the Corps' continued engagement regarding the Gulfport Harbor Deepening Feasibility Study. It is vital that this study's Chiefs Report be completed so it is eligible for authorization in the 2026 WRDA Bill.

    a. However, I remain concerned that the corps has not fully accounted for certain benefits of this project, while overestimating some costs of the project. Just this last week, my staff were briefed on the ongoing analysis of these costs and benefits.

    Response: I will ensure you and your staff continue to receive Corps briefings on

the costs and benefits.

b. The Technical Review at the Walla Walla District was recently completed, and your office will soon formally review it. I would appreciate your attention to the report to ensure that all appropriate benefits have been captured and costs have been calculated appropriately.

Response: I will work with the Corps to ensure all benefits have been captured and costs have been calculated appropriately.

3. Dedicating additional funding through the annual budget process to inspections, operations, and maintenance will help prevent catastrophic lock failures on our inland waterways, as we experienced on the Tenn-Tom in 2024.

a. Will you work with me to ensure that the Army Corps dedicates the appropriate level of resources to lock and dam inspections, so we avoid future lock failures on our inland waterway system?

Response: Yes.

4. Section 8205 of the Water Resources Development Act of 2022 (WRDA 2022) was a reporting requirement related to dredging capacity in the United States. Under this section, the Secretary of the Army (through the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers) was directed to prepare and submit a report to Congress detailing the nation's current and future public and private dredge capacity and its availability to meet the dredging needs of the Nation's waterways and navigation channels. Could you please provide an update on the report that Section 8205 of the 2022 Water Resources Development Act required?

Response: This report is under development.

Ranking Member Whitehouse:

1. Last year, the Corp's South Pacific Division office was relocated from San Francisco to Sacramento, California. This month, you directed the Chief of Engineers to find a new location for the New York District main office, and to evaluate co-locating the North Atlantic Division office at the new district office location. Is your office considering, or have you directed the Corps to consider, reorganization plans that would involve the elimination or significant downsizing of any Corps district, division, or center office?

Response: At this time, I have not directed the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to develop or implement a reorganization plan that would eliminate or downsize any Corps district, division, or center office.

2. By what date (please provide a date) will this Committee receive responses to the questions for the record submitted from the September 2025 Corps oversight hearing?

Response: Responses to these questions for the record are under development.

Senator Merkley:

1. The Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) 2022 Section 8220 required that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) complete a report to Congress that would share information regarding the potential effects of hydropower deauthorization in the Willamette Valley, Oregon. This report was required to be transmitted to Congress no later than 18 months after the date of WRDA 2022's enactment – a deadline that has lapsed. The Portland District and the Northwest Division of USACE completed this report within the statutory timeline, yet the report is stuck in the administrative review process. Which agency is currently reviewing the Willamette hydropower report?

   Response: This report is under development.

   a. Please outline the remaining steps that the administration will take prior to publishing the report.

      Response: The report will be transmitted to Congress as soon as it has completed all reviews.

   b. Please provide the specific date that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers will submit the Willamette Hydropower study to Congress.

      Response: I am unable to provide a specific date.

2. Oregon's ports are a primary source of jobs in rural areas and provide support for our commercial and recreational fishing industry that supports local economies. The Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) of 2020 included provisions to expand the use of the Harbor Maintenance Trust Fund (HMTF) and authorize additional uses of funding at emerging harbors. What steps will you take to ensure the needs of rural port communities are met and ensure that the HMTF set-aside for emerging harbors and provisions for additional uses at emerging harbors are implemented?

Response: In allocating funds, the Corps considers all eligible uses of funds including work in rural communities.

   a. In Section 1129 of the Thomas R. Carper Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) of 2024, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) was required to publish guidance on establishing a mechanism to assist non-federal interests in financing projects at emerging harbors within 90 days of the law's enactment. That deadline has passed. Please provide the date that USACE will publish implementation guidance for the Emerging Harbors provision in Section 1129 of WRDA 2024.

      Response: A draft Memorandum of Agreement is under development which will be utilized if appropriations are received for such assistance and will provide the guidance necessary for implementation of this section.

3. The Federal Columbia River Basin System is an economic powerhouse, supporting

approximately 40,000 local jobs and moving more than $31,000,000,000 worth of cargo each year. This economic opportunity is in large part thanks to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' (USACE) work to maintain the river depth in the channel. However, I have heard concerns about the rising costs of the Dredge Material Management Plan (DMMP) for the Columbia River. Understanding that Oregon and Washington have done their part to secure funding, please provide an update on the DMMP and how the plan will continue to prioritize the economic interests of the Columbia River.

Response: The Draft Dredged Material Management Plan (DMMP) is a 20-year strategy to ensure the Lower Columbia River's navigation channel is maintained to its authorized depth, directly supporting the nation's and region's economic vitality. While the plan requires new capital investments that are cost-shared, a detailed cost analysis reveals that the proposed plan is comparable to current operation and maintenance costs. The DMMP prioritizes national economic development by identifying a suite of efficient placement locations and includes beneficial use opportunities for the dredged material. Implementing this plan involves a substantial contribution from our non-Federal sponsors in Oregon and Washington, who are responsible for cost sharing the new capital costs and securing all necessary lands, easements, relocations, rights-of-way and dredged material placement sites. This collaborative, long-term approach ensures the Columbia River will continue to serve as an economic powerhouse. The DMMP notice of public availability should be announced on May 6, 2026, with a Record of Decision scheduled to be signed by June 4, 2026.

4. Please share the current capability sheets for Fiscal Year 2026 and Fiscal Year 2027 for each District of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

   Response: Information for FY26 can be found in the FY26 President's Budget Press Book at https://www.usace.army.mil/Missions/Civil-Works/Budget/#Budget%20Information, with more information in the corresponding Justification Sheets, within the "Budget Information" section. The FY27 President's Budget has not been released, but once it has been released, the FY27 information will be available in the same location.

   Will you commit to providing Congress and external stakeholders with capability sheets when requested?

   Response: This information is available when the President's Budget is released.

5. Section 8205 of the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) of 2022 authorized a study for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) to examine dredging needs in different regions across the country and the capacity of publicly and privately owned dredge vessels to meet those needs. This study received funding in Fiscal Year 2024, but it has not been completed. At the February 2026 hearing, USACE shared that this study was in the steps of administrative review. Which federal agency is currently evaluating the study authorized in Section 8205 of WRDA 2022?

   Response: This report is under development.

a. If the study has not been completed by the time the Questions for the Record are submitted, please provide the date in which USACE will share this report with Congress.

Response: I am unable to provide a date at this time.

6. In Springfield, Oregon, the 42nd Street Levee provides flood risk reduction to approximately 24,000 residents and more than $4 billion in land and property value. However, the levee is more than 60 years old and may require upgrades to ensure the levee can withstand future disasters. The Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) of 2020 authorized an expedited completion of a feasibility study through the Section 205 Continuing Authorities Program (CAP) for the 42nd Street Levee project, which I understand has been paused since February 11, 2026. Did the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers provide the prior written notice to the relevant congressional committees required by the explanatory statement accompanying P.L. 119-74 before pausing the 42nd Street Levee Project?

Response: Written notice was not provided because the project is not paused.

a. If yes, please provide the date the notification was transmitted, the committees notified, and a copy of the written justification submitted.

Response: Not applicable.

7. Is the Springfield 42nd Street Levee project the only Continuing Authorities Program (CAP) project that is paused?

Response: The project is not paused.

a. If the answer is no, please list all CAP projects paused nationally by USACE organized by Section authority, USACE District, and State.

Response: No CAP projects have been paused.

b. If the answer is yes, is the pause limited to Section 205 CAP projects, to specific project phases, or any other factors?

Response: Not applicable.

8. I have heard from constituents that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) has shared that Springfield's 42nd Street Levee project was paused because it hit a "major milestone," therefore representing a "natural stopping point." Please identify the specific milestone reached, and explain the statutory, programmatic, or regulatory basis under which reaching a project milestone constitutes the suspension of federally appropriated funding?

Response: No specific project milestone has been reached that has affected funding on

this project.

a. Please clarify whether this milestone-based rationale was applied to any other Continuing Authorities Program (CAP) project or exclusively to Springfield?

Response: CAP projects do not have a milestone-based suspension of federally appropriated funding.

9. Describe the criteria and timeline for resuming work on the Springfield 42nd Street Levee project in Oregon.

Response: Not applicable.

a. What actions, if any, do the City of Springfield and the Portland District need to take before funding can be restored?

Response: Not applicable.

b. What is the status of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' current projection for when the project will resume active funding status?

Response: Not applicable.

Senator Kelly:

1. Your office put out a proposal to modernize how the Corps works, a key piece of which is requiring projects to be at 35% design maturity so that the cost estimate given to Congress is accurate. That should give Congress confidence that the projects we are authorizing and appropriating funds to are backed by reliable numbers, but I want to understand how the Corps will apply this to projects that are partially complete. For example, the City of Phoenix has a project called Rio Salado Oeste. This project's feasibility study has been funded and is nearly complete, but the City has now been told that to get this feasibility study to 35% would take an additional 18 months and could cost an extra $1 million. As you roll out your modernization program, how will you ensure that it does not further delay the completion of projects? For projects like Rio Salado Oeste, that received funding before the 35% design requirement was in place, will you ensure additional funds are made available in the Corps' budget to get these projects to the new design threshold you are requiring?

Response: The primary goal of this initiative is to deliver higher quality projects faster and with more cost certainty. The modernization effort being implemented is the RAPID (Risk-Informed, Aligned, Proportional, Iterative, Decisive) Feasibility Study Framework. The framework emphasizes early alignment and decision-making about the scope and recommended plan. Engineering and cost subject matter experts will be involved from the start, leading to more accurate and reliable plans. This proactive engagement ensures that the level of design needed is correctly assessed and incorporated early in the process.

For ongoing studies, the principles of the RAPID framework will be applied to the greatest extent possible. Each ongoing study will have a tailored transition plan to ensure the Corps honors its commitments while benefiting from this more efficient approach. I am committed to delivering studies that are both timely and fiscally responsible, ultimately providing more confidence in the cost estimates and project outcomes.

2. I secured authorization for an increased spending limit for Tres Rios in WRDA 2024 to complete that project. It has been several years since that authorization with no substantive movement towards resuming Tres Rios construction. Will the Corps commit to prioritizing funding and staff resources to move Tres Rios forward?

   Response: I commit to considering this project for funding along with other important projects across the nation.

3. In last year's WRDA bill we secured new emergency authorities for the Army Corps to ensure the Corps can exercise your regulatory authorities differently in regions experiencing drought. These changes have the potential to save hundreds of thousands of acre feet of water in certain years in the west, which we discussed during your confirmation. My understanding is the Corps has not yet released implementation guidance for these provisions – or implementation guidance for much of WRDA 2024. When do you expect the guidance will be released? Will you keep my office informed as guidance is developed?

   Response: WRDA 2024 is the law, and the Corps is implementing the law. Implementation guidance is not needed for all provisions of WRDA. My office and the Corps are actively working on implementation guidance for those provisions that require additional clarity.

Senator Padilla:

1. Sacramento has amongst the highest flood risk of any major American city, with 86% of its homes at risk. The Corps stripped over $126 million in funding from the FY 2025 work plan for critical Sacramento flood control projects, including Lower San Joaquin, Natomas, and West Sacramento. If funding is not restored by FY 2027, these projects will slow down substantially. Will you commit to restore funding for these projects by FY 2027 at the latest?

   Response: I commit to considering this project for funding along with other important projects across the Nation.

2. Congress appropriated $417.8 million for the Section 102 Donor and Energy Port Program in the FY26 Water and Energy Appropriations Act. Will the Corps commit to fully allocating these funds in the March Work Plan, consistent with congressional intent?

Response: I commit to allocating funds as directed in annual appropriations acts.

a. Donor ports generate half of Harbor Maintenance Tax revenues but historically received less than 3% of reinvestment. How will WRDA 2026 and current appropriations ensure predictable, equitable funding for these ports?

Response: WRDA 2020 included percentages for allocating certain spending from the Harbor Maintenance Trust Fund for specific types of port, including 12% for donor and energy transfer ports of which 66% is allocated to donor ports and 33% to energy transfer ports. The Corps will consider the percentages identified in Section 102 of WRDA 2020 as practicable and to the extent there are identifiable operation and maintenance needs. For FY 2025, $60 million was appropriated, of which 50% was allocated to donor ports.

3. The Corps, in collaboration with local and state agencies, is conducting a flood control feasibility study to identify a project which is essential to protecting the lives of over 55,000 residents and critical infrastructure in San Joaquin County. After three consecutive years of funding, the Lower San Joaquin River Feasibility Study (Lathrop-Manteca) was not included in the President's Budgets for either FY 2025 or FY 2026. The non-federal sponsors were told that the study was not funded in FY 2025 because the study's 3 by 3 by 3 waiver exemption documentation had not yet been approved by the Assistant Secretary in time for budget consideration. A clear explanation has yet to be provided as to why the study did not receive funding in the President's FY26 Budget Request. In the meantime, what was originally a $3 million study has now escalated to a study that will cost close to $10 million or more. Will you commit to take all the necessary actions to allocate funding for this study in both the FY26 Work Plan and the FY27 President's Budget Request?

Response: I commit to considering this project for funding along with other important projects across the Nation.

a. Will you commit to ensure all pending reviews and approvals associated with the study's new cost change request to support a second waiver exemption are considered in the most expeditious manner possible?

Response: Yes.

4. West Sacramento is another California flood control project whose funding was removed in the FY25 workplan and which was not proposed for funding in the President's Budget for FY 26. This is an important project to protect Sacramento, which has the highest flood risk of any major city in the nation. My understanding is that the Programmed Balance to Complete this project after FY 2025 is $1.226 million. Can you discuss your funding strategy for advancing the West Sacramento project?

Response: This project will be considered for funding along with other important projects across the nation.

5. The review for the cooperative agreement (PCA) for the West Basin's project to install recycled water pipelines in Carson and Gardena in LA County (Mills Memorial and North Gardena) was completed by both the Los Angeles District and South Pacific Division (SPD) in November. Typically, approval/sign off by SPD is all that would be required for execution of the agreement. However, at some point in the second half of 2025, your office issued a directive to Division Commanders requiring pending PCA agreements to be forwarded to the Office of the ASA (CW) for an "administrative review". For approximately three months and counting, the Mills Memorial and North Gardena PCA has been stalled at the OASA(CW) awaiting "administrative review". No timeline on how long this administrative review at the OASA(CW) will go on for or what the outcome will be. A key concern in getting this project moving is West Basin secured a $1.3 million CA state grant as part of the non-federal match. The state funding will run out if the Corps match is not released. Significantly, this project is largely being funded through Congressionally designated spending that I secured, so the funding is part of enacted legislation signed into law by the President. Will you commit now to release forthwith this Congressionally required funding for the West Basin recycled water pipeline?

   Response: This project is under review. Following completion of the review, alignment with the Environmental Infrastructure strategy and next steps will be determined.

6. In its FY 2026 budget proposal to Congress, the Administration recommended zeroing out funding for the Corps' Water Infrastructure Financing Program, claiming that the program is duplicative to the EPA's WIFIA Program. In my experience, these programs are not at all duplicative as they finance vastly different needs. Have you seen any evidence of the levees and dams that the Corps would finance being duplicative to the water supply and drinking water projects EPA finances?

   Response: The FY 2026 budget eliminates this program because there is no demonstrated need in the private market for Federal financial assistance for these types of projects. See Letter from Office of Management and Budget to Hon. Susan Collins, Chair, Committee on Appropriations at p. 36 (May 5, 2025). Moreover, the Corps WIFIA program is duplicative of other programs, such as FEMA's National Dam Safety Program and the EPA's WIFIA Program and is not an efficient use of federal resources.

   a. Doesn't it make sense to have the Corps review proposed WIFIA loans for flood control projects like levees and dam safety projects, areas that are within the Corps' expertise but not EPA's expertise? When Congress created WIFIA and the Corps' financing program in the WRDA 2007 bill, the intent was to support all water infrastructure regardless of whether or not the projects are federally authorized. Why does the Administration believe that these federal financing tools should only be used on non-federally authorized projects?

Response: The Further Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2020, Public Law 116-94, required the publication of criteria that "limit Federal participation in a project consistent with the requirements for the budgetary treatment provided for in Section 504 of the Federal Credit Reform Act of 1990 [(FCRA; 2 U.S.C. 661c)] and based on the recommendations contained in the 1967 Report of the President's Commission on Budget Concepts [(1967 Report)]." In response, 85 FR 39189 was published which in footnote 3 acknowledged that: "A project authorized by an Act of Congress to be built by the Army Corps of Engineers or Bureau of Reclamation is ineligible for WIFIA financing. However, a project that may connect to, or be tangentially related to, such a project, may be eligible depending on the factual circumstances (e.g., a project to upgrade a water distribution system that is connected to an Army Corps of Engineers- or Bureau of Reclamation-constructed water source may be eligible for WIFIA financing in some circumstances). Furthermore, a project at a local municipal facility might not be deemed ineligible simply because it was originally built by the Army Corps of Engineers or Bureau of Reclamation. Such questions will need to be resolved on a case-by-case basis."

7. Initiating a feasibility study to look at enlarging Buchanan Dam Eastman Lake in California is a major priority for federal, state and local elected officials representing Fresno, Madera and Merced Counties. I greatly appreciate you going out to visit the San Joaquin Valley and want to follow up on some of the things have been discussed. We have heard the FY 2028 timeline as the year the Corps will have capability to begin this work, and it is crucial that we get this study started no later than that. Every year we delay is one more year we could see another flood or drought that threatens lives and costs billions of dollars in damage. Can you commit that the Buchanan Dam Eastman Lake project will commence by 2028?

   Response: This study will be considered for funding along with other important studies and projects across the nation.

8. Similarly, initiating a feasibility study to look at raising Pine Flat Dam in California is another major priority to me and many other federal, state and local elected officials representing Fresno, Kings, Tulare Counties. I greatly appreciate you going out to visit the Dam and want to follow up on some of the things that have been discussed. We have also heard the FY 2028 timeline floated for quite some time as the year the Corps will have capability to begin this work and it is crucial that we get this study started no later than that. Every year we delay is one more year we could see another flood that threatens lives and costs billions of dollars in damage. Can you commit that the Pine Flat Reservoir Raise project will be commenced by 2028?

   Response: This study will be considered for funding along with other important studies and projects across the nation.

9. We continue to be stuck in a cycle where Corps leadership points to funding as the key factor limiting initiating this work, but when we request funding in appropriations – as my colleagues in Congress have done for a feasibility study on Buchanan Dam and on Pine Flat - the Corps objects to the funding due to a lack of capability to do the work.

How can we improve coordination so that when Congress prioritizes projects in WRDA or prioritizes funding to initiate a project, it won't be subject to these conflicting realities?

Response: Those two factors – funding and capability – are not necessarily in conflict but must align in order for the Corps to initiate work. The Administration is working to optimize the Army Civil Works program for quality, speed, and cost to build infrastructure. Once the FY26 work plan and FY27 Budget are finalized, we will mobilize our work force to execute on those priorities.

Senator Schiff:

1. Initiating a feasibility study to look at raising Pine Flat Dam is a priority to many federal, state, and local elected officials representing Fresno, Kings, and Tulare Counties in California. The Corps has indicated for some time that it will have capability to begin this work in Fiscal Year 2028. Will you confirm that the Corps remains prepared to commence this study in Fiscal Year 2028?

   Response: This study will be considered for funding along with other important studies and projects across the nation.

2. Recent language in the FY26 Senate Committee report accompanying the Energy and Water Development Appropriations bill has directed the Corps to strengthen wildfire resilience at its facilities, particularly in Western states. California continues to face devastating wildfire seasons that threaten watersheds, dams, and flood control infrastructure. What specific steps is the Corps taking to implement mitigation measures at Corps facilities and projects located in high-risk states like California and to incorporate wildfire risk into watershed and flood management planning?

   Response: The Corps continues to evaluate preventative wildfire risk work packages for budget consideration. In addition, a potential AI-driven pilot program has been discussed to better predict fire hot spots. This project would use AI-powered predictive mapping and drone technology to identify high-risk areas for targeted vegetation management. The primary motivation for this initiative is to protect the region's critical water supply and federal assets, such as fish hatcheries, from the catastrophic risk of contamination by fire retardants, carbon, and other debris following a wildfire.

3. The recent history of poor communication between the Corps and Congress has been extremely troubling. We have not received responses to a September 2025 Questions for the Record, direct communication between Hill staff and Corps staff is discouraged, details of new Corps initiatives are shared with Senate Democrats in a delayed manner, and letters with serious inquiries to the Corps remain unanswered. What specific steps is your office taking to rectify this breakdown in communications and be responsive to Members of Congress and the relevant committees?

   Response: It is important that all communications related to the Army Civil Works Program are consistent with Administration guidance and directives. A process has been established that includes having dedicated staff reviewing and approving

congressional inquiries and other requests.

4. The Corps has conveyed through various public channels its projects that have been paused or cancelled over the last year. Can you provide a complete and accurate list of studies, projects, and activities in California that are under review, that have been paused, and that have been cancelled since January 2025? Please also provide a justification for why such action has been taken for each of the projects.

   Response: The Corps is assessing and reviewing all projects in its portfolio all the time. Project managers, districts, divisions, and LTG Graham are empowered to stop, reevaluate, and provide oversight to address any concerns to get projects back on track.

5. The City of Los Angeles and the Corps of Engineers have worked in partnership to protect Angelenos from flood risk for nearly a century. Through Democratic and Republican Administrations, that partnership has never been affected by an administration's political affiliation. On September 10, 2025, General Graham testified in a hearing in front of the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure that the Post Authorization Change Report (PACR) for the LA River Ecosystem Restoration project would be completed in time for WRDA 2026. Although funding for this project is congressionally appropriated and expressly designated for this specific purpose, we have heard that the Corps has halted work and funding for the project. While we discussed this at the hearing, I would appreciate written confirmation regarding this project. What is the status of the LA River Ecosystem Restoration project and its PACR?

   Response: After reevaluation, it has been determined that the PACR will not be completed in time for WRDA 2026.

   a. If the project and/or its PACR is being terminated, please explain why. Please also clarify whether this decision was discussed with the Secretary of the Army and/or with anyone at the White House.

      Response: The PACR is not being terminated.

   b. Does the Corps have authority to terminate projects that have been approved and appropriated by Congress?

      Response: The Corps does not terminate projects authorized and appropriated by Congress without written notice which includes a justification.

Senator CAPITO. Thank you.

Next, we will hear from Lieutenant General William H. Graham, Jr., the 56th Chief of Engineers and Commanding General of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. General Graham assumed these duties after serving as the Corps' Deputy Commanding General for several emergency operations.

As Commanding General, he is responsible for over 30,000 civilian employees and 800 military personnel in more than 110 countries.

General Graham, welcome, and we thank you for being here. Please proceed with your opening statement.

STATEMENT OF LIEUTENANT GENERAL WILLIAM H. GRAHAM JR., CHIEF OF ENGINEERS AND COMMANDING GENERAL, U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS, DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY

General GRAHAM. Chairman Capito, Ranking Member Whitehouse, and members of the committee, I am honored to testify before you today in regard to the 2026 Water Resources Development Act. Through the Civil Works Program, the Army Corps works with our partners to study, build and operate protect water resource projects, focusing on our three main areas of commercial navigation, flood and coastal storm damage reduction, and aquatic ecosystem restoration.

Breaking these down, the navigation program, which consist of our coastal and Great Lakes channels, as well as the inland rivers and intercoastal waterways, underpins much of the national economy, ensuring that commodities can move reliably and efficiently.

Our flood and coastal storm damage reduction program maintains 746 dams, over 13,000 miles of Federal levees, and 450 miles of shore protection that provide, on average, a staggering $200 billion per year in flood damages avoided.

To continuously maintain and improve these mission areas, I want to thank this committee for supporting the Corps' Civil Works Program. Your commitment since 2014 to pass biannual Water Resource Development Acts has provided us with the authorities necessary to address the changing needs of the Nation's water resource infrastructure.

We deeply value the authorities you entrust to us and pledge to put them to work to deliver for the American people.

To that end, the Army Corps' objective, each and every day, is to safely and efficiently deliver quality studies and projects on schedule and within budget.

Our current on-schedule rate across the Civil Works Program is 86.2 percent. That is an improvement from 80 percent that I reported in September. So, by focusing on the basics and getting the engineering right, of getting the project management right, and getting the project delivery team right, we are making our cost estimates more reliable and our project delivery more efficient.

That said, there is more work to do, more improvements to make. To that end, we are very excited about the Building Infrastructure, Not Paperwork initiative that Mr. Telle outlined. These improvements, delivered by district engineers who are empowered to manage risk, not avoid it, will allow the Corps of Engineers to make

the necessary changes to best deliver our important infrastructure for the Nation.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. I look forward to addressing your questions.

[The prepared statement of General Williams follows:]

DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS

COMPLETE STATEMENT OF

LIEUTENANT GENERAL WILLIAM H. "BUTCH" GRAHAM, JR.
CHIEF OF ENGINEERS

BEFORE

COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC WORKS

UNITED STATES SENATE

ON

HEARING TO EXAMINE THE WATER RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT ACT OF 2026 AND U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS PROJECTS, PROGRAMS, AND PRIORITIES

FEBRUARY 25, 2026

Chairman Capito, Ranking Member Whitehouse, and Members of the Committee:

I am honored to testify before your committee today, along with Mr. Adam Telle, the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works, regarding the development of the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) of 2026. I look forward to continuing our work with this committee, the Congress, and the Administration to help address the Nation's water resources challenges.

Through the Civil Works Program, the Corps works with other Federal agencies, and with state, Tribal, and local agencies and others, to develop, manage, restore, and protect water resources, primarily through the construction, operation and maintenance, and study of water-related infrastructure projects. The Corps focuses on work that provides high economic, environmental, and public safety returns to the Nation. The Corps also regulates development in waters of the United States and works with other Federal agencies to help communities respond to, and recover from, floods and other natural disasters.

The authorizations and funding that Congress provides to the Corps allow us to advance our three main missions of commercial navigation, flood and storm damage reduction, and aquatic ecosystem restoration, as well as support related project purposes, such as water supply, hydropower, and recreation. The Civil Works program is performance-based and focuses on high-performing projects and programs within these three main mission areas. The Corps uses its engineering expertise and relationships with project sponsors and other stakeholders to develop innovative approaches to address some of the most pressing water resources challenges facing the Nation. Since 2014, the Congress has passed a WRDA bill every two years to address evolving water resources issues.

WRDA 2024 advances the Corps' principal Civil Works missions. The legislation reinforces the Corps' partnership with non-federal sponsors by refining existing programs, while introducing new tools to enhance coordination with non-federal partners, improve project delivery, and address evolving national priorities.

To promote long-term infrastructure resilience and to support coastal and riverine communities, WRDA 2024 provides expanded authority for forecast-informed reservoir operations and supports beneficial use of dredged material for shoreline restoration and flood risk reduction. It also authorizes recurring coastal mapping activities to ensure timely data for navigation safety and storm preparedness. Across all mission areas, WRDA 2024 includes provisions to streamline project implementation, facilitate crediting for non-federal contributions such as technical models, and improve transparency in project prioritization, strengthening the Corps ability to deliver safe, high-quality water resources infrastructure that supports both local communities and national economic interests.

My primary commitment is the successful execution of the Army Civil Works Program, ensuring projects are completed safely, on schedule, and within budget. I remain focused on implementing strategies to make our project delivery more efficient and our cost estimates more reliable. By improving our initial planning and design phases and applying rigorous risk management, we are enhancing the accuracy of our timelines and budgets. Furthermore, we are boosting our engagement with industry partners through early collaboration and market research to align our goals and secure more competitive proposals.

A successful Civil Works program depends on efficient project delivery and close partnerships with stakeholders at all levels. We are actively refining the early stages of our projects and managing risks to ensure every infrastructure investment delivers net national benefits cost-effectively. Ultimately, these priorities mean a better deal for the taxpayer and a better future for all Americans.

Thank you, Chairman Capito, Ranking Member Whitehouse, and Members of the Committee. This concludes my statement. I look forward to answering any questions you or other Members of the Committee may have.

Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works
hearing entitled, "*Water Resources Development Act of 2026: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Projects, Programs, and Priorities*."
February 25, 2026
Questions for the Record for Lieutenant General William Graham, Jr.

Senator Cramer:

1. In 2025, the Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) began a risk evaluation assessment and concluded the Williston Levee was not providing design level protection and no longer meets Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) flood protection accreditation standards. This development created several challenges, primarily for hundreds of homes and business owners in the community. I'd emphasize this levee was constructed and is still owned by the USACE as part of the Garrison Project. Its restoration remains a federal responsibility.

    a. Will you commit to assisting the city of Williston with interim measures to minimize flood risk?

    Response: Yes.

    b. What are the steps and associated timeline for restoring design level protection at the levee?

    Response: An Issue Evaluation Study (IES) will be conducted to further evaluate the project risks by developing models and refining potential failure modes. If the IES recommends further evaluation, a Dam Safety Modification Study will be done to evaluate alternatives and produce a scope of work for the development of plans and specifications for a remedial construction contract. Projected schedules will be further developed after the IES is completed.

    c. Are you committed to working with FEMA on resolving this issue in a timely and effective manner?

    Response: Yes, the Omaha District has and will continue to proactively coordinate with FEMA. A data sharing coordination meeting is scheduled for the week of 16 March 16, 2026, between FEMA and the Omaha District.

2. The Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) of 2020 (Public Law 116-260) authorized a Dam Safety Modification Study (DSMS) to identify a long-term structural solution at the Snake Creek Embankment. The study is expected to be completed in Fiscal Year 2026 and propose installing new relief wells to address seepage issues at the embankment.

    a. Do you still expect to finalize the DSMS this fiscal year?

    Response: The Corps anticipates finalizing the study during the first quarter of FY 2027. The team is finalizing the schedule and level of effort to conduct the 35%

design of the relief wells and obtain a certified cost estimate. Both are needed to complete the DSMS.

b. Upon completion, will you prioritize funding within your budget and installing the relief wells promptly?

Response: Snake Creek Embankment will be considered for funding along with other important projects across the Nation.

3. Section 503 of the WRDA 2020 (Public Law 116-260) required the USACE to establish a pilot program and develop a report on new strategies for terrestrial invasive species management. The report was due to Congress in December 2022, over three years ago. I asked for a status update when you appeared before this committee in September 2025. The feedback provided by your team following the hearing indicated the report was close to completion, but to date, I've yet to receive it.

a. When will the report be issued?

Response: This report is under development.

Senator Ricketts:

1. In 1944, Congress passed the Flood Control Act (FCA), which authorized the construction of a series of dams along the Missouri River to control flooding and maintain downstream navigation. The 1944 FCA also identified flood control, navigation, irrigation, hydropower, water supply, water quality, recreation, and fish and wildlife as project purposes for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps). Congress did not assign a priority to these purposes.

The Missouri River Mainstem Reservoir System Reservoir Regulation Manual (Master Manual) was first published in 1960 to direct the Corps' operations on the Missouri River. The revised 1979 Master Manual explicitly prioritized flood control over the other authorized purposes. These modifications allowed the floodplain to be developed, but reduced the habitat of endangered species such as the piping plover, pallid sturgeon, and interior least tern.

As a result, in 2000, the Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) issued a biological opinion (BiOp) recommending several changes to comply with the Endangered Species Act (ESA). The Corps, believing that these changes would increase the risk of flooding, declined. Litigation ensued and the Corps created the 2004 Master Manual to comply with a court order (*In re Operation of Mo. River Sys. Litig.*, 305 F. Supp. 2d 1096, 1099 (D. Minn. 2004). Following the court order, the 2004 Master Manual no longer ranked priorities and implemented changes intended to "restore the Missouri River to a more natural state".

Following a drought that ended in 2006, significant rainfall events flooded lands adjacent to the Missouri River and led to the filing of the I*deker Farms, Inc., et al v. United States*

case in 2014. *Ideker Farms, Inc., et al. v. United States,* claimed that the Corps' 2004 policy shift led to recurrent flooding on their land between 2007 and 2014. In 2018, the trial court found the Corps responsible for recurrent flooding due to its 2004 Master Manual decision to deprioritize flood control. In 2023, the Federal Circuit for the Court of Appeals affirmed that the Corps' work to restore the Missouri River to its natural condition caused intermittent flooding and constituted a *per se* taking of farmland.

Despite that ruling, the current Master Manual, last updated in 2018 and still governing the Corps' operations on the Missouri River, does not clearly prioritize the authorized project purposes.

a) General Graham, does the Corps currently treat the eight identified authorized project purposes as equal priorities?

   Response: No. Life and safety are always the top priorities.

b) If they are treated equally, does Congress need to take action? If so, what action is needed to establish clear project priorities for the Corps to follow?

   Response. No congressional action is needed.

c) If they are not treated equally, what legal basis, if any, does the Corps have for moving away from the 2004 Master Manual?

   Response: The Corps operates the Missouri River Mainstem Reservoir System in compliance with the 1944 Flood Control Act, that authorized the System, and other federal laws. Engineering regulations require the Corps to review our water control plans no less than every 10 years and to revise them as needed.

d) How does the Corps currently make decisions with the project purposes listed in the 2018 Master Manual? Specifically, how does the Corps make decisions regarding water control when project purposes such as flood control and ESA obligations conflict?

   Response: The authorized purposes do not conflict with ESA. Operations to support ESA are only taken when hydrologic conditions allow.

e) You have stated that protecting life and property is a priority for the Corps. However, given the impacts of the 2019 flooding along the Missouri River, it is difficult to see how that priority is reflected in practice. How does that align with the guidance in the Master Manual?

   Response: The flood control criteria in the 2004 and 2018 Master Manual are the same as the flood control criteria in the 1979 Master Manual. The 2019 flood event was a combination of two extreme hydrologic events. The first was a "bomb cyclone" that took place below the mainstem system that severely damaged most of the flood protection system (levees) in Iowa, Nebraska and northwestern Missouri. During this first event the Corps stopped all flow from

Fort Randall Dam for a number of days in an attempt to minimize peak flows below the system. After the bomb cyclone, the upper basin received a near record amount of runoff that required high system releases through the summer and fall.

Ranking Member Whitehouse:

1. Have any Corps employees been subject to disciplinary action for releasing information requested by congressional offices?

   Response: No.

Senator Merkley:

1. For more than 30 years, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) has worked in partnership with Columbia Basin Tribes to mitigate native fish populations in the Columbia River Basin. However, I have heard from constituents that USACE has reversed some of its commitments to work with Tribes to offset the loss of native fish populations through hatchery operations, specifically at the John Day Dam mitigation site. What specific steps has USACE taken to uphold its trust responsibility to Tribes in the Pacific Northwest?

   Response: The Corps continues to uphold trust responsibilities with Tribes in the Pacific Northwest by following the law. Annual Operation and Maintenance appropriations received for the John Day mitigation program support hatchery operations. In 2025, the Tribes provided the Corps with potential courses of action to increase the Total Adult Production (TAP) in an effort to reach the goal of 107,000 TAP. The Corps is evaluating these courses of action and any requirements necessary to implement.

   a. Will USACE commit to meeting with Tribes to discuss fish mitigation at John Day Dam?

      Response: Yes.

2. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) last appeared before the Environment and Public Works Committee in September 2025. At the hearing, you shared that you would rank fish hatcheries in the Portland District at a C minus or D plus and have given the Northwest Division direction to establish a long-term plan to reinvest in the hatcheries that are underperforming. At the February 2026 hearing, I asked what the plan entailed and received an answer with minimal details. What locations in the Northwest Division is USACE establishing a long-term plan to reinvest in fish hatcheries and meet mitigation responsibilities?

   Response: The Northwest Division (NWD) hatcheries included in the long-term plan are: Leaburg, Willamette, McKennzie, South Santiam, Marion Forks, Bonneville, Spring Creek, Cole Rivers, Dworshak, and Murray Springs hatcheries.

   a. Outline the steps, goals, and actions that USACE has taken or intends to take to reinvest in underperforming fish hatcheries in the Northwest Division.

Response: In January 2026, the Corps compiled a master hierarchy for fish hatchery assets to populate the Operational Condition Assessment (OCA) database for NWD-owned mitigation fish hatcheries. Portland District has an OCA inspection scheduled in early April for Cole Rivers Hatchery. The results of this inspection will be uploaded to the Corps' OCA database to identify, prioritize, and schedule outyear budget requests to address failing infrastructure and maintenance at Cole Rivers. This pilot of the master hierarchy at Cole Rivers Hatchery will also help the Corps refine the process so that it can be replicated and implemented at the nine other mitigation hatcheries owned by NWD throughout the Pacific Northwest. Our goal is to use these updated hatchery OCAs to guide the development of our long-term reinvestment plan to improve reliability and restore these hatcheries to their full production capability.

In addition, the Corps is evaluating the Walla Walla District's routine maintenance plan for Dworshak Hatchery to determine if that model can be applied to other mitigation hatcheries to track routine maintenance. The goal is to develop a routine maintenance plan with maintenance standards for each hatchery and work with the operators to implement the maintenance standards to address routine maintenance at each hatchery moving forward.

Senator Kelly:

1. I secured authorization for an increased spending limit for Tres Rios in WRDA 2024 to complete that project. It has been several years since that authorization with no substantive movement towards resuming Tres Rios construction. Will the Corps commit to prioritizing funding and staff resources to move Tres Rios forward?

   Response: I commit to considering this project for funding along with other important projects across the Nation.

Senator Padilla:

1. Thank you for our discussion about the San Francisco Waterfront Coastal Flood Study at the hearing. It was good to hear that you appreciate the work that has been done in that study effort. Our understanding from the non-Federal sponsor is that USACE has certified a 20% design maturity for the project with a Class III cost estimate. Will you commit to working with the non-Federal Sponsor to advance an appropriately-sized part of the Recommended Plan to 35% design maturity if funding can be identified?

   Response: Yes.

2. I want to repeat my concerns with the removal of construction funding for four California flood control projects in the FY25 Work Plan – and the absence of funding for these projects yet again in the FY26 President's Budget. One advantage of consistent budgeting is that it can provide a structure for more cost-effective design-build contracts, rather than getting just enough funding for project design and then entering into separate construction contracts. Is the Corps attempting to budget for design-build contracts, and if

so, how is that reflected in your budget proposals?

Response: Yes, the Corps evaluates all procurement methods for efficient program delivery and will express capability accordingly.

3. I understand that a post-authorization change report is underway for the Port of Long Beach's deep draft navigation project. Will you commit to completing and submitting that report for the Port's project in time for this year's WRDA bill?

   Response: Yes, I will commit to completing and submitting the report as quickly as possible.

4. As we continue through my state's wet season, how much does the Corps rely on real-time forecasting by the National Weather Service staff in operating reservoirs?

   Response: The Corps relies heavily on real-time forecasting by the National Weather Service.

   a. What impacts are you expecting in the timing and quality of information you will receive as a result of staff reductions the National Weather Service is experiencing?

      Response: The Corps cannot speculate on how staffing changes at the National Weather Service may impact the timing and quality of information.

Senator CAPITO. Thank you, General.

Okay, we will start the question portion. I am going to start, myself, and I am going to admit here, a little bit, Secretary Telle to a little bit of confusion on my part. Implementation of WRDA laws and a lack of transparency of what is needed to implement these laws, including the extent to which any appropriations are needed, has frustrated this committee for years. That frustration culminated in 1102 of WRDA 2024.

This section requires your office to develop and submit a plan to Congress on the implementation of WRDA 2024 and prior WRDAs. I recognize that there could be a variety of factors that impact the rate at which your office can implement WRDA. However, a firm understanding of where we stand on implementation is critical to the committee's ability to develop WRDA 2026.

What is the status of the plan that is required under 1102? And I know you talked a little bit about that in your opening statement.

Mr. TELLE. Yes, ma'am, thank you for the question. I would say to start off, when a law is signed, when the President signs a law and it becomes law, it is the law and we follow it. Of the 552 provisions included in the last three WRDAs, 21, as of the beginning of this week, 21 required implementation guidance.

On Monday, I signed implementation guidance for two of them. Of the 19 remaining, five of those pieces of implementation guidance will be finalized in the coming weeks. Seven of the provisions required appropriations to be implemented, and an additional seven require a longer rulemaking process that will engage the public in a way that will take longer than the typical implementation guidance.

The remainder of the WRDA provisions did not require implementation guidance, and therefore are in effect. I believe there are 86 reporting requirements included in the last three WRDAs, and those 86, the responses to those 86 reporting requirements are currently under administration review.

Senator CAPITO. Okay. Just so I understand, I am understanding from 1102 here that you are to put forward and submit a plan. You have just told me about the implementation guidance.

Is the structure of the implementation guidance the same as the plan? Do you see what I am saying? Are we talking about the same things here?

Mr. TELLE. Yes, ma'am. I think what we are trying to say here is, we are happy to comply with 1102. I will check the status on our compliance with that section itself.

Of the 552 provisions enacted in the past three WRDAs, only 21 of them—

Senator CAPITO. Required a lengthy—

Mr. TELLE [continuing]. required a more lengthy process. The rest of them took effect immediately because they were simple and straightforward enough.

So they are implemented. Again, 86 of the provisions required information from us. That information has been collected. The responses are currently under administration review.

Senator CAPITO. Okay. So we would get your implementation guidance of the remainder of those, we could expect that through the rest of the year?

Mr. TELLE. Two on Monday, I released two on Monday.

Senator CAPITO. Two on Monday.

Mr. TELLE. There are five that should be coming in the coming weeks.

Senator CAPITO. Okay.

Mr. TELLE. Seven that require funding to implement and seven that will require a longer process.

I will also add, there are ways that my team has been talking with your team and other Members of Congress to inform, both to get your advice on how we can shorten the process, but also for the future, how we can make WRDA more implementable.

There are ways that we can help you help us make the process much quicker.

Senator CAPITO. Is this the reason that there is $15 billion that is 6 years old, that has not moved forward?

Mr. TELLE. No, ma'am. No, ma'am. Largely unrelated. That funding is largely projects that were appropriated as a result of supplemental appropriations where for some reason, whether it is a design, or the project became too expensive, we do not have sufficient funding, the non-Federal sponsor has not agreed with the plan. There are a lot of reasons that funding has been stranded. The fact remains it is stranded. And we are putting pressure, I am putting pressure on the organization to find a way to make use of that funding.

Senator CAPITO. Yes, that is what I am thinking. I mean, I know you have reprogrammed in the past, I do not know in this particular area, I know there are strings on that. We have so many projects. That is a lot of money, $15 billion just sitting there on projects.

Mr. TELLE. It is a shame, Senator Capito.

Senator CAPITO. We need to work with you to try to figure out a way to do that.

General Graham, I talked in my opening statement about the importance of our non-Federal sponsors. I am interested to know how you keep that open line of communication with your district and division commanders to make sure that they are working with their non-Federal sponsors and that they are aware of any changes that we might make in WRDA in terms of the flexibility that they might have.

General GRAHAM. Chairman Capito, thank you for that question. In my opening statement, it said, we do not do anything by ourselves. Everything we do goes hand in hand with one of our Federal partners. We are working right now, the key member of that partnership is the project or program manager. And their skills at interfacing with our non-Federal sponsors, their skills at interfacing with the public are absolutely key.

We have instituted some initiatives recently to make sure that those key individuals have the training and experience to do that really, really difficult job, which is to make sure that they understand the problem, make sure that they understand what authorities this committee has given them, and as those authorities change, so that they can best inform our non-Federal sponsors on what options are out there, and how to put those options to work for their communities.

Senator CAPITO. Okay. Thank you.

Senator Whitehouse?

Senator WHITEHOUSE. Thanks very much, Chairman.

Mr. Telle, I would like to start with just trying to clear the information blockade. I have heard from members of the committee, constantly from my staff, from stakeholders struggling to obtain basic information from the Corps. And in particular, my staff has repeatedly requested information on the status of studies and projects affected by your review of the Corps' investigations portfolio, and by the pause in funding to Blue States announced by OMB last October.

If you would be good enough, Assistant Secretary Telle, will you authorize General Graham, right here, right now, sitting next to you today, to provide my staff with the requested information without further delay?

Mr. TELLE. Senator Whitehouse, thank you for the question. We met 2 weeks ago and discussed this issue. Your staff had requested information about the status of 39 separate projects or studies. I believe within a day or so of me visiting you, my staff provided you with detailed information on the 39 projects or studies that you requested, or we provided it to your staff.

If there is anything that we left off, please let us know.

Senator WHITEHOUSE. Well, it would be helpful if I did not have to wait until you and I had a personal meeting in order to get responses. So to the extent that we have asked for things beyond those 39, or that the responses are not complete, will you clear General Graham to provide my staff what they need and what they ask for?

Mr. TELLE. Senator Whitehouse, we will continue to do what we have been doing and we will do it even better than we have been doing, which is to visit with your team on at least a monthly basis and try to turn around very quickly the request for information.

There is no reason for me to clear General Graham. We are one team. We work together. And the information that you receive from General Graham will be the same as the information you receive from me.

Senator WHITEHOUSE. Well, let's turn to core missions. Your prioritization initiative proposes to focus all the Corps' resources on core missions, while terminating legacy efforts that the Corps believes no longer provide value.

Is coastal storm risk management a core mission that will be prioritized in the Corps' annual budget review?

Mr. TELLE. Senator Whitehouse, absolutely. Coastal storm risk management is growing and a critical part of our portfolio. We treat it with every bit of importance as inland storm risk management and navigation.

As I spoke to you 2 weeks ago when we visited, I spend a disproportionate amount of my time and effort trying to come up with building infrastructure in our coastal areas to protect flood-prone areas on the coast, disproportionate to the inland. So when it comes to Building Infrastructure, Not Paperwork, I can not think of anything that will benefit more than coastal storm risk management.

Senator WHITEHOUSE. So, back to core missions again, what happens when Congress has directed you in a WRDA bill to do a particular thing and you have decided that is not a core mission?

Mr. TELLE. Senator Whitehouse, we follow the law. I am not sure what specific action you are talking about, but we follow the law.

Senator WHITEHOUSE. The question of non-structural flood risk management we have discussed a couple of times.

Mr. TELLE. Yes, sir.

Senator WHITEHOUSE. You have made some, I think, logical points about dealing with the scope of the potential liability that the Corps faces. To address that, I have developed a suite of legislative reforms that would provide the Corps with the authorities it needs to implement non-structural solutions more effectively and more efficiently.

My staff requested technical assistance on that legislation in November and have yet to receive a response. Could you let me know when we can get that technical assistance?

Mr. TELLE. Senator Whitehouse, we will absolutely provide you with technical assistance. I will say that when it comes to the non-structural issue that you raised, I just want to make sure that the committee is tracking what we are talking about here.

In August, on the basis of exorbitant costs per unit that we were seeing, it was costing $600,000 per home to elevate structures, and the Corps of Engineers does not have experience elevating homes at scale on a regional basis, into the thousands of homes.

It does not mean that elevation of structures should not be part of our tool kit, it absolutely should. It is just that at this moment, that particularly, there were two projects affected that were in process, and five or six more that were under the feasibility stage.

We just came to you immediately in August and to the committee and said, hey, this is not right, we all have a responsibility here to ensure we are efficiently spending taxpayer dollars. And we want to get it right on non-structural.

Quite often that probably means that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers may not be the best deliverer of that. It does not mean it would not help participate in the funding of non-structural solutions at scale on a regional basis. It simply means that the Corps of Engineers may not be the best executor. A non-Federal sponsor may be.

Senator WHITEHOUSE. Well, I will close out just with the observation that, I appreciate some of the things you have said about coastal risk management, but particularly with Army Corps projects, getting stuff done and getting funding out are the two really powerful ways of expressing your priorities. And the continued 20 to 1 or 100 to 1 favoring of inland flooding over coastal flooding I think remains a problem.

When the largest adjustment to the Corps' actions is one that disproportionately interferes with coast projects, that makes it even worse. Then you throw in that Blue States tend to be coastal ones, and they were the ones that OMB held up for cuts, it does not look like it is a new day for coasts yet.

I appreciate everything you said about paying more attention there. I hope we can work together to turn that into some real progress. Thank you.

Mr. TELLE. Thank you, sir.

Madam Chairman, if I may, Senator Whitehouse, when you and I met recently, I committed to get you some information about the distribution between coasts and inland on supplemental funding. I will provide that to you now as well as the entire committee.

We analyzed all Corps of Engineers spending on flood risk mitigation since 2017, Fiscal Year 2017. Of the amount spent on flood risk mitigation in total, $24 billion, $9 billion was for coastal storm risk mitigation.

Senator CAPITO. Okay. Senator Cramer?

Senator CRAMER. Thank you, Madam Chair, and for Senator Whitehouse, I can not compare to what you are going through right now back in North Dakota. We have really good plows that can get us out of those situations.

[Laughter.]

Senator CRAMER. I do feel your pain, believe me.

Senator WHITEHOUSE. We usually have plows on pickup trucks.

Senator CRAMER. I understand. I want one of those, by the way. That is in my next life.

Thank you both for being here. I was thinking, Madam Chair, when you were talking about the history of WRDA, I remember when you and I were in the House and Chairman Shuster promised we would have 2-year WRDA. We have been doing it ever since. It is really a nice cadence we are in. And that is a testament to the leadership of this committee on both sides for the last several years.

Real quickly, Secretary Telle, I want to just share publicly what I shared with you privately lately. I really appreciate your work on the Dakota Access Pipeline Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). We will not go through the entire history of it. It has been a decade in the works.

I just want you to know that those of us who are living with that situation are grateful both for the urgency you have given it as well as the thoughtfulness. Thoughtful urgency, urgent thoughtfulness, whatever you might call it, complicated stuff, but we really appreciate the work of you and your team. We look forward to a decision of record here fairly soon, or a record of decision, fairly soon.

I want to speak just a little bit to you, Mr. Secretary, about the rollout this week, and just applaud, thank you so much. Anything that you can do to make the agency more efficient and effective in the very important work of your mission, I applaud. And if there is anything we should be doing to help codify any of that, please be open with us on that. I would really want to be part of that solution, if you will.

And I think, and this is a bipartisan issue, in fact, we have had some very good hearings already on permitting reform, and I think about the very specific role that your agency obviously plays, that the Corps plays in infrastructure buildout. Even your discussion, just listening to the last several minutes to your discussion with Senator Whitehouse, I think we are all on the same page.

Let's do stuff better, faster, more efficiently with lower costs if we can, while not cutting corners, just doing things in a better way. Let us know how to be helpful on that.

On the regulatory front, I do want to speak a little bit about the efficiency of jurisdictional determination as it relates to what is and what is not a Waters of the United States. As this new rule is in the making and really grateful to the EPA for the hearing out in North Dakota that we had, I hope we populated the record in a helpful way there. I feel like we really did.

One of the areas that has always frustrated me about the evolution of WOTUS is that even when the court has been crystal clear about what is not a Waters of the United States, which has always been fairly obvious to me, the idea that a jurisdictional determination is still required is one of my great frustrations.

So as we get to finalizing a rule, maybe just help me better understand that piece of it. How can we help landowners know intuitively, intellectually, obviously what is not a Waters of the United States? Is that an area of opportunity for us in efficiencies?

Mr. TELLE. Senator Cramer, thank you for the question. I think you are touching on something critically important that we are hard at work on as part of our Building Infrastructure, Not Paperwork initiative. On March 12th of last year, I will say we have already got a walking start, because the Sackett decision that was rendered by the Supreme Court in 2023 was the law of the land. On March 12th of last year, we issued interim guidance to our regulators throughout enterprise about what it meant to follow the law as it stands.

We have also, as you mentioned, gotten busy with our partners at the Environmental Protection Agency on making sure that our rules match the law as it stands today. We are intent on following the law.

The point that you are making, I believe the point you are making, which is a critically important one, is even when we have a new law, new rule, we still rely on the employees in General Graham's enterprise, whether it is at the Huntington District or the Portland District or the St. Paul District, we rely on our regulators, who are wonderful people, to interpret the law.

Quite often, I have heard frustration from Members of Congress, from the public, about the inconsistency they see across the landscape. If it is the law, it ought to be interpreted by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers employees consistently. And it ought to be in keeping with the law.

So we began the process in the fall of a very rapid acquisition of the latest technology to make sure that we can use the tools available that we have, the never before seen in human history data that we have to tie geographic features about what a Water of the United States is back to the law, all the way back to the Clean Water Act of 1972 and through all the decisions that have come ever since.

If we can provide this tool to our regulators, we can take subjectivity out of the equation. If we can get our regulators a tool, the tool may not provide the final decision. That may still be our regulators. If they have a tool, which we are very rapidly developing to coincide with the finalized rule, it will provide clarity and durability to the public in a way that we have not seen yet.

Senator CRAMER. That is a really great point. Because you are right, the diversity of ideas out there and philosophies, even, prob-

ably, among the regulators, is a bit of a problem. And that is what presents a lack of clarity to the developer, the landowner, an engineering firm in Bismarck, whatever the case may be.

I might just add to that, though, how about the determination by the developer or the landowner themselves to see what is obviously not a wetland to be able to say, I always put it like this, we do not ask every driver on the interstate to call the highway patrol every few miles to ask permission to drive the speed limit. Now, the nice thing about the speed limit is it is not only on the sign at the side of the road, it is on your GPS in your car. So, there is clarity there.

It just seems to me, we need to get that down to a more local level.

Mr. TELLE. Senator Cramer, you are right. The best version of what we are trying to do would enable the public to have transparency in real time about what is and what is not a Waters of the United States. These decisions should be made instantly, with the technology we have today.

This is complicated by the legal wrangling that has happened over the decades. I am committed to looking at what the law says today and providing technology that provides clarity in real time to the public.

Senator CRAMER. Thank you.

Senator CAPITO. Senator Merkley?

Senator MERKLEY. Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you all very much. The Corps does such important work in the northwest quadrant of the United States of America. We have a very close working relationship with the Corps that we much appreciate.

I do feel like the flow of information has changed a bit over this last year. I am very concerned about that. I have seen situations where an administration has previously not answered the QFRs until right before the next hearing, but I have never seen a situation where they just absolutely did not answer them at all.

And the QFRs that I submitted after our September gathering have never been answered. I just do not understand that. Why not answer them?

Mr. TELLE. Senator Merkley, I agree with you. I agree with you. I think it is unacceptable that we have not answered the questions for the record that were submitted prior to our previous hearing. This is something that I did not anticipate would take so long. Obviously, we had the longest government shutdown in history in the middle of that period, but it is still no excuse.

Senator MERKLEY. I really appreciate that. You have answered my question, that you want to get it done.

Mr. TELLE. And I will just say, both for this committee and for the House T&I committee, the QFRs are in the final stages of administrative review. We expect them very soon.

Senator MERKLEY. So, in the northwest, where we have put a lot of hydroelectric dams and flood control dams on the Columbia and on the Willamette and on its tributaries, there has always been this partnership in which we have said, well, we know those dams will have a big impact. The fish ladders will not get the fish through, so we have mitigation strategies, including hatcheries. And those hatcheries have been kind of a sacred responsibility to

maintaining the salmon and other species that travel through the river system.

It has appeared that the work that the Corps has been doing on the hatcheries has slowed down or stopped. Is there a strategy for the Corps to say that they are not going to continue this partnership that has been so important to the economy and the culture of the northwest?

Mr. TELLE. I am not aware of any particular strategy, Senator Merkley. I will defer to General Graham on the latest on that project.

General GRAHAM. Senator Merkley, thank you for that question. Absolutely not. Where we have fallen behind is the capital reinvestment of those hatcheries. I took a look at what the Portland District is doing on the four hatcheries that it has on the Willamette. We think that it probably has $160 million to recapitalize those facilities.

That is where we need to go. We are thankful for the roughly $9.4 million that we received in the latest appropriations to work on Cole River. And we will put that money to good use to design how to replumb that facility. As I mentioned, there is $160 million of backlog and we have not been investing in that. And it is time to capitally reinvest on those facilities.

Senator MERKLEY. Thank you very much, General. When I asked in September, you shared that you had ranked, after consultation, the hatcheries as a C minus or D at most locations, and indicated a desire to establish a long-term plan to reinvest in those hatcheries.

Is that plan currently under development? Because I thought that was a very good idea when you suggested that in September.

General GRAHAM. Senator, that plan is, first step on any of that plan is to make sure that we truly understand the State of the facilities that we have, so we can put a good cost estimate together. And talking about the Portland District, that is underway.

Senator MERKLEY. Well, if we need to formalize that in some way, I will be happy to work with you. I think the hatcheries are suffering. And Cole Rivers is such a critical one, but it is only one of many, many hatcheries that have been part of sustaining the fish on these multiple rivers.

So I want to really highlight that, and continue to work with you all on that.

I want to turn to, WRDA 2022 authorized a study to examine dredging in different regions across the Country. Dredging is particularly important to our many harbors on the west coast, our many riverways. It is very important to our recreational fishing, to our commercial fishing, to commercial traffic up and down the Columbia.

And that study, we do not have it. How do we get this study?

Mr. TELLE. Senator Merkley, I will push to General Graham in just a moment to give you a response on the study. I just want to reiterate something you said here. Dredging is the lifeblood of the American economy.

I have been using the analogy lately with all the winter storms, which is particularly appropriate today, with Senator Whitehouse stuck in Rhode Island, that our dredging capacity is really, it pro-

vides the same function to our economy that snow plows provide when we are trapped under inches of snow. We clear the roads, we can get back to work.

It is the same thing with our economy at a much larger scale. It is the secret to our economy, it is how we project economic power across the globe. And it is critically important.

I will let General Graham answer the specific question on the Columbia River.

General GRAHAM. Senator Merkley, thank you for that. Section 8205 of WRDA 2022 asks for that report. That report is still under administrative review. As the Assistant Secretary spoke to, we will work diligently to get that information over to you.

We are looking to, one point would be to look at dredging, we look at right now regionally, not so much as the Columbia system. Under Building Infrastructure, Not Paperwork, we are going to look to harness the power of, we are the largest purchaser of dredging services in the Nation, and we are looking to leverage that to get a better deal for the American people, to include the many industries on the Columbia River.

Senator MERKLEY. Thank you, General. My time is up, but in both the case of this dredging study and in the case of the report that was required for the impacts of de-authorizing hydropower in the Willamette Valley, I just had, the Peoples Utilities came in yesterday and said, we really want to get that report, because it appears that some of these smaller operations get a little bit of hydropower, but at a very, very elevated cost, way above other ways. They do not know for sure, and that is what this report was all about.

Both of these reports in September, we were told, is under administrative review, the words you just used, which means it is stuck at OMB. It is just essential in a democratic republic that when the reports are done, I understand a short look at them, and sometimes some correcting. To just have them die because somebody somewhere has never gotten to them or somebody somewhere does not like something that is in the report, we need to have the information flow. And if the information is not accurate it creates a conversation, we bring in other experts.

Please commit, both of you, to getting those reports out of OMB and delivering them. It is not acceptable in a democracy to have these authorized and funded by law, done, completed, the hard work that your team has done, General, that your team has done, Assistant Secretary, get us the reports, please.

Mr. TELLE. Senator Merkley, we will be happy to press on those reports. It is important that we coordinate across interagency. That does not mean it should be indefinitely delayed, as you point out.

There is value to making sure we have a coordinated response, and that is what these administrative reviews are often for. I apologize for the delay. We will get you a status update on both of those.

Senator MERKLEY. Thank you.

Senator CAPITO. Senator Ricketts?

Senator RICKETTS. Thank you, Chairman Capito and Ranking Member Whitehouse, for hosting todays' hearing. And thank you to our witnesses for being here. We very much appreciate it.

I certainly, Assistant Secretary Telle, applaud the Building Infrastructure, Not Paperwork process improvement. You know from our conversations I am a big believer in process improvement. And it is a great step toward accelerating project delivery. This is of course necessary as we look to infrastructure projects that will prevent future flood events.

One of those flood events we discussed, when we talked in September of last year, can have devastating impacts. In 2019, we had the most widespread flooding in State history in Nebraska. During that flood, four people lost their lives, and it cost Nebraska more than $3 billion, our farmers and ranchers lost a billion dollars of that.

And as we look to improve the Corps and its authorized programs, preventing loss of life should be the top priority. It is concerning that it is currently not being treated that way.

In the 1979 Missouri River Master Manual, flood control was clearly prioritized over the Corps' other authorized purposes. In this document, the purposes were explicitly ranked.

Following lawsuits filed by environmental groups relating to the Endangered Species Act, the Corps created a 2004 Master Manual to comply with a Minnesota court order. This amended the 1979 Master Manual to reverse the Corps' historical flood control water management practices, and put all project purposes on the same level as flood control to comply with the Endangered Species Act.

As a result, farmers and landowners saw disastrous flooding along the Missouri River and filed the Ideker Farms v. United States in 2014. This case claimed that the Corps' 2004 policy shift led to recurrent flooding on their land between 2007 and 2014.

In 2018, the court found that the Corps was responsible for recurrent flooding due to its 2004 decision to deprioritize flood control. Despite that ruling, the current Master Manual, last updated in 2018, is still governing the Corps' operations on the Missouri River, and still leaves the authorized project purposes unranked.

General Graham, does the Corps currently treat the eight identified authorized project purposes as equal priorities?

General GRAHAM. Senator Ricketts, no. Life-health safety is No. 1.

Senator RICKETTS. So when I asked you last year, you gave a similar response. How do you prioritize flood control and life and property when your Master Manual has the authorized project purposes are all ranked equally the same?

General GRAHAM. Senator, project by project, as those are formulated, life-health safety is always our top priority.

Senator RICKETTS. So even though you do not have it written down in the manual, it is kind of an unwritten rule or an unwritten thing that your team knows that if it involves lives and property, that gets ranked above the Endangered Species Act?

General GRAHAM. Life-health safety is always our No. 1 priority. I will get back to you on how we have codified that in our procedures. Life-health safety is No. 1.

Senator RICKETTS. All right. So, Assistant Secretary Telle, to protect life and property from flooding, would you say that Congress needs to act to make flood control supersede species protection?

Mr. TELLE. Senator Ricketts, I am not in a position to make that assertion today. It certainly seems that President Trump has prioritized protecting human life and human prosperity.

I will say, thank you, I would say on the Building Infrastructure, Not Paperwork initiative, I would say thank you, because you were part of the inspiration for that, given your run as Governor of Nebraska and everything that you did there. I will also say, related to the topic you are asking about, I am in the process of planning a trip along the entire Missouri River this spring. This is something I want to take a close look at, so that I can understand and help inform General Graham's process.

I absolutely think that protecting life is, it is always our No. 1 priority in everything that we do.

Senator RICKETTS. Well, I laid out the timeline of what I think the legal case is that has happened here. So I would certainly appreciate an opportunity, and when you are on the Missouri River, let me know. If I can make it, I would love to be there with you to talk about this. Because I think it really has created a problem based upon the legal history of what has happened here. This is obviously where I think that Congress does need to step in.

According to a congressional briefing with the Corps and U.S. Wildlife Service last year, the Pallid Sturgeon has demonstrated measurable recovery metrics. However, these updated metrics have not been made publicly available, limiting transparency and preventing meaningful review.

Assistant Secretary Telle, can you work with me and make a commitment to work with Fish and Wildlife Service to make these metrics public and provide them so we can have more transparency?

Mr. TELLE. Senator Ricketts, absolutely. This is something we are already hard at work on. Tim Petty, with the National Marine Fisheries Services, as well as our friends at Fish and Wildlife Service, we have been raising these types of issues at what is called the Water Subcabinet.

I think we are in a position in this administration to have a very practical view of these types of issues and solve them globally, and at the Washington, DC. headquarters level, so we can provide certainty across the Country for issues like this one, where we are trying to do our best to follow the laws as they relate to our environment, while also allowing the type of activities that benefit humanity to continue.

Senator RICKETTS. I see my time is expired, and with the Chair's indulgence, I am just going to hit upon a couple of points real quickly.

One of the things that I started when I was Governor was the Perkins County Canal. This is a canal that would bring water from Colorado to Nebraska. It is under a compact that we have with Colorado that dates back to 1926, and I look forward to working with the Corps as we push forward on this project, it is a very important project, to make sure that our folks in Nebraska, whether it is our water users, regular consumers or our farmers and ranchers, have access to water. So I look forward to working with you on that.

And then finally, also, one of the big issues we have occasionally is ice jams. And one of the things I think we need to address, and

I will followup on this later, is releasing water out of Gavins Point Dam to be able to address some of these ice floes. Salix, Iowa, for example, had its power generation curtailed in 2022 when we had a snowstorm there, Winter Storm Elliott. So again, I think the Ranking Member probably is feeling a little of that pain right now.

I want to highlight that one of the alternatives that people always throw out there is, hey, well, we can use explosives to try and break up the ice packs. Nobody wants using explosives on any of our river systems to break up the ice packs. So please, help work with us on other solutions so we do not have this ice jam problem.

With that, Chairman Capito, thank you.

Senator CAPITO. Senator Padilla?

Senator PADILLA. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Before I get to my first question, I want to make a statement that is going to echo the theme and concerns from a number of my colleagues on this committee. So let me start by being California-specific, and say that the Army Corps process for funding and implementing projects in California is fundamentally broken. I can not support a WRDA bill without seeing some real changes.

Let me review what has happened with California's highest priority Army Corps projects just within this last year. Sacramento has among the highest flood risk of any major city in America. The Army Corps gets it. Eighty-six percent of its homes are at risk.

Nevertheless, over $126 million was stripped out of the Corps' Fiscal Year 2025 work plan as part of the political transfer of over $250 million from States that have elected Democrat leadership to States with Republican leadership. That is trying to shift from Blue States to Red States.

On October 17th of last year, the Director of the Office of Management and Budget announced that over $11 billion in Corps funding for projects in Blue States, including California, had been paused. We understand the Corps' district commanders were told which projects were frozen, but were also directed not to inform the local project sponsors or the public.

So there is great uncertainty over where California projects are being frozen, and for how long.

What we do know is that many critical projects in California are also facing arbitrary obstacles. For the San Francisco Waterfront Project, we are hearing the Corps will no longer approve a Chief's Report that had been scheduled for this year. Work on the Los Angeles River Ecosystem Restoration Project has stopped, because the Corps is simply no longer processing the city's requests for a project cost increase, even thought Lieutenant General Graham publicly committed that the requested cost increase would be administratively approved in time for this year's WRDA, just a few months ago.

And a recycled water pipeline in Los Angeles County has been stalled for over 3 months now by a new policy requiring the Assistant Secretary's office to review project cooperative agreements that have already been signed off on by the Corps district and the division.

So, Madam Chair, how can I possibly support a business as usual WRDA, when so many critical California projects are either arbitrarily stopped, stalled, or facing fundamental uncertainty whether

they will still have funding going forward? To support a WRDA bill, I believe we need some certainty that when Congress has enacted and the President has signed into law specific funding announced for specific projects, these projects cannot simply be indefinitely frozen or stalled.

That being said, let me jump into my first question. General Graham, I want to ask you about the San Francisco Waterfront Coastal Flood Study, which is a critical project to protect downtown San Francisco from potentially severe coastal flooding.

The study is on the verge of completion after substantial local expenditures, per the Corps' longstanding schedule, and has been executed in full accordance with existing Corps guidance.

Yet in the late stages of a mature study, the new 35 percent design requirement, which you and I discussed at a recent hearing, last September, it presents major challenges for the authorization and advancement of this important project.

If the Port of San Franciso is willing to work with you to forecast and control costs through future cost shared work, what can the Corps do to complete the Chief's Report on schedule this year?

General GRAHAM. Senator Padilla, thank you for that question. I have spent time in both the Embarcadero, meeting with the Port over the years. And you are correct, that is the path that we had gone down. We have gone down this path of looking at these very complicated projects in many areas, coastal Texas, the harbor in New York City.

And what we have come up with are multi-multi-multi-billion dollar projects. And the update I got this week on where San Francisco Waterfront was is somewhere between $17 billion and $32 billion. Our construction budget every year is two to three.

So under Building Infrastructure, Not Paperwork, we are trying to take these looks at these very long, complicated projects and try to break them down into digestible pieces that we can actually get after and make San Franciso, that amazing place that it is, safer.

Senator, you have our absolute commitment that we are going to work diligently to break these projects down. We have to make sure that we get the engineering right in the cost estimates that we are giving you. We have been too long asking authorization from this committee when the engineering behind those cost estimates are only at 5 to 10 percent.

So I ask in this case, where do we think the design maturity is in total for the San Francisco Waterfront? It is about 10 percent.

So I think the way forward is, it is just such a big, complicated problem. We have great sponsors there.

So Senator, our commitment to you is to keep working on ways to take a look at these broad problems and break them down into manageable pieces.

Senator PADILLA. And that is the beginning of what I want to hear. What is the path forward? I know some of these projects represent a big budget, big dollar amount. So that is why this new 35 percent requirement is, it is not part of a one-size-fits-all, because not one size does fit all.

So what is the path forward? We have talked offline about the Everglades authorization precedent that was set. Nothing has to be that exact model, but there are other models that I would just love

to get a commitment from the Corps on, that this is how we are going to tackle those unique challenges of these bigger ticket projects that are so critical.

I know my colleagues have talked about life-safety. This is life-safety for San Francisco.

Mr. TELLE. Senator Padilla, if I may respond?

Senator PADILLA. Mr. Telle?

Mr. TELLE. I would just point you to a new process that we have developed as part of Building Infrastructure, Not Paperwork, to get at the exact challenge that you are identifying. We have incentivized our non-Federal sponsors to build these big, complex projects and we wind up studying them for decades. It turns out that to get them to the fidelity of engineering that is required to provide the Congress with accurate information, we may have to study them for another decade after everything changes in a community like San Francisco, that is a dynamic community.

The rapid process allows us to take features within a project and lift them out and design them to 35 percent maturity, so that we can submit them to you with confidence that we know what we are talking about, we know what the cost is going to be. And then get that project authorized and funded, start delivering for the American public, for your constituents. And then move on to the other features within the project, rather than seeking to boil the ocean right away.

Senator PADILLA. My time is up, and there are two things I will ask, some additional followup questions for the record after today. I do want to reassure my colleagues that there has been significant investment from local partners on this and other projects in California, for that matter, to date.

So as we may pivot to a different model of breaking this down and getting to completion in a different way, I want to make sure that those initial investments are credited and not overlooked. There is value there.

So with that, thank you, Madam Chair.

Senator CAPITO. Senator Boozman?

Senator BOOZMAN. Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank both of you for being here and the great work that you are doing.

I want to start off and really take just a second to thank you, Secretary Telle, for the support during the Dardanelles Spillway failure that nearly forced Arkansas Nuclear One offline. The incident exposed real vulnerabilities, not just for navigation, but for our regional grid and the 1,800 megawatts of nuclear generation that rely on stable pool levels.

So again, this really was a crisis, and the Corps did an excellent job of stepping in and getting that done in a timely fashion.

Secretary Telle, one of the things that concerns me, and I know it concerns both of you, is that Congress and our project sponsors continue to encounter inconsistent explanations between districts, divisions, and headquarters when it comes to project readiness and work plan prioritization. These inconsistencies slow projects and create confusion for local partners.

Can you tell us about reforms that you are in the process of implementing to create a more transparent, uniform, and predictable

process, so that Congress and sponsors can understand how decisions are made and what is required to move a project forward?

Mr. TELLE. Absolutely, Senator Boozman. Thank you for raising this point.

One of the features of Building Infrastructure, Not Paperwork, has to do with harmonizing and making consistent the work that we do from district to district. We are very blessed that the Corps of Engineers is out in the communities of America. I believe the stat that I quote is that only 2 percent of our work force is here in Washington, DC. The other 98 percent is out in our communities. That is a blessing and a wonderful strength that we have.

It also means that we have to work doubly hard to make sure that we have consistency, that when a State like yours is divided among multiple districts and you have communities that border those districts, and one part of the community may have to deal with one district, and another part may have to deal with the other.

They ought to get the same customer service and the same level of support, the same level of transparency that they get from each district, whether they are in the Little Rock District or the Memphis District, for instance.

So this is something I have been working on since I took this job. General Graham has been a great help ensuring that we can have consistent and coherent programs across the enterprise. We can not, I want to make very clear, this is not trying to centralize our work here in Washington. This is about empowering our commanders, taking some of the work off their plate that we can handle at the Washington, DC. level so that they can get after the type of work that we have been describing here today.

Senator BOOZMAN. Mr. Secretary, many permit applicants, including State and local governments, and private developers, rely on the Corps' for timely review of permits and consultation. Section 214, funding agreements have been successful in Arkansas, very successful, increasing capacity elsewhere in the Corps and expediting the permitting process for critical infrastructure projects.

For example, the Arkansas Department of Transportation has been able to fund a liaison to the Corps, increasing coordination and advancing key infrastructure projects, Fish and Wildlife, same story.

How do these agreements fit into your transformation of the Corps? What can we do in Congress to expand and improve these agreements where needed? And also, are we undergoing, is that part of the hiring freeze or hiring freeze now that is going on? Is that impacted? Because programs like this, to me, actually seem, the way they are working in Arkansas actually, you are able to expand your work force, without cost to you.

Mr. TELLE. Senator Boozman, you are absolutely right. This is a key part of Building Infrastructure, Not Paperwork. This committee has provided us with myriad authorities, 214 is just one of them, 203, 204, 1043. These are authorities where this committee has given us the ability to do what you said. We have this huge demand for our work, whether it is in the infrastructure part of our work or in the permitting part of our work. We have this huge demand.

And our districts have been incentivized in the past to hold all that work for themselves, to justify, in some cases to justify their existence. We have capacity out there with our non-Federal sponsors, with our State and local partners, with the private sector, where we, as a Nation, if we want to get after Building Infrastructure, Not Paperwork, we would be foolish to not take advantage of expertise and expand our capacity beyond just what we are able to deliver.

So, Building Infrastructure, Not Paperwork is all about leveraging our partners, and 214 is an example of that.

Senator BOOZMAN. Very good.

Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank both of you again for working so hard to get us moving in the right direction.

Mr. TELLE. Madam Chairman, I just want to touch on something that Senator Boozman raised early in his statement. We had a situation in Dardanelles, Arkansas, last August, where one of the gates on the dam there got stuck in the up position. I raise this because we, our folks there at the Little Rock District for days could not get that gate back down. And water was rushing through the dam, and the pool behind the dam was going down.

This did not get much media attention, but Arkansas Nuclear One, which powers much of the State of Arkansas, was within hours of having to shut down. Because the water behind that dam was getting to a low level.

And I just, it occurred to me when this happened and I heard about it, that this really is a great illustrator of the cyber, the vulnerabilities our critical infrastructure has from cyber. Because if a nefarious actor wanted to access our critical infrastructure, this is the type of effect it could have. I am really proud of our team in Branson, Missouri, which is looking after our critical infrastructure.

I just wanted to point to the Dardanelles, Arkansas, example as something that is a lesson for us all to learn as we think about our vulnerabilities.

Senator CAPITO. All right, thank you.

Senator Alsobrooks?

Senator ALSOBROOKS. Thank you so much, Chair Capito, for holding this important hearing, and thank you especially to our Secretary, Secretary Telle. Thank you also, General Graham, for being here today.

Maryland communities depend on the Army Corps to deliver critical flood protection, ecosystem restoration, and navigation projects that Congress has authorized and funded. So, Secretary Telle, I want to talk to you, because Senator Van Hollen and I sent you a letter earlier this month that outlined several Maryland priorities, which we hope the administration will include in the Corps' work plan for Fiscal Year 2026.

This included a Mid-Chesapeake Bay Island Ecosystem Restoration Project, dredging to maintain safe navigation channels for the Port of Baltimore, and C&O Canal Rewatering in Cumberland, which is key to cultural, environmental and flood mitigation in our State.

Now, the Mid-Bay Ecosystem Restoration Project is critical for dredged material management, as Poplar Island reaches capacity. I know you understand this, because you visited.

Would you explain how the Corps' plan to ensure that funding, contracts, and construction schedules are in place, so that this transition does not cause delays to the Port of Baltimore's dredging operations?

Mr. TELLE. Senator Alsobrooks, you are absolutely right. Ports like the Port of Baltimore, in particular, it is not just about dredging the channel to ensure that commerce can continue, it is also about having a place to deposit the dredged material that comes out of the channel that is so important, like the Port of Baltimore.

And you raised Poplar Island, that is where we have been depositing that material for many years. That is a place where we get beneficial use. We get to take that dredged material and restore ecosystem there in the Chesapeake Bay. As you said, it is running out of capacity. We have to expand that capacity, not just for the Chesapeake, but to make sure that the Port of Baltimore can continue to be the important terminal that it is for the Eastern Seaboard and our Nation.

We are ready, I believe that all is in order as it relates to that expansion. It is something that is important to me. As we develop the Fiscal Year 2026 work plan, we will absolutely—you have been a great advocate for this, and we will absolutely keep that in mind as we work through that.

Senator ALSOBROOKS. Okay, thank you.

General GRAHAM. Senator Alsobrooks, if I could just add, in March, we do plan to award with the $168 million we do have on hand, to award the Site One Prep contract. Then we will wait for additional funding and the work plan to come after that, eventually, to keep that project moving forward. Right now, as the Secretary spoke to, we are on track.

Senator ALSBROOKS. Okay, great to hear.

Dredging capacity in the mid-Atlantic is limited by aging equipment and few available vessels. So what specific investments, procurement plans or operational strategies is the Corps implementing to ensure that navigation channels serving Baltimore remain safe, reliable, and capable of handling increased vessel traffic?

Mr. TELLE. Senator Alsobrooks, thank you so much for raising this question. You hit on a very important thing here. Our Nation depends on dredging capacity. Unfortunately, the way that we are acquiring that dredging capacity and contracting with our private sector partners is inefficient.

Building Infrastructure, Not Paperwork, is going to tackle that in a number of ways. One of the ones that I will highlight that I think you are hitting on here, the way that we deal with the contracting for this is we quite often have regional contracts that do not look at the national scope and make smart decisions about how we deploy the resources nationally.

We also have environmental challenges related to dredging that we have not updated in sometimes decades. The way that I equate it is, sometimes we have these windows that we have to get in environmentally to dredge, and there is a small part of the year, I

equate it to something, your spouse asking you to run errands on a Saturday and you have to go to 10 different places.

You and I both live in Prince Georges County, Maryland. And you have to go all the way across the Washington, DC. metro for errand No. 1, you have to go back across the Washington, DC. area, metro, for errand No. 2.

Any rational person would go to the stop that is closest to them first, then the stop that is closest to that next, and the stop that is closest to that next, and have an efficient Saturday of errand-running. Right now, the way that we acquire our dredging, we are sending our dredgers all over, and they are spending, quite often, more time in transit between our ports than they are in the ports dredging.

Building Infrastructure, Not Paperwork, is going to get after this in a number of ways and give us more efficient dredging that is going to benefit the Port of Baltimore, it is going to benefit ports all up and down the east coast and the Gulf and on the west coast as well.

Senator ALSOBROOKS. Thank you.

Now, on October 17, Russell Vought, the Director of the Office of Management and Budget, posted on X that the "Democrats shut down," this is his quote, "has drained the Army Corps of Engineers' ability to manage billions of dollars in projects." He further stated that over $11 billion in lower priority projects, including projects in New York, San Francisco, Boston, and Baltimore would be paused or considered for cancellation.

In response, my colleagues and I, on October 30th, sent a letter to you, Secretary Telle, urging you to defend the Corps against politically biased decisionmaking, and that letter remains unanswered. Our staff continues to not receive information on the affected projects or studies. I, along with members of the Maryland delegation, sent a letter following up, requesting Maryland-specific details, as these threatened cancellations impact the safety, flood protection, and economic well-being of communities across our State.

I see our time is tolling. So I want to ask two quick questions, whether the failure to respond, because I know you said transparency was important to you, communication was important to you, and whether or not you regard that as a break in that commitment, and whether or not we can have that commitment from you, that we will have the answer. It has been 4 months, we have no answer to it yet. We need that commitment.

Mr. TELLE. Senator Alsobrooks, we had the longest shutdown in our Nation's history last fall. It was very unfortunate. It caused all kinds of problems for us in the delivery of what we do. It caused General Graham all kinds of problems. It was terribly unfortunate.

What I will say about projects is that we are assessing and reviewing all of our portfolio all the time. We empower our project managers, we empower our districts, our divisions, General Graham or me, if we see something going wrong with a project, to stop and take a look and make sure we get back on track.

This is normal, an everyday process within what we do to deliver good oversight and——

Senator ALSBROOKS. Secretary, I know that I am going to get cutoff in a second here. When can we expect a response?

Mr. TELLE. Senator Alsbrooks, we are happy to get you a response.

Senator ALSBROOKS. Okay, perfect. Thank you.

Senator CAPITO. All right. Senator Blunt Rochester?

Senator BLUNT ROCHESTER. Thank you, Chair Capito. And thank you so much to the witnesses for being here.

Some of my questions will probably just pick right up on my colleague's. First, I want to also say thank you for highlighting the focus on the vulnerabilities that we have with our critical infrastructure. I think that is something that we as a Congress need to pay particular attention to. Those vulnerabilities can be cyber, those vulnerabilities can be the elements. This is really, really important to all of us.

I wanted to start off by saying that during WRDA 2022 and WRDA 2024, I had the opportunity to work very closely with our former Chairman, Tom Carper, Chair Capito actually came to Delaware for a field hearing as well. Part of the work with Senator Carper was to authorize individual Environmental Infrastructure programs for each of Delaware's three counties.

As you know, the Environmental Infrastructure programs support local water, wastewater, and stormwater projects in partnership with non-Federal sponsors.

In conversations across my State, it is becoming clear that Delaware communities are having difficulty accessing funding for these programs. So Secretary Telle, how are you working to implement the Environmental Infrastructure authorities previously outlined in WRDA 2022 and 2024? What specific steps are you taking to make these projects more accessible to communities?

Mr. TELLE. Senator Blunt Rochester, thank you. When it comes to the Environmental Infrastructure authorities, and funding that Congress has provided, we are going to follow the law.

I will point out that while there has been a lot of good that has come from that program in terms of supplementing local communities' water capacity, this type of project is one that has not been included in the Presidents' budgets, whether the President is a Republican or a Democrat. This is not something that has been prioritized in Presidents' budgets.

And there is a reason for that. It is because the Corps of Engineers is the greatest civil engineering entity that humanity has ever devised. There are municipal needs that are critical. We all want clean water and wastewater in every community in America.

I think the question that confronts us, confronts me, is that, whether or not we are going to use United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) engineering excellence on these municipal functions. I see Senator Kelly is here, and I think about NASA, the greatest space agency humanity has ever devised.

We would not expect NASA to be in charge of every county science fair. I think that is where I think administrations of both parties have seen environmental infrastructure.

With that said, there are needs out there that the Corps of Engineers can address. Congress asks, gives us authority to address them and the funding to address them, and we will follow the law.

Quite often, that means contracting with the same providers that a municipality would contract with to deliver that service.

We do not have that inherent expertise within the Corps of Engineers, but we are happy to continue to follow the law and execute the funding that is provided by the Congress.

Senator BLUNT ROCHESTER. So, just to make sure I am clear, WRDA 2022 and WRDA 2024, this was the priority that we talked about. So are you saying, and when you compare NASA and a science fair, are you comparing the Corps with communities? Is that the analogy there, that you are saying municipalities, communities do not meet the standard of—I am just confused a little bit. I thought this was an easy question.

Mr. TELLE. No, ma'am, I probably made it more complicated than I should have. The bottom line here is that for a long time, as administrations of both parties have racked and stacked the priorities for funding for the Corps, this type of activity has not risen to the top. This dates back decades.

With that said, this has been a priority for Congress. And because it is a priority for Congress, and Congress includes the laws that tell us to do that, we will do it.

Senator BLUNT ROCHESTER. Well, I will tell you, I meet with our League of Local Governments, I meet with our communities. We just did a beach tour, and we have communities that, in Lewes, Delaware, where they need to elevate sanitary pumps. So I want to make sure we are following the intention of what we as Senators and Congresspeople representing our constituents are following up on.

Which leads me to two other questions in followup to Senator Alsobrooks. In October, the Corps paused the $11 billion in projects, including two from Delaware. We have been having challenges getting updates on those programs, one being Oak Orchard.

I am sure that you probably can not tell me specifically right now, but I would love a commitment to get, by next week, an update on the Oak Orchard project. And also, I wanted to confirm with you, because I know there have been these pauses and you mentioned the shutdown, are the other paused projects, are they all from both Democratic and Republican States?

Mr. TELLE. Ma'am, we do not—

Senator BLUNT ROCHESTER. I would hope you do not.

Mr. TELLE [continuing]. classify States as Republican or Democrat. We look at—

Senator BLUNT ROCHESTER. Well, you understand what I am saying. Right now, unfortunately, I am going to hate to have to even ask this question, but unfortunately, we have actually seen where whole lists of States have been included on projects and they are only from States that represent Democratic Senators. So I just want to confirm, because I would assume you are non-partisan. And maybe I would ask that you also get back to me on that question as well.

Mr. TELLE. Our concern is with the protection of the American public.

Senator BLUNT ROCHESTER. And so is ours.

Mr. TELLE. And the American economy.

Senator BLUNT ROCHESTER. And so is ours. So, last, I will also just say again, we support the work of the Army Corps. My sister is an industrial engineer, my brother-in-law is a nuclear engineer, my husband was a mechanical aerospace engineer. So we understand how important engineering is, how important it is.

We also have a job to do here. We want to continue to work in partnership with you to make sure our communities and our States are also taken care of, especially in this very important time.

Thank you, and I yield back.

Senator CAPITO. Thank you.

Senator Kelly?

Senator KELLY. Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you both for being here.

Mr. Telle, the Rio de Flag project at Flagstaff, it is designed to protect the city from flooding. We have bad wildfires in the region, we discussed this project during your nomination hearing.

It has hit the 902 limit. So for folks in the room that do not understand what that is, that means construction is on hold until the L.A. District completes a cost validation study, and then that study has to be reauthorized in some sort of water bill to restart construction. You know this, Mr. Telle.

The non-Federal sponsor has been told by the L.A. District that this report will be completed and submitted to Congress by May 2026, so in about three or 4 months, and in time to be included in this year's Water Bill.

So let me start with General Graham. Is that the timeline that you are tracking for completion of the validation study?

General GRAHAM. Senator Kelly, thank you for that question. Yes, it is. The Director's report is scheduled to be on my desk May of this year.

Senator KELLY. So, Secretary Telle, will you then commit to making sure that this study is submitted in time for WRDA 2026?

Mr. TELLE. Senator Kelly, I believe, and I will check with the Chairman, that May 26th will be sufficient time to have that included in WRDA 2026. I would also point out, this is a project that is affected by real estate issues related to railroads, as you well know.

Senator KELLY. Yes.

Mr. TELLE. This is an issue that part of our Building Infrastructure, Not Paperwork initiative about how do we solve some of these local real estate challenges, railroads are a big one. I think we can work with the railroad industry to have a better, nationwide, to have a better working relationship that will help projects just like this one.

Senator KELLY. Well, that is great. That is good news. It will be in time for WRDA 2026.

Similar issue, the Winslow Levee Project. Right now, the entire city of Winslow is in a flood plain. This project, this levee system will fix that.

So let me quickly go through the timeline here. In 2020, Congress authorized the project. In 2022, I secured the full Federal match for the project. In 2024, the Arizona legislature, they stepped up and provided the full local match for the project.

Once again, like the other one, this hit the 902 limit, which means construction can not start.

General Graham, when do you expect that the validation study for this one, the Winslow Levee Project, will be completed? And will this be in time for WRDA 2026?

General GRAHAM. Senator Kelly, direct answer, no. I do not believe that we will be able to get the documentation for a PAC up here in that time. Let me explain that.

It was authorized, and this is behavior that we are working under Building Infrastructure, Not Paperwork. This is behavior we are trying to prevent. It got authorized at roughly 5 percent design. So, shockingly, when we start to actually put the real engineering behind what it is going to take better protect Winslow, we realize that, well, there is more and that more is going to be more expensive, and in a different place.

Acknowledge absolutely that the other challenge here is that it is a ring levee basically around the town. So we can not just come up with, let's just do a little piece, because eventually the water will surround it. So we have to do this the whole thing.

So that behavior of asking for authorization for projects when we don' have enough engineering to give you what a good cost estimate is, I own that. We are working hand in hand with the Secretary's office to fix that.

We will see if we can beat, well, we are not going to make it, WRDA 2026. We will make a commitment to make WRDA 2028 with the information—

Senator KELLY. Is there anything that the local sponsor should have done differently here? This is frustrating, because it feels like they did everything right, and now we are in this downward spiral of—

General GRAHAM. Senator Kelly, that is on us. We own that. We have to work hand-in-hand with the local sponsors. We will see if there are some options where they might be able to provide funds. To try to get this over here by the end of May, I do not believe that we are going to make it. I understand that is a challenge for this community, that they are vulnerable. We will continue to work with a great sense of urgency to do everything we can to offer protection.

Senator KELLY. How many projects nationwide are currently under 902 reviews?

General GRAHAM. Senator, the number I have in my head is 29.

Senator KELLY. And what do you think that is as a percentage of all projects?

General GRAHAM. We have thousands of projects, Senator.

Senator KELLY. So it does not feel like a high percentage?

General GRAHAM. Every one of those is a commitment we have made to this committee and we are not delivering on it. So those are unacceptable. As part of Building Infrastructure, Not Paperwork, we are going to take a look at every one of those 902 busts to see why we have had to come back.

A lot of this is going to be, we have it authorized with immature engineering. Some of it is we just do not have the right team on it. So we will take a look at that. And if that is the case, we will move it to a different team or different district.

Senator KELLY. Yes, but it seems like with this one, especially, it is going to be a scenario where to get it reauthorized, it is going to take more time. And in that period of time, cost is going to go up, and then it is going to hit a 902 limit again, and then it is going to get reauthorized again, and new engineer and cost estimates. And you wind up spiraling, and you never get the project done.

General GRAHAM. That is the spiral of doom that the Secretary and I are working with to get the Corps out of.

Senator KELLY. All right. Thank you. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Senator LUMMIS. [Presiding.] The Chair thanks the member from Arizona.

The Acting Chair recognizes herself next. Gentlemen, thank you so much for being here.

I have a couple of questions. I am going to start with one about algae blooms. In my State of Wyoming, we struggle with algae blooms in our reservoirs. These are working reservoirs, so they support irrigation, drinking water, fisheries, and recreation. These harmful algae blooms that we have result in costly delays for communities and recreation.

So through WRDA 2024 implementation, what have you learned about preventing and responding to harmful algae blooms, especially in western reservoirs? And the question is posed to both or either of you who wishes to respond.

General GRAHAM. Senator Lummis, thank you for that question. I wish that algal blooms were only confined to the western States, but we certainly have this throughout the Country. It is a large challenge to all water resources agencies, to include the Corps. We are very thankful for this committee and for Congress to give us authority to do research and development on how to prevent these algal blooms.

We break this down into a couple of buckets. One is figure out how to detect them at the earliest stage possible, see what we can then do to prevent them, and then efforts to manage them. We are looking to find solutions that are scalable to the large reservoirs out in the western States.

We have some ongoing R&D efforts in the western States, and we have some potential research opportunities in the future, pending available funding.

Senator LUMMIS. Do you ever work with groups like the National Science Foundation, or other research-oriented government agencies to kind of double your efforts on things like algae?

General GRAHAM. Senator Lummis, we absolutely do work as a Federal family on that. Secretary Telle and I, when we leave this hearing, we are going to fly down to Mississippi. We are going to go to our large research lab in Vicksburg, Mississippi, where they are doing a lot of the cutting edge research on this.

Those researchers there are incredibly well tied into the rest of the Federal family, as well as the State level.

Senator LUMMIS. Thank you. Go with God on this one. It is an important issue to address in our Nation. Thanks for your attention to that.

Now I want to talk a little bit about snowpack, especially this year where we are in real trouble in the Colorado River Basin and

elsewhere, due to a historic lack of snowfall. And of course, Wyoming's water supply depends heavily on snowpack and runoff forecasting.

How does the Corps utilize soil moisture and snowpack monitoring authorities to improve long-term water supply forecasting and drought preparedness? We are into, I think here, like 20 or 21 in terms of non-historically low flows into the Colorado River Basin in particular.

Mr. TELLE. Senator Lummis, this is a critically important point. One of the techniques that we use, we have been using for quite some time, is called forecast informed reservoir operations. This is where we take an existing piece of infrastructure, we look at the weather, we look at what is headed our way, and we can make risk informed decisions about how to operate a reservoir to squeeze the most water out of it for water supply purposes, or hold the most water back for flood risk mitigation purposes.

I was out in California recently and some communities in California were talking to me about how actually snowpack monitoring can be even more critical to the operation of their dam than forecast informed reservoir operations. The technique that is done here is to fly LiDAR when there is no snow on the mountains, then fly LiDAR with the snow on the mountains. We are able better than ever to understand the snow that is there, or the lack thereof.

So this is critically important, because our infrastructure operators need as much information as they can possibly have, especially when water supply is low or floods are imminent, to make decisions that do not waste water when we need it, or that do not release water when there is too much of it.

This is a place where we have a lot of work to do in terms of the R&D. We are working on it right now at the facility that General Graham just referenced. It is a place, we can do a lot more of this to make better use of the infrastructure that we have.

General Graham, do you want to add anything?

General GRAHAM. Senator Lummis, just to add, we certainly are tracking the no-to low-snowpack out on the Plains and the Upper Missouri watershed and the Upper Colorado watershed are of great concern to all of us. Our water managers are watching that really closely. Thank you for that question.

Senator LUMMIS. Thank you for your responses. I look forward to working with you and other Federal agencies who can provide guidance, expertise, scientific research and answers for those of us who are struggling with these important issues.

Thank you, gentlemen, for being here today, and for your service.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from California, Mr. Schiff.

Senator SCHIFF. Thank you, Madam Chair.

I want to reiterate I think what has said by some of my colleagues earlier, we want to arrive at another WRDA reauthorization bill. They have been typically very bipartisan. When projects are canceled on a partisan basis, a political basis, it obviously makes it very difficult to get to agreement on a new bill, if we can not assume that what we appropriate money for is actually going to be spent and utilized.

Along those lines, last year the Army Corps of Engineers canceled several flood control projects for, in particular, in California

and others in Washington State. It looked like what we have seen in the cancellation of energy projects and other projects, like it was targeting Blue States.

So let me ask you, General, what was the rationale for canceling four California flood projects last year?

General GRAHAM. Senator, what I am tracking on this, there were four projects on the Sacramento River that had an excess carryover of funds. They carried them in from last year into this year. And when we receive money, the Corps of Engineers, we are supposed to obligate, put that money to use that year. And we had not done that.

So those four projects were using that carryover money and putting that to work now.

Senator SCHIFF. General, is it your testimony that it just happened to be in California and Washington State, two Blue States, that you found carryover funding that you could cancel? That that was not the case in any other State in the Union?

General GRAHAM. Senator, I will defer to the Assistant Secretary for a broader discussion of that. Those four projects, it was carryover funding that we were not using, or we had not put that money to use that last year. So asking for more money when we had not used last year's, and that amount of work we would not get to in this current year.

Senator SCHIFF. Are you going to use that money this year?

General GRAHAM. The $332 million, yes.

Senator SCHIFF. So those four flood control projects will go forward?

General GRAHAM. Yes.

Senator SCHIFF. And I have your word on that?

General GRAHAM. Yes.

Senator SCHIFF. Let me ask you about something you gave your word on last year, and that is the flood control project in the L.A. River Ecosystem Restoration Project. Last September, I think you testified in front of the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure that the PAC, Post Authorization Change Report for the L.A. River Ecosystem Project would be completed in time for WRDA 2026.

Although funding for this project is congressionally appropriated, and expressly designated for this specific purpose, we are now hearing that the court has halted work and funding for the project. I understand from your testimony earlier that they have given us a justification for reneging on the commitment from last September that real estate costs have gone up in the region.

Why is not that clearly incorporated into the report? Why is that a reason for not issuing the report?

General GRAHAM. Senator Schiff, thanks. And absolutely, we are not able to deliver on the commitment I made to Congress just back in September. We are not going to be able to get that PAC or justification document in front of this committee for WRDA 2026.

I walked that project at least twice over the last 5 years. This is one of those challenging projects at the USACE level, at the non-Federal sponsor level, and we can not just seem to get it together. Everybody understands that nobody wants a giant concrete trape-

zoidal ditch in their back yard. And there is so much opportunity here in downtown Los Angeles to achieve the benefits that this project is intended to pursue.

The real estate costs are over $3 billion.

Senator SCHIFF. General, they did not balloon just in September. Right? We are just talking about a few months ago. So why was it possible in September that led you to believe to the point of committing to getting it done in September. And now you are telling us you are not going to meet that commitment.

Are you testifying here that real estate prices changed that much since September, that this is the sole reason this is happening?

General GRAHAM. Senator, real estate, that is not the sole reason. It is a huge reason. And part of it is the larger acknowledgement on the Corps' part that these large, challenged projects, we really have to come up with a viable plan. I am struggling to come up with a viable way forward on L.A. River Ecosystem.

Senator SCHIFF. I guess what I am asking, General, and I will be very blunt about it, is this rationale about real estate costs since September in fact the reason why this PAC report is not going to be completed? Or has there been a political decision made not to go forward with this project?

Senator LUMMIS. The gentleman's time has expired, but you may answer.

Senator SCHIFF. I would ask the General to answer.

General GRAHAM. Senator, we are not political, as you well know. My struggle with this project is just putting the pieces together to move it forward.

Senator SCHIFF. So you have not been given a political instruction to cancel the project?

General GRAHAM. No, sir. No.

Senator SCHIFF. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Senator LUMMIS. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Alaska, Mr. Sullivan.

Senator SULLIVAN. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Secretary, General thanks for being here. Thanks for your responsiveness on a whole host of issues.

Mr. Secretary, I know you remember this in your confirmation hearing, the President's Executive Order on Unleashing Alaska's Extraordinary Resource Potential, the only State in the Country that has its own EO, a lot of it to reverse the previous administration's lockdown of Alaska.

And when I asked you a question about all the different directions you guys are getting, Corps of Engineers, you had probably one of the best answers I have ever heard in a confirmation hearing in my career. You said, Senator, "I have already tattooed that section of the EO on my heart." That is pretty good.

So, is that still tattooed on your heart?

Mr. TELLE. Senator, I read it last night, in fact.

Senator SULLIVAN. From your heart?

Mr. TELLE. Honestly. Yes. No, I don not even have to use paper anymore.

Senator SULIVAN. Okay. Well, look. Let me first compliment you guys. You know I am going to go to the Juneau issue, because it is a really, really, really big issue. And I will admit, it is a chal-

lenging issue. It is actually the kind of issue that Corps of Engineers is perfectly designed for, when you look at the Corps' history. Because it is literally thousands of homes being flooded every summer, probably happen again this summer. This very kind of unique glacier outburst that happens every summer.

By the way, it is incredible that no one has been killed. Because I have been out there the last two summers right after this has happened, talked to the homeowners, talked to some just a couple of days ago when I was in Juneau.

And it is remarkable, particularly two summers ago. Middle of the night, giant flood, freezing water, all over and nobody was killed. Thank God. Alot of property is at risk and currently at risk.

So I want to compliment you initially, because you guys have been very responsive. You have been responsive, Mr. Secretary, General, you and your team, when I asked you guys to work on this last year around this time, you got the Hesco barriers up quick, which by the way, saved the whole community. It is kind of amazing, you saw how close the flood—those Hesco barriers worked, right? We want to keep that without jinxing it. Because we are probably going to need them again this summer.

And then you, when the flood happened, you guys surged your brigadier general. I went out there, they were there for a week. It was really, really, really good.

And then I was in Juneau just last week, met with the Chamber of Commerce. Mr. Secretary, I read them the text that you sent me. So I appreciated the text, too. And your test said, hey, we are working on this, we want to make sure that it is a quicker solution than some of the things we are looking at.

Now, but just lately, I will tell you, this was an article from the Juneau Independent yesterday. Madam Chair, I would like to submit this for the record. It is a giant issue, as you can imagine, in Juneau.

Can I submit this for the record?

Senator LUMMIS. Without objection, so ordered.

[The referenced information follows:]

USACE Rescinds Promise to Pursue Lake Tap as Long-term Flood Solution

'Disheartening pivot' leaves CBJ leaders 'a little bit speechless' as assessment of worst-case flood-level scenario rises significantly

Date: February 23, 2026

By: Jasz Garrett and Mark Sabbatini | Juneau Independent

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has pulled back from studying a preferred long-term solution for glacial lake outburst floods, according to the City and Borough of Juneau.

City Manager Katie Koester announced what she called disappointing news during a Committee of the Whole work session on Monday. She said the federal agency still promised to consider the outlined five long-term alternatives, but would no longer be primarily focusing on the lake tap. She said the city was notified of the change on Thursday.

Koester said she did not understand why the agency's direction changed and hoped to learn more in a meeting scheduled with Sen. Dan Sullivan's office this week.

“They used words like, 'If there's ever an enduring solution,' and put it on a time frame of decades and not years,” Koester said. “I can assure you that our immediate next outreach was to our Sen. Sullivan, who remains committed to an enduring solution for the City and Borough of Juneau.”

The lake tap solution was not authorized to move forward on construction or funding, but its selection was meant to move the publication date of a technical report for public review to May.

That report is still expected to be submitted by USACE this spring, but it will now survey the five long-term solution options. This could significantly lengthen the timeline to implementing a long-term solution, according to CBJ.

The announcement, called shocking by some Assembly members, came immediately after city engineers said floods in future years may far exceed previous worst-case scenarios. Record floods have crested at about 15, 16 and 16.65 feet during the past three years, and a top-end scenario presented Monday could result in a crest of 22.5 feet. Flood inundation maps for a worst-case scenario last year showed a Mendenhall River crest of 20 feet.

https://www.juneauindependent.com/post/usace-rescinds-promise-to-pursue-lake-tap-as-long-term-flood-solution

	Lake Tap	Dam	Floodwall/Levee	Hybrid (Dam + Floodwall/Levee)	Relocation
Likelihood of Risk Reduction	High	High	Medium (Doesn't address bank erosion or downcutting)	Low	High
Risk Reduction if failure	GLOF release (partial or full) - Not worse or better than natural conditions	Extreme hazard (flash flooding etc.) - Higher wall of water than experienced in GLOF	Extreme hazard (flash flooding etc.) - Worse than natural conditions	Extreme hazard (flash flooding etc.) - Worse than natural conditions	Many relocated property owners leave Juneau
Constructability	Moderate complexity	Extreme complexity	Extreme complexity	Extreme complexity and disturbance of lake shore and river bank	Complex plus long timeframe
Operation and Maintenance Complexity and Cost	Lower	Significant	Extreme	More extreme (maint on both Dam and Floodwalls)	n/a
Number of properties impacted	0	450	697	503	2855

The five options for long-term flood solutions for the Mendenhall Valley. The lake tap was determined to be the preferred solution for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to study in December 2025. (City and Borough of Juneau Engineering and Public Works presentation)

A lake tap was deemed the best option for USACE to study by the city, the Central Council of Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska, and the U.S. Forest Service during a three-day USACE charrette in December.

The 2023 flood saw a flow of 34,000 cubic feet per second, the 2024 flood 42,000 cfs, and a preliminary estimate of the 2025 flood is more than 51,000 cfs.

In her presentation to the Juneau Assembly, CBJ Engineering Director Denise Koch explained why the lake tap is a desirable solution and called the worst-case flood scenario "sobering."

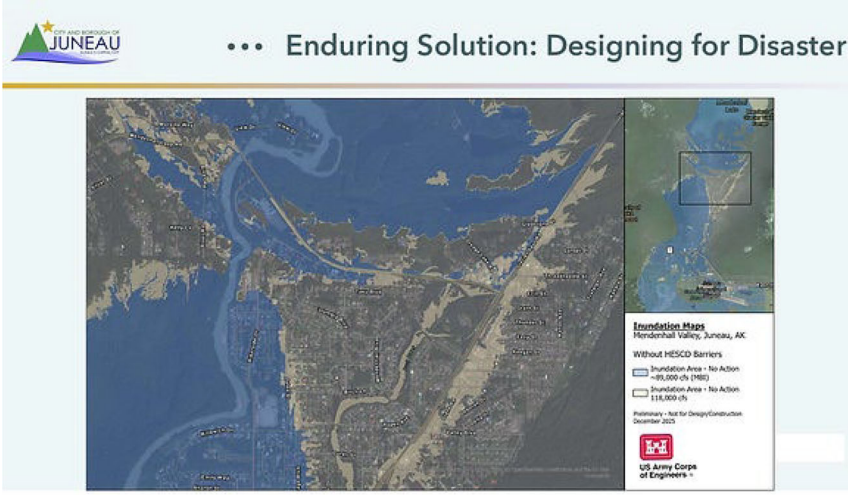
Koch's presentation included a "design peak flow" of 118,000 cfs, with inundation maps at that level showing most of the Mendenhall Valley submerged without protective measures. The worst-case flood scenario of 118,000 cfs was determined at the December charette by USACE.

Koch and Koester both remained adamant the lake tap is the best solution for long-term flood mitigation and said they would continue their advocacy with Alaska's federal delegation.

"The call to action that I would ask is to advocate for a lake tap," Koester said. "This community needs to be very singularly focused and together on what we need and demand for the survival of our community."

Residents living in the flood zone who attended Monday's meeting expressed shock and declined comment as they processed the information.

https://www.juneauindependent.com/post/usace-rescinds-promise-to-pursue-lake-tap-as-long-term-flood-solution



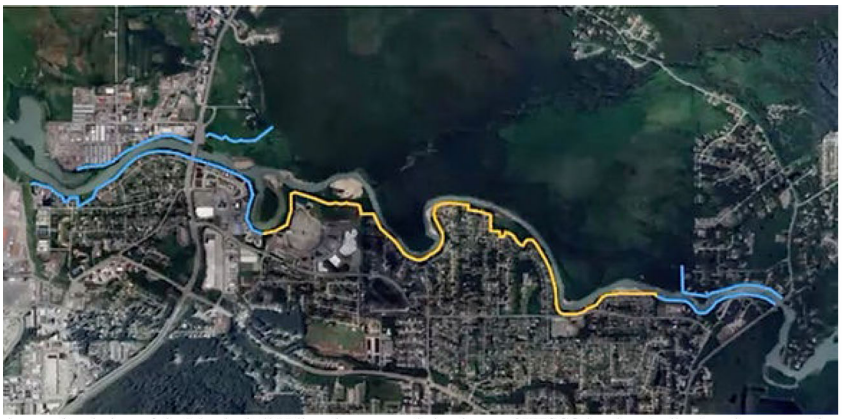
Inundation maps provided by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers detail a worst-case scenario of 118,000 cubic feet per second if no action is taken. (City and Borough of Juneau Engineering and Public Works presentation)

The Trump administration has frozen other funding from the Army Corps of Engineers, most notably $11 billion in projects last fall in a dozen states mostly led by Democratic governors. Also, CBJ, as of earlier this month, had not received any of its expected Federal Emergency Management Agency funds for public assistance projects after the 2024 glacial flood.

The Corps of Engineers is still expected to honor a short-term agreement with CBJ to pay for and install a second phase of HESCO barriers before this year's flood season, extending the current levee in both directions, according to city administrators. Officials said when the agreement was signed last October it would save the city about $17.5 million for the work, based on the nearly $8 million local cost for the first phase of barriers.

Nate Rumsey, CBJ's deputy director of public works, said Monday those general parameters are still accurate, but the scope of the work is changing. One part will include repairing and reinforcing the first stage of barriers, including making some higher due to potentially higher levels of flooding than previously expected. Also, some of the areas included in the second phrase of barriers — extending as far as the perimeter of Juneau International Airport, well away from the major damage zones — "didn't see a lot of direct flooding from the river at all."

https://www.juneauindependent.com/post/usace-rescinds-promise-to-pursue-lake-tap-as-long-term-flood-solution



An overhead view of the Mendenhall Valley shows an existing levee of HESCO barriers (yellow) and a proposed second phase (blue) that would extend the barriers from Juneau International Airport to the Back Loop Bridge. (City and Borough of Juneau)

More specifics about the second phase of the project are scheduled to be discussed with USACE engineer officials Tuesday, Rumsey said.

He said the city already has the barriers in its possession, so there isn't a concern about the federal agency revoking that agreement. The city is responsible for the ongoing maintenance of the barriers once they are installed.

However, Rumsey said, those barriers "are likely not the answer to our problems" if a worst-case flood under the new projections occurs. He said an enduring solution is needed.

https://www.juneauindependent.com/post/usace-rescinds-promise-to-pursue-lake-tap-as-long-term-flood-solution

Senator SULLIVAN. So, and it says, U.S. Corps of Engineers Rescinds Promise to Pursue Lake Tap as Long-Term Flood Solution, "Disheartening pivot leaves Juneau leaders 'a bit speechless' as assessment of worst case flood scenario rises significantly."

So, look, a lot of times things happen where the transparency is not as good as it should be. Now, there is real frustration in the community. In December, the lake tap became as the preferred option. People thought there was momentum building. And the concern is, in Juneau, is the Corps has pulled back on quiet without clearly explaining the changes in direction to the community.

So what I want to do here is I want to be able to put that issue to rest. I know people in Juneau are literally watching this hearing. It is that big of a deal. There is a real frustration in the community.

And I think with transparency—and look, I trust you guys, right? You have been on it. And a clear path forward with tangible progress on a long-term solution.

Can you confirm to me the Corps is fully committed to delivering a durable, long-term solution to Juneau as quickly as possible? And that we are also ready for the short-term, right? Because again, we are probably going to have, there are estimates of record flooding again this summer.

And then finally, we are working on the WRDA bill. And I guarantee you, my colleagues here, because I have explained this to them, on both sides of the aisle, if you guys have big asks in the WRDA bill, hey, Senator, we are going to need this special thing for Juneau, I have already talked to the Chairman and the committee.

I think both my Democrat and Republican colleagues would be flexible with me to get you authorities that you need to really attack this, including the money, which will be significant. On the other hand, like I said, this is what the Corps of Engineers is designed for. We have people who are going to be flooded every summer, up to thousands of people in the Mendenhall Valley.

So can both of you talk about that? Look, a lot of times I think my colleagues know, and Madam Chair, if you will just work with me here, I know I am going over my time limit, but this is a really important issue, you know, I will come and I will rip the hell out of witnesses, does not matter Democrat or Republican, when I think they are not keeping their word.

I do not think that's the case with you guys. I have a lot of faith in you, Mr. Secretary, General. Both of you. I know you have been really committed to this. And I do not fully understand why, because I was just in Juneau, there is this perception that things are going dark, people are nervous again, that the Corps is not engaged.

I just want you to A, be able to clear that up, and again, once again commit to me, hey, we are going to work this, this is a challenging issue but we will it with speed, time, urgency, short-term, medium-term, and long-term, kind of like what your text said.

And I did read the text. And by the way, I appreciated the text. You knew I was going to Juneau. I told you and your team, hey, I want to be able to clarify this.

So maybe it will take maybe another meeting, a Zoom meeting or something with leadership in the Juneau community, me, you guys. I kind of want to put this to rest. Because I know you are committed, but the transparency, and look, people get nervous, right? If it were your home getting ready to be flooded for the third summer in a row, geez Louise, I would be nervous, right?

So a lot of people are stressed about this. And I have committed to them, my team and I have been working on this very diligently. I think you have too. It would be a really good opportunity right now for both of you to kind of clear this up. And again, we need more, it is kind of perfect timing, we are working on WRDA right now, this is the kind of thing we can get into that.

So, Mr. Secretary, can you address that first? I know you knew I was going to ask about it. And this is not like fake news, right? This came out in the paper yesterday. People who really want to work with you are very concerned that there is, it is kind of going dark.

Senator LUMMIS. The gentleman's time is expired. I do ask the witnesses to respond.

Senator SULLIVAN. Madam Chair, if I can just—

Senator LUMMIS. Absolutely.

Senator SULLIVAN. Because there is no one else here, and this is important to me and my constituents.

Mr. TELLE. Senator Sullivan and Madam Chairman, you will have to indulge me because I have a lot to say.

Senator SULLIVAN. Good.

Mr. TELLE. Senator Sullivan, when you and I have talked about this in the past, in private and in public, every time, I have told you that I am committed to delivering the short, medium, long-term option.

Senator SULIVAN. And your text said that as well.

Mr. TELLE. I have been very consistent. I testified before this committee and said that very thing the last time I was here, in September.

That continues to be true. I will say it again, and I will make sure that our entire enterprise can hear me, I will make sure that the Pacific Oceans Division can hear me and the Alaska District can hear me. We are committed to a short, medium, and long-term solution for the challenge that faces Juneau. This is a unique challenge that is caused by glacial outburst flooding. Something that, as you said, is a technical challenge.

Senator SULIVAN. It is.

Mr. TELLE. It is very difficult.

I mean, in my office in the Pentagon, I have maps of Juneau, Alaska spread out on my table. I know how Suicide Glacier intersects with Mendenhall Glacier, and I know the flood pool at the base of Mendenhall Glacier. I know the outlet that runs on the west side of Juneau.

General Graham and I talk about this almost every day.

Senator SULLIVAN. Good.

Mr. TELLE. We have some work to do, because we have to make sure that our Pacific Oceans Division and our Alaska District understand the President's Executive Order which you referenced. I think part of Building Infrastructure, Not Paperwork, an initiative

that we rolled out this week, is about freeing our commanders and our engineers from assumptions. Sometimes we ask the question of our engineers, hey, the only laws I want you to focus on right now are the laws of physics. Then we can talk about how we can work within the authorities and the laws that this committee provides to deliver for the public.

And that is the case here. We have to think about the laws of physics first. Because this is going to require a solution that is going to be unique. That is why long, medium, and short, short, medium, and long is critical in this situation. Because long is going to be too long.

Senator SULLIVAN. Yes.

By the way, your text, I appreciate your text. Your text said, hey, we are looking at this hard, because some of the solutions, you said this to me in your text, I think will take too long and I do not want it to be that long. So I appreciated that sentiment.

Mr. TELLE. Yes, sir, and I will just say, I mean, just to give you an example and to give some relief to the citizens of Juneau who are worried about this, I met with the city of Fargo, North Dakota yesterday. Wonderful community. Perhaps as much as any community in America. They had a flood issue in Fargo, and they worked with us to figure out a public-private partnership that was unlike any solution that we have ever experienced.

I asked the Mayor of Fargo, I said, hey, Fargo and Juneau, you know, similar latitudes, similar size towns, critically important, would you mind mentoring and providing the St. Paul District, can we go up to Juneau, can we get on a Zoom?

So I just want you to know, I am trying to use some of the most creative processes that we have ever employed to help the people of Juneau. I think, Senator Sullivan, we plan to be out there in the next few weeks to focus on this issue.

Senator SULIVAN. Good.

Mr. TELLE. General Kelly and I were just talking about our plans to head out there and work with General Goetz and Colonel Palazzini out there. We have to get on the same page across the four layers of our organization, and make sure that we are delivering a reliable answer to you and the citizens of Juneau. This is a top priority for us.

General Graham, I know you have other—

Senator SULLIVAN. Thank you, Mr. Secretary. Thank you, Madam Chair, for indulging me on these long questions and answers. They are just really important. And it is a really, really, really big issue to my constituents. I want to give them assurance.

And look, I think a lot of this is miscommunication both within the Fed department and some of the Alaskans. Also probably within the Corps of Engineers, too, and I am glad you mentioned not just you guys headquarters here, but the Pacific Division and Hawaii and Alaska Division in Alaska.

General GRAHAM. Senator Sullivan, if I could just add.

Senator SULLIVAN. Yes, please, General.

Senator LUMMIS. Very briefly.

General GRAHAM. Yes, ma'am.

Senator LUMMIS. Thank you.

General GRAHAM. I think this is actually, where we are at right now is that we were working collaboratively. Everybody was seeing our homework, but that homework is not done.

Senator SULLIVAN. Okay.

General GRAHAM. So that is my sense in this. The guidance I gave the district is, it is too soon to take any options off the table, because what we are wrestling with most here is time.

Senator SULLIVAN. Yes.

General GRAHAM. As you heard the city engineer talk yesterday, the floods might get up to 22.5 feet. And that is well over what the Hescos can do.

Senator SULLIVAN. I know. We have to figure that one out. It is pretty scary.

General GRAHAM. So the initial, this is just base, base, base, rough, rough order of magnitude engineering, was 6 years for a tunnel, Okay? I'm going to put a whole bunch of contingency time on digging a tunnel through solid rock. And in Arctic conditions.

So maybe somewhere between six to 10 years. And when will the current barriers be overwhelmed? So then as Mr. Telle spoke to, we have to look at an intermediate solution.

Senator SULLIVAN. Yes.

General GRAHAM. To see what efficacy that might have. Because the time and money we can do everything, this, I am really concerned that we juts do not have enough time.

So that is the engineering that this report is going to lay out, which is, how much time do we have, and then we will take a look at all of those options, all five of those options, to see what is best going to serve those 2,855 homes that are down in that valley.

Senator SULLIVAN. Yes, Okay. Well, look, I appreciate both of your commitment, your focus. I will relay this to my constituents back home. It will be good to get everybody together.

And thank you, you have been responsive. And sometimes we get communication gaps and people are nervous, and I do not blame them for being nervous. This is a good answer, good hearing, Madam Chair. I am sorry I went so long. It is a super important issue for me.

We will continue to work with you guys. The need for sped, short, medium, long-term. And again on the WRDA side, let us know if you need authorities or money to get this going. We are drafting up the bill right now, and I am very confident I can get stuff relating to Juneau in the legislation.

Thank you again. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Senator LUMMIS. The Chair recognizes the Ranking Member, Senator Whitehouse, who I understand is joining us virtually today. He is snowed in, in his home State. And if you are available to us virtually, Senator Whitehouse, you are now recognized.

Senator WHITEHOUSE. Thank you, Chair Lummis. I appreciate it.

I just wanted to close out with my gratitude to the EPW team for allowing me to participate remotely. I am looking out my window right now, and guess what? We are having more snow. It could not get better.

So, we will see when I get down there, but I really appreciate everyone courtesy.

Mr. Telle, I am grateful that you are focusing more on the coastal aspect, and I would just make the observation that the additional spending and additional work and attention on coastal supplemental spending is probably a sign that the baseline is not up to snuff at this point, that it takes an emergency to get that attention to the coast. I look forward to working with you to try to get that solved once and for all.

I think you also heard there is an array of communications problems, particularly down our side of the aisle. So every step that you can take to improve the Army Corps' communication with us would be appreciated.

Thanks very much, Madam Chair. And thank you both, to Mr. Telle and to the General.

Senator LUMMIS. Question for you, Senator Whitehouse. Can you tell us a little bit about what you have experienced in this blizzard, and how it is affecting your State?

Senator WHITEHOUSE. It is the biggest snowfall in Rhode Island history. There was the legendary East Coast Blizzard of 1978. We have blown through that.

As I mentioned in the beginning, the guy who usually plows my driveway got snowed in and could not get his plow out. Last night, a fairly good-sized pickup truck with a plow supported by a front-end loader were unable to get through the accumulated snow. They got about 50 feet, 60 feet into the driveway and then that all came to an end.

So, it is very unusual conditions. It just requires, in order to clear things, much bigger equipment than most people have. A lot of people in Rhode Island expect snow, and they have a pickup, and they have a snow plow and they go around and plow things. This is overwhelming that cohort of response.

The big equipment is what is needed, and there is a lot of demand for it, obviously, a lot of side streets still not plowed. So people are getting through it, because we do. It is a very unusual situation for Rhode Island to be in. I think the Providence measure was 37 inches of snow, and then of course, it blows around. So a lot of places it is more than 37 inches.

Senator LUMMIS. Well, we wish you and your colleagues, Senator, a speedy recovery. Mother Nature is an awesome, awesome sister.

Senator WHITEHOUSE. She sure is.

Senator LUMMIS. We, again, thank you for participating virtually.

With no further questions, I would like to thank the witnesses and all my colleagues for your participation in today's hearing. Senators who wish to submit written requests for the record have until 5 p.m. on Wednesday, March 11th, to do so. The witnesses' responses to those questions are due back to the committee no later than 5 p.m. on Wednesday, March 25th, and will be submitted for the record.

With that, and our thanks again to the witnesses, this hearing is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 12:01 p.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

Stands for American Steel.

Steel Manufacturers Association
1150 Connecticut Avenue, Suite 201
Washington, DC 20036

Brandon Farris
Executive Vice President

February 25, 2026

The Honorable Shelley Moore Capito
Chairman
Committee on Environment and Public Works
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Sheldon Whitehouse
Ranking Member
Committee on Environment and Public Works
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Capito and Ranking Member Whitehouse:

The Steel Manufacturers Association appreciates the opportunity to provide a statement for the record for the Committee's "Hearing to Examine the Water Resources Development Act of 2026 and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Projects, Programs, and Priorities."

SMA stands for American steel. Our members operate in communities across the country and range from the nation's largest publicly traded steel producers to single-facility, family-owned businesses. Steel manufacturers generate $149.4 billion in annual economic impact, employing 87,266 men and women in community-sustaining jobs at an average annual wage of $142,730. They create the essential material that underpins American industry and national security.

Steel manufacturers are investing in American's communities, deploying $25 billion in capital here in the U.S. to modernize, expand, and construct facilities. This is made possible by smart trade policies promulgated in 2018 and continued on a bipartisan basis that recognize the importance of domestic steel manufacturing to America's economy and national security.

Continued federal support for infrastructure rehabilitation and construction is essential to capitalize on the investments made by American steel producers, inducing demand and supporting job creation. From surface transportation reauthorization to WRDA, Congress has a tremendous opportunity in the near term to ensure America continues to build, and to build with American steel. Furthermore, modernizing infrastructure will help ensure more efficient transportation supply chains for steel manufacturers and the entire economy.

SMA applauds the Committee for beginning consideration of WRDA 2026. As development of the legislation begins, we respectfully urge members to focus on the Army Corps of Engineers core mission areas of navigation and flood risk management. Importantly, this recognizes the need for rehabilitation of aging inland waterways infrastructure, the failure of any project of which would be

highly disruptive. We also encourage maintaining Build America, Buy America policies critical to a strong domestic steel industry and the family-supporting jobs that come with it. Our industry built America, and BABA provisions ensure those same jobs can continue to answer the call for all of our nation's needs.

Steel manufacturers are committed to working with the Committee and your colleagues to continue biennial development and passage of WRDA legislation. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Brandon Farris
Executive Vice President
Steel Manufacturers Association

ASCE
AMERICAN SOCIETY OF CIVIL ENGINEERS

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Statement for the Record of the American Society of Civil Engineers

U.S. Senate
Committee on Environment & Public Works

Hearing to Examine Water Resources Development Act of 2026 and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Projects, Programs, and Priorities

February 26, 2026

The American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) thanks the committee for the opportunity to submit the following statement for the record detailing our priorities for the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) of 2026. We also wish to express our appreciation to the committee for its commitment to keeping WRDA on schedule for reauthorization, as it has done biennially since 2014. Doing so ensures greater certainty and predictability for new and ongoing U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) water resources projects and provides an opportunity to make needed updates to federal water resources policy. ASCE looks forward to working with the committee in the weeks and months ahead to further improve our nation's water resources infrastructure.

Over the past two WRDA cycles, Congress has enacted into law multiple key policies supporting the safety and enhancement of our nation's infrastructure. This includes reauthorization of the National Levee Safety Program, the authorization of a new national inventory of low-head dams in 2022, and reauthorization of the National Dam Safety Program along with an adjustment to the Inland Waterways Trust Fund cost share formula in 2024. In March 2025, ASCE released the latest version of its *Report Card for America's Infrastructure*. Thanks in large part to the enactment of these policies in WRDA, grades for all four of the water resources infrastructure Report Card chapters improved from 2021 to 2025, with the grades for Dams and Levees both improving from "D" to "D+", Ports improving from "B-" to "B", and Inland Waterways improving from "D+" to "C-". Congress passing effective WRDA legislation every two years is critical to the condition, capacity, resilience, and lifespan of our nation's water resources infrastructure. We are grateful for the opportunity to continue to be a part of that conversation and encourage the committee's support for the following ASCE priorities.

Support for High Hazard Potential Dams

The United States is home to more than 92,000 dams serving a variety of functions from water storage and flood control to irrigation and recreation. Of those dams, 18 percent (or nearly 17,000 dams) are classified as having high-hazard potential. This means a failure of one of these dams would likely result in the loss of life and significant destruction of property. While hazard potential is not an indicator of a dam's overall condition, almost 2,600 of the nation's 17,000 high-hazard potential dams have been assessed to be in poor or unsatisfactory condition. Since 2012, the number of high-hazard potential dams has grown by nearly 20% due to increased downstream development. Compounding the problem, the average age of the nation's dams is 64 years, which is 7 years older than in 2021, and 7 out of 10 dams nationwide are more than 50 years old according to the Association of State Dam Safety Officials (ASDSO). These trends, along with increasingly severe weather events producing higher levels of precipitation, will continue to place increased strain on the nation's high-hazard dams.

Federal programs like the National Dam Safety Program provide states with grant funding to support certain administrative and dam monitoring activities by state level dam safety programs. However, these state assistance grants may not be used to support dam rehabilitation projects or dam repairs. One of the few federal funding streams available to support dam repair and rehabilitation is the High Hazard Potential Dam Rehabilitation Grant Program, or HHPD Program. The HHPD Program was first authorized in 2016 under the Water Infrastructure Improvements for the Nation (WIIN) Act and provides competitive grants to states to support

rehabilitation projects for dams that pose the greatest risk to the public. Since 2019, the HHPD Program has provided $71.1 million in grant funding across 40 states and Puerto Rico, despite being historically underfunded through annual appropriations and having much of the funding provided through the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act reprogrammed or rescinded. [1]

The HHPD program's legislative authority is set to lapse in September of 2026. Reauthorization of this critical program will be necessary to ensure that it is available to address the growing challenges to high-hazard dams nationwide. As such, ASCE strongly encourages the inclusion of H.R. 5414, the Dam Assessment and Mitigation Support (DAMS) Act into any WRDA legislation taken up in Congress in 2026. The DAMS Act would reauthorize the HHPD program for five years. It would also allow states to use their own risk-based priority systems, in lieu of federally created systems, to identify dams in greatest need and better prioritize grant applications in a manner that best meets the needs of their own communities.

Revision of National Dam Safety Program State Assistance Grant Formula

In 2024, WRDA reauthorized the National Dam Safety Program, which had lapsed at the end of Fiscal Year 2023. The National Dam Safety Program provides resources to states to support inspection and monitoring activities, staffing needs, and emergency planning through State Assistance Grants. The 2024 reauthorization of this program ensures those funds can continue to flow directly to state dam safety programs. WRDA 2024 also included provisions to incorporate low-head dams into the National Inventory of Dams. Low-head dams are small, river spanning structures which produce dangerous currents that have been shown to harm public safety. ASCE supported the incorporation of these structures into the inventory to improve the overall safety of the nation's dams. State Assistance Grant allocations to states are determined by multiple factors, including number of dams in a state. WRDA 2024 altered this formula factor by including the number of low-head dams in addition to dams (33 U.S.C. § 467j(a)(2)(A)(ii)(I) & (II)). This poses multiple challenges to states and may affect their ability to receive valuable resources for their dam safety programs.

While the development of a national inventory of low-head dams continues to be a priority for ASCE, it is a process that is still in its early stages and not yet fully developed. Additionally, many states do not regulate or collect data on low-head dams, and the federal government currently lacks the resources and proper mandate to provide incentives to states to collect and upload low-head dam data into the budding inventory. Until USACE has had time to properly develop the low-head dam inventory, including assisting states with the process of counting and collecting data on low-head dams, factoring low-head dams into the total number of dams that determine State Assistance Grant allocations may divert funding away from states that have significant dam safety needs but lack the capacity to properly account for low-head dams. These circumstances reduce the overall safety of the nation's dams. To address these challenges, **ASCE recommends striking the language incorporating low-head dams into the grant formula from the 2024 law and to instead continue supporting robust efforts to grow and develop the National Low-Head Dam Inventory.**

[1] https://www.fema.gov/grants/mitigation/learn/dam-safety/rehabilitation-high-hazard-potential-dams/awards#2019

Reauthorization of the National Levee Safety Program

USACE has identified more than 24,000 miles of levees across the country providing flood protection to over 2,300 communities nationwide. The nation's levee systems protect more than 23 million people, and $2 trillion worth of property value-- including 7 million buildings and 5 million acres of farmland-- that sit behind them. Since the creation of the National Levee Safety Program, USACE has made significant progress developing a national regulatory and support framework to improve the safety of the nation's levees.

The National Levee Safety Program was first authorized in 2014 for the purposes of supporting the standing up of state levee safety programs, creating a comprehensive database of the nation's levees, developing guidelines for levee safety best practices, and supporting repair and rehabilitation of the nation's levees. The National Levee Safety Program was last reauthorized in the 2022 WRDA and has continued to make significant progress. In 2024, USACE produced the first National Levee Safety Guidelines, providing a consistent yet flexible set of best practices for levee management, reducing flood impact, utilizing nature-based solutions to improve levee safety, and addressing the needs of underserved communities living behind levees. Additionally, USACE has made significant progress developing its National Levee Database, providing more detailed data on USACE's levee portfolio, as well as dams owned and operated at the state and local level. As previously noted, this progress played a large role in ASCE's decision to raise its grade for the nation's levees in its 2025 *Report Card for America's Infrastructure* from D to D+.

The National Levee Safety Program's legislative authority is set to expire at the end FY 2028. In 2024, the House's WRDA bill included a 4-year reauthorization of the National Levee Safety Program. That provision, however, was not included in the Senate WRDA bill, and was thus not included in the final WRDA signed into law by President Joe Biden in early 2025. To ensure that it can continue to develop and provide needed assistance to states, **ASCE strongly encourages the inclusion of a 5-year reauthorization into WRDA 2026.**

Addressing the Water Resources Project Backlog

In each WRDA bill, Congress authorizes new navigation, ports, and flood protection projects and feasibility studies for USACE to begin work on. In 2024, Congress authorized 21 new water resources projects with an authorized total federal funding level of more than $10 billion. While authorization of new projects every other year is essential to USACE planning, and provides the agency with a degree of predictability, Congressional appropriators have not been able to fund water resources projects at a fast enough pace, creating a current project backlog of more than $100 billion. This backlog results in project delays, increased overall costs, and can create challenges to project development and design. **ASCE encourages Congress, including the Senate Environment & Public Works Committee, House Transportation & Infrastructure Committee, and House and Senate Appropriations Committees, to work closely with the USACE to develop plans and strategies to address and reduce the water resources project backlog.**

Utilize Harbor Maintenance Trust Fund for Maintenance Dredging Activities

Waterside infrastructure needs, such as maintenance dredging, are paid for through the federal Harbor Maintenance Trust Fund (HMTF). The HMTF collects revenue through a 0.125% user fee on the value of cargo shipped. The 2020 WRDA included full utilization of the $10 billion balance of the HMTF by allowing $500 million to be appropriated in FY 2021, with an increase of $100 million annually until 2030. The full expenditure of the HMTF has been a longtime priority and ASCE strongly supported Congress's effort to address this issue in 2020.

Dredging is a critical and continuously needed activity for ports. Channel depth determines the size of vessels that can call at a port, and maintenance dredging is important for making sure ports can safely accommodate large ships and compete with one another.

In 2025, Ports received the highest grade on ASCE's *Report Card for America's Infrastructure*, earning a grade of B. Port investment decisions are largely driven by the need to upgrade aging facilities and maintain the depth of channels and harbors to keep them safe and navigable. **To help ensure the continued functionality of our nation's ports, ASCE urges Congress to continue to spend down the balance of the HMTF on maintenance dredging activities.**

Conclusion

ASCE appreciates the opportunity to provide the committee with this statement on its priorities for the 2026 Water Resources Development Act. We strongly believe that our nation must prioritize investments in its water resources infrastructure to ensure public safety, a strong economy, and the protection of environmental resources. Support for America's dams, levees, ports, and inland waterways is needed to close the growing funding gap and to ensure the country has world-class 21st century infrastructure.

