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## **The Worst Corps Work Plan We've Ever Seen**

The Corps Work Plan for the current fiscal year (FY25) provides absolutely no funding to place sand on any existing or new projects, a fact that hasn't occurred in the 29 years we've been tracking appropriations. The Work Plan is produced by the Corps with the approval of the Trump White House staff. While the final FY25 budget had cut the Corps total allocation to \$8.7 billion, it cut the construction account by 44 percent compared to the previous year.

However, for beach nourishment, the construction cut was 100 percent. Normal funding to place sand on beaches averages between \$50 million and \$100 million annually. Had we had an equitable 44 percent cut from even the low end of that range, it would have meant about \$28 million in sand money. Instead, the cut was to \$0. Using funds that had been recommended by the House and Senate Appropriations Committees, there should have been almost \$19 million appropriated if those recommendations had been followed as would normally have been the case.

Bottom line: The Administration put no money into sand on the Nation's beaches. The only good news in the Work Plan is the nearly \$7 million in funding for completing ongoing studies. Three national programs, beneficial use of sediment (Sec. 204), mitigation of shoreline damages (Sec. 111), and Small Shore Protection Programs (Sec. 103) were all zeroed out.

## **Will Next Year Be Any Better?**

The FY26 Corps appropriation cannot be any worse than the FY25 Work Plan, but it's not starting off any better. Let's look at the situation, at least as of today. The President's budget was due in February but didn't come out until the end of May. It includes presidential earmarks for each Corps study, construction, and navigation project supported by the Administration. There was absolutely nothing in the President's FY26 proposal for the coast.

Meanwhile, the President has been cutting out funding for agencies that Congress already approved for FY25 and before. Fortunately for the Corps, that does not mean project or study cuts. Instead, the Corps has felt primarily personnel losses due to a hiring freeze and the Administration's early retirement offers, which have had their most obvious impact on the Corps' 2,600 recreation facilities. Some districts are having trouble planning and managing water resources projects due to personnel losses, plus the Corps budget will have to include paying the cost of those early retirement benefits.

Despite these pressures, we expect the House Appropriations Committee to develop a Corps funding bill as well as funding bills for NOAA, EPA, Interior and all other agencies in July. If that schedule holds, it may be September before the House can pass all 12 appropriations bills, leaving the Senate with no chance of passing its version of those bills before the September 30<sup>th</sup> end of the federal fiscal year. The question is: Will the final FY26 Corps budget include adequate coastal funding? Congress must maintain its power of the purse.

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## **Bipartisan Committee Leaders Propose FEMA Reform Bill**

The Republican and Democratic leaders of the House Transportation & Infrastructure Committee have released a discussion draft of the Fixing Emergency Management for Americans (FEMA) Act of 2025. It would re-establish FEMA as an independent agency reporting directly to the President, which had been the case until the Department of Homeland Security was created on the wake of the September 11<sup>th</sup> tragedy.

Among its other provisions, it establishes a temporary task force and process for clearing out claims from past disasters, allows states to request lump sum payments for small disasters, establishes a web-based “unified disaster application system” for individual assistance, establishes an efficient process for reviewing state mitigation plans and projects, and incentivizes pre-disaster mitigation efforts with a Federal cost share to be determined using a sliding scale of 65 to 85 percent. The latter provision means that “states that demonstrate efforts to invest in pre-disaster mitigation measures would be eligible for an increased Federal cost share.”

Another provision requires that the costs submitted for reconstruction, repair, or replacement of a damaged structure must be reviewed within 90 days of receipt with revised estimates able to be submitted not later than two-years afterward to account for changes in labor, materials or other costs. Groups interested in commenting on the FEMA Act should contact the House Transportation & Infrastructure Committee’s press office to get a copy of the bill text.

## **Congressman Charges Politics Played in Project Funding**

In a House hearing on the Corps’ FY25 Work Plan (see related article above), Congressman Mike Levin (D-CA) charged that partisan politics played a role in deciding which projects got funded. Rep. Levin alleged that both the House and Senate Appropriations Committees had put funding for several major California flood control projects that got zeroed out in the final Work Plan produced by the Corps. “It doesn’t make sense that the most populous state in the country should receive \$0 for construction work. And this is limited to California,” he said. “In total, the so-called blue states saw a reduction of nearly half a billion dollars, while the so-called red states saw an increase of \$257 million.”

Speaking for the Office of the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works (ASA-CW), Robyn Colosimo noted that both the House and Senate committees had construction allocations of around \$3 billion while the final allocation was only \$1.8 billion. She said, “it’s a dicey situation...so they made hard choices, the Administration did, and they had that discretion.” The ASA-CW’s office is an Administration office that reports to the White House Office of Management and Budget (OMB) as well as to the Secretary of the Army.

## Corps Work Prioritization Issue Pushed on the Senate Side

How Corps projects are prioritized was an issue raised at the confirmation hearing of Adam Telle, who has been nominated by President Trump to be Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works. Telle noted that “when it comes to prioritization in a constrained budget environment...the law says that the Corps’ primary missions are navigation, enabling commerce on America’s waterways, flood mitigation and control, and environmental aquatic ecosystem restoration....those have to be the primary beacons when it comes to prioritization, examining how the projects meet those missions...setting priorities on the basis of benefits versus costs, life and safety, and other factors that ultimately will play into all of these decisions, and it’s a complicated one.”

Questioning that explanation, Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI) noted “the extent to which the Army Corps appears to favor inland over coastal flooding projects. Telle promised to “make sure we have our hands around the data and understand it. Historically, riverine flooding has been easier to predict perhaps than the locations of coastal flooding....As we work to justify and prioritize the projects that are of the greatest benefit to the public, we have to be able to consider things that have in the past been unpredictable and try to predict them more accurately.”

## News Briefs

With hurricane season upon us, predictions say it will be busier than usual. With that ominous forecast, understand that the weather service has lost about 600 staff. The New York Times reported this week that the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has lost about a quarter of its full-time staff, including one-fifth of the coordinating officers who manage responses to large-scale disasters. We also estimate the loss of about 3,500 Corps staffers to early retirement initiatives. When taken with the other staff cuts, it is unclear how well storms can be handled by the Federal government.

Speaking of hurricane season, it actually began half a month earlier on the Pacific coast and they have already had Alvin, their first named storm. Both Atlantic and Pacific seasons run until November 30<sup>th</sup>. The U.S. Supreme Court ruled unanimously that NEPA reviews should be scaled back. “The goal of [NEPA] is to inform agency decision making, not paralyze it,” according to Justice Brett Kavanaugh.

At least some observers believe the high court decision means that government agencies do not need to consider a project’s upstream or downstream impacts, that courts should defer to an agency’s judgment about where to draw the line when considering a project’s indirect impacts, and that courts cannot block agency projects based on the outcome of a potential future energy project. It will take time to determine how this decision involving a major railroad project affects agency reviews of non-energy types of projects.

## Coastal Legislative Update

We’re [tracking 114 bills](#) so far in this first year of the two-year 119<sup>th</sup> Congress. Here are some recent additions.

**S.216.** Sen. Dan Sullivan’s (R-AK) Save Our Seas Amendments passed the Senate and is awaiting House consideration. The bill allows NOAA to contribute on an in-kind basis the portion of the costs of the marine debris project that the NOAA determines represents the amount of benefit the NOAA derives from the project.

**H.R. 1885.** A bill to amend the Coastal Barrier Resources Systems Map for the Town of North Topsail, NC (Rep. Greg Murphy, R-NC) was the subject of a House subcommittee hearing last month.

**H.R. 3556.** A bill to amend the Small Business Act to modify application deadlines for certain disaster assistance. It is sponsored by Rep. Joe Neguse (D-CO).

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