

5 Steps to Be Prepared for the Next Corps Budget

The President releases his detailed proposal for the Corps’ budget at, or shortly after, he sends his annual budget proposal to Congress. That’s supposed to happen in early February but that deadline sometimes slips a few weeks. When it’s released, people often look in vain for the details of the Corps’ budget. Unfortunately, that’s the wrong place. At *Coastal Strategies*, we’ve got your back with this explanation of where to look, when and what to look for.

The President earmarks the Corps’ budget. I bet you thought that earmarks had been banned. Congress made the mistake a decade ago of banning itself from any earmarks, but that ban doesn’t apply to the President. He continues to have full reign to earmark those Corps projects and programs he wants to fund. Congress can approve, decrease, deny funding to any of his earmarks, but it can’t add funding that is directed to any other project or program.

So, how do you find out whether your project has made it into the President’s budget proposal?

Step 1: Track when the detailed budget comes out. You can do this by [subscribing to WaterLog](#), our free weekly e-newsletter. We’ll send an alert to all subscribers. Otherwise, [bookmark this page](#) on the Corps’ website, look for the item called “Program Budget – Press Book”, and keep refreshing the page until you see “FYXX report now available.” Remember that the “XX” is always the *next* Federal fiscal year.

Step 2: Once it’s out, download the Press Book, turn to your state’s page as noted in the table of contents, and look for your project. Here’s a snippet from a previous year’s book.

PROJECT	BUSINESS LINE	TRUST FUND	INVESTIGATIONS	CONSTRUCTION / HMTF / IWTF	OPERATION & MAINTENANCE / HMTF		
					OPERATION	MAINTENANCE	TOTAL
FLORIDA (cont'd)							
SOUTH FLORIDA ECOSYSTEM RESTORATION (EVERGLADES), FL	E			67,500,000			-
TAMPA HARBOR, FL	N	HMTF			730,000	250,000	980,000
WATER/ENVIRONMENTAL CERTIFICATION, FL	N	HMTF			180,000	-	180,000
							-
GEORGIA							
							-
ALLATOONA LAKE, GA	E,F,H,R,W				5,492,000	3,765,000	9,257,000
APALACHICOLA, CHATTAHOOCHEE AND FLINT RIVERS, GA, AL & FL	E,N,R				1,115,000	217,000	1,332,000

Step 3: If your project is in this book, it’s been earmarked by the President. But don’t rest easy! Congress can reject the earmark, or it can change the dollar figure. While the odds are small that it will be decreased or zeroed out, notify your [Representative](#) and two [Senators](#) of the good news and let them know why it is important that they support it. Most Members of Congress want to know what their constituents’ priorities are; some even have special appropriations forms to facilitate getting that information. Just call them to ask. The House and Senate Appropriations take requests from Members of Congress which usually are carefully worded to avoid crossing the no-earmarks line.

Step 4: So, your project isn’t one of the President’s earmarks and Congress can’t prohibited itself from earmarking, how much trouble are you in? The truth is: You’ve got a steep hill to climb but you’re not

alone and it's been climbed to the very top by dozens of others before. *Your goal is to get into the final Corps Work Plan* that contains the list of projects proposed by the President and also added through pots of additional funds provided by Congress. It's released 60-90 days after Congress passes the Energy & Water Development Appropriations Bill and that bill is signed into law by the President. Reach out to your Representative and Senators. Your "ask" is that they support enough "Additional Funding" for the Corps so that your project can be included in the Work Plan. You need to know:

- The Corps' name for your project
- The amount of money the Corps could actually spend during the fiscal year. (If you don't have an exact figure, just use an approximate one).
- Know which Corps account your project is funded by: Investigations (for studies); Construction (actual implementation); or Operation and Maintenance (mostly for dredging, but not deepening, of Federal navigation channels). This information is critical because the additional funding provided by Congress is divided into these pots.
- A short explanation of the project and why it's worthy of funding.

Ever since Congress prohibited itself from earmarked, the White House plays a game of lowballing its budget for the Corps in the expectation that Congress will provide a substantial increase. In FY19, for example, the President asked for a measly \$37.5 million and Congress provided a major boost to \$175.3 million. That means that many projects get into the final Work Plan that weren't in the President's proposal.

The bottom line is that individual citizens, local and state governments, and even congressional offices can use the release of the President's detailed budget for the Corps to start advocating for the money needed to fund all those projects not included in the President's proposal.

A Special Note for Congressional Staffers: Your office can advocate to Corps Headquarters, the Assistant Secretary and to the nearly impervious wall of middle level bureaucrats at OMB on behalf of your high priority projects that didn't make it onto the President's list. If your office doesn't, remember there are other congressional offices that aren't hesitating.

Step 5: There's one more critical tip that you won't read anywhere else: Once the House and Senate each passes its version of the Energy & Water Development Appropriations bill, *don't look for the bill.* It doesn't contain any information about the studies and projects funded. Be sure to get the committee's "report". It can be found on Congress.gov. Hint: It's easier to find if you know the House bill number.

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