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Work Plan Released

On February 10th, the Corps released its Work Plan for fiscal year 20, alongside the president's FY21 budget proposal, which we'll get to later (U.S. Coastal Policy is (Literally) a Disaster). To see all the funded coastal projects, you can find our shore protection tracker [here](#). The total shore protection budget in the FY20 Work Plan is \$30.5 million short from last year's enacted level.

The Corps Work Plan proposes 6 new study starts and 6 new construction starts:

General Investigations:

- Baltimore Harbor & Channels (Seagirt Loop Deepening), MD (Navigation)
- Oakland Inner Harbor Turning Basin Widening, CA (Navigation)
- Central City Flood and Storm Damage Reduction, TX (Flood Risk Management)
- Lower Missouri Basin Flood Risk and Resiliency Study, IA, KS, NE & MO (Flood Risk Management)
- Lower Osage River at Lock and Dam No. 1, MO (Aquatic Ecosystem Restoration)
- GIWW Coastal Resiliency Study, TX (Multi-purpose Watershed Study)

General Construction:

- Freeport Harbor Channel Improvements, TX (Navigation)
- Port Everglades Harbor Deepening, FL (Navigation)
- San Joaquin River Basin, Lower San Joaquin, CA (Flood Risk Management)
- Waterbury Dam Rehabilitation, VT (Flood Risk Management)
- Dry Creek (Warm Springs) Restoration, CA (Aquatic Ecosystem Restoration)
- South Florida Ecosystem Restoration, FL (Aquatic Ecosystem Restoration)

While Congress specifically notes that 6 new study and 6 new construction starts are to be included, the Work Plan also includes funds to initiate construction to deepen two additional navigation projects (bringing the total to 8):

- Mobile Harbor, AL; and
- Mississippi River Ship Channel, Baton Rouge to the Gulf, LA.

Are they not new starts? We're looking into it, because they look, smell and taste like new starts.

California Projects Funded

In better news, the California projects that have been seeking funds for nearly two decades finally got funded in the Work Plan (sorry OMB - you lose!). This appropriation will enable the San Clemente shoreline project to complete the design phase prior to construction and the Solana Beach - Encinitas project will initiate the engineering design phase.

New Director of Civil Works – Al Lee

Mr. Lee comes from the Transatlantic Division where he served as Director of Programs and Regional Business. Prior to that assignment, he served as Programs Director for the South Atlantic Division covering a large Civil Works region including three mega-projects; Herbert Hoover Dike, the Savannah Harbor Expansion project and the Everglades Ecosystem Restoration Program.

In a message to USACE partners, Lee delivered his plan to revolutionize civil works and maintain the momentum the program currently has through sustained improvements to the items discussed below:

1) Continuing Authorities Program (CAP)

We are actively working to implement improvements to the Continuing Authorities Program (CAP) which include delegating decisions and increasing funding flexibilities. These improvements were developed by USACE staff at all levels and take into account feedback we have received from you, our partners.

2) Waters of the U.S. (WOTUS)

On January 23, 2020, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Department of the Army (Army) finalized the Navigable Waters Protection Rule that defines “Waters of the United States” and clarifies the limits of federal control under the Clean Water Act.

3) Revolutionize USACE CW Brochure

The team has updated the Revolutionize USACE Civil Works brochure for 2020. The purpose of this update is to share some early success stories on our efforts and provide information on the additional actions we are taking this year to continue to revolutionize Civil Works. The brochure is posted to our website.

While an update to the brochure won't move the needle on the Corps' \$100B construction backlog, the approach in using the CAP programs and a few other lesser-known programs like those hidden within the Regional Sediment Management program offer significant opportunity for non-federal sponsors to advance their priorities without relying on specific congressional authorization and appropriation. To our benefit, Mr. Lee has significant experience working along the coast from his experience in the South Atlantic Division and understands our coastal world. We look forward to working with you, Mr. Lee.

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It's WRDA time in Washington

Congress has successfully enacted three consecutive WRDAs in 2014, 2016, and 2018 and it is looking to stay on track this year. This Thursday members of the House who sit outside the Transportation and Infrastructure committee have the opportunity to make their case for water resources projects in the Water Resources Development Act of 2020 by joining the Subcommittee on Water Resources and Environment for a 'members day' hearing. This hearing is an opportunity for all Members of the House of Representatives to highlight water resource issues of importance in their district as it relates to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Testimony from this hearing will inform the Committee in the development of a new WRDA, which the Committee expects to approve this year.

U.S. Coastal Policy is (Literally) a Disaster →

U.S. Coastal Policy is (Literally) a Disaster

By Howard Marlowe

While there's little this president can do anymore that shocks me, I was stunned to see his FY21 budget proposal defunds the entire coastal program of the Corps of Engineers. Since he boosted his overall request for that agency by over 22% compared to his FY20 budget request, this goose-egg was especially baffling. There was a double-whammy the same day when the Corps released its administration-approved funding allocations for the current fiscal year. There was almost no money for any of the ongoing follow-up studies that Congress authorized and funded for the past several years, including the New York-New Jersey Harbor, New Jersey Back Bays, and several others that were treated by the budget proposal as if they had never existed. In the Great Lakes, all eight states banded together to develop a multi-agency, cost-shared, thoughtful approach to erosion and flooding that got no Federal funding for the last two years and isn't supported by the Administration next year. These are examples of proactive initiatives driven from the state and local level that are simply ignored by the budgeteers whose decisions are as final as they are non-transparent and irrational.

Truth is the Corps' coastal program is not a big-ticket item for federal taxpayers. For this year, it's under \$150 million, less than the cost of a grounded 737MAX. Fortunately, state and local governments leverage that paltry sum with about \$75 million, but the whole program is still puny compared with most any country with a coast that's even one-third the size of ours. This shortsightedness afflicts all our coasts. Major Great Lakes initiatives years in the making including fighting erosion and invasive Asian carp were zeroed out. Many existing coastal projects are getting maintenance funding, but efforts to upgrade their effectiveness against rising seas were rejected by the Administration.

It isn't just money that's missing; it's thought. Got a disaster? Congress will send billions. No storms, no money. This helter-skelter post-disaster nonsense really doesn't require much thought; just a little haggling behind closed doors over two digits followed by enough zeroes to equal a number that will be in the tens of billions. Whenever the most careful civil servant allocates billions post-disaster, it's partly based on guesswork. There is no plan, just find any place where the Corps District says they could use money and add them to the list. Most of it is "free" money, meaning it waives the usual one-third to one-half required non-federal cost share. Without skin in the game, the Corps does the study because it literally pays their salaries, the study sits on the shelf because its recommendations are too expensive for OMB to support, so they move onto the next post-disaster study.

When it comes to post-disaster repairs, we're fixing projects to pre-disaster conditions but not upgrading them to new sea level rise and storm predictions. Even when Congress provides direction to modernize the projects, Corps Headquarters finds a way to Just Say No. That's what happened to the disaster funding provided by the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2018. Eight projects built by the Corps in the 1970's without dunes were given a total of \$16 million to add dunes out of the total of \$14 billion in post-storm money. To date, Headquarters has blocked that money saying Congress didn't use the right words. If you look at the projects with big figures on the list, there are some that don't have a non-federal cost share partner but are happy to take the "free" money. The problem is, sand nourishment projects are ongoing construction that require cost-shared nourishment every 3 to 10 years...unless, of course, you can count

on a storm to result in more “free” post-disaster money.

I'm not suggesting fraud and abuse, but I am alleging waste and stupidity. During the recession, the government ran its money printing presses 24/7/365 to create money that would keep our economy from crashing. Now we're in a strong economy and the presses are still running at high speed. We are spending money in the wake of floods and fires to repair property and infrastructure to pre-tragedy conditions. If there was some thought put into this, Congress could invest one-tenth of that amount before disaster strikes to reduce the post-disaster price tag. [Note to my four young grandsons: Guys, there is a price to be paid for short-sightedness and it will be paid by you in the form of coastal and inland communities unprepared for climate change, whopping interest payments on the debt, and much more. Grandpa plans to write an e-book called “While American Slept” that will explain this all to you and your kids.]

I can't believe that the folks at the White House Office of Management and Budget allow this kind of post-disaster budget mismanagement when they spend their every waking day nickel-and-diming the Corps' regular budget and every other move they make. Are they asleep when it comes to post-disaster budgets? There's enough blame to go around elsewhere. Congress passes these supplemental disaster spending bills that triple the Corps budget but won't take the time to provide the Corps and other agencies with a multi-agency intergovernmental plan to reduce coastal flooding risks and the pre-disaster money to carry it out. Congress excels at kicking the can down the street, take fixing the National Flood Insurance Program as the poster child for that approach. And the forte of regulatory agencies is to come up with more rules that drive up the cost and delivery time to get actual results. None of this requires the kind of thoughtful approach our coasts need to face the next 10 years, not to mention the next half century.

I'm placing my hopes on coastal states and regional alliances of towns and cities. They're seeing the disruptions caused by increased storm and tidal flooding on daily commutes, tourism, business, as well as emergency services and national defense infrastructure. If you're a state or local leader, the lesson of the past decade or two is 'don't count on the federal government for a solution'. That's only relying on leadership by disaster and doomed to failure.

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