



[August 5th, 2020]

New Chief of Engineers, Major General Scott Spellmon

Spellmon most recently served as Commander for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Northwestern Division where he oversaw an annual program of more than \$3 billion in civil works, environmental restoration and military construction in more than a dozen states, primarily within the Columbia and Missouri river basins. In his current role as Deputy Commanding General for Civil and Emergency Operations, he has been pivotal in overseeing the implementation of billions of dollars in natural disaster related construction recovery efforts. While the change of command has been set for mid-September, we look forward to working with MG Spellmon on revitalizing the Corps and re-envision the future of coastal resilience.

House Passes Energy & Water Approps Bill

Moving to get all twelve of its funding bills passed before it leaves for August recess, the House passed its second set of appropriations bills last week. It includes a record-breaking \$7.63 billion for the Army Corps of Engineers civil works program, \$1.7 billion above the President's request. Included in the total is \$151 million for Investigations, \$2.6 billion for construction, and \$3.84 billion for operation and maintenance. It allocates \$1.68 billion of Harbor Maintenance Trust funds and \$131 million for beach nourishment projects and programs. The bill authorizes 7 new study starts and 7 new construction starts. Action on all appropriations bills in the Senate has been stalled by the stalemate on the latest pandemic stimulus bill. For our chart of coastal projects and programs funded, [click here](#).

NOAA Coastal Resilience Fund

The House E&W report language specifically recommends more funding for NOAA's National Coastal Resilience Fund, a competitive grant program that funnels money to natural coastal infrastructure projects. Meanwhile, the House has passed a NOAA funding bill that boosts the agency's level by \$101.9 million above its current year funding. The increase will help address congressional priorities such as climate research, weather forecasting, the reduction of harmful algal blooms, and fisheries management.

House Passes WRDA Bill

The House has passed the Water Resources Development Act of 2020, which provides authority for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to carry out 34 new water resources development construction projects and to start 35 new feasibility studies. Since there are only 6 or 7 new construction starts funded each year and a similar number of new starts for studies, it will take a while before action is seen on all of these.

What makes WRDA important to us are its policy and programmatic changes. Those changes that require funding are dead in the water unless the president includes money for them in his budget proposal. Interestingly, both this WRDA bill and the Corps' FY21 funding bill passed by the House last week show an increased desire for the Corps to do more natural and nature-based work. That's been the case with the past two WRDA's, but this year's House WRDA initiative actually steps in the direction of overcoming an obstacle to NNBF features: The environmental benefits they provide are often discounted when the overall project involves reducing flood and storm damage. Since the Corps hasn't yet adopted a way to quantify environmental benefits, those benefits get left on the table or left out of the project altogether.

The House WRDA bill encourages the Corps to do projects that have two or more purposes. In Corps business-line parlance, that means flood risk management and ecosystem restoration. The bill also asks that the Corps maximize the beneficial use of sand dredged from federal channels. Frankly, there are so many internal Corps barriers to surmount to achieve that goal, but it can be done under existing law if Congress and local sponsors keep pushing for the incorporation of more NNBF features.

A pet peeve of ours are the many news articles from journalists who should know better. Example #1: This bill (WRDA 2020) injects \$8.6 billion into the U.S. Corps of Engineers projects." WRONG. Example #2: "The bill includes provisions to open up \$10 billion in the Harbor Maintenance Trust Fund for the Army Corps of Engineers' \$40 billion backlog of critical projects." WAY WRONG! It authorizes \$8.6 billion in projects, and that just gives the non-federal sponsors a yellow slip to take to the House and Senate Appropriations Committees to ask for the money.

As far the HMTF goes, it's a more complicated study but first, it can only be used for harbor maintenance and second, congressional budget rules don't let Congress appropriate all of it. Words don't mean money unless they are part of legislation that actually funds something. It's confusing because the highway bill and a couple of other authorization bills do result in actual funding. It's just that WRDA doesn't.

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If there's a federal beach nourishment project in your community, it's future is in doubt. We'll tell you why in this week's [WaterLog podcast](#).