



New Orleans Following Hurricane Katrina, NOAA

Water Resources Planning Must Be Modernized *Five Reforms to Protect People, Jobs, and Wildlife*

While some improvements have been made to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers planning process, the Corps continues to plan and operate projects that fail to solve critical water resources problems. All too often Corps projects create dangerous unintended consequences, including increasing flood risks for communities, damaging businesses that rely on a healthy environment, and depriving the nation of clean water, natural flood protection, and fish and wildlife habitat.

In the face of more intense storms like Hurricane Sandy, more frequent and intense floods and droughts, rapidly rising sea levels, and increasingly limited federal funding we can no longer afford this business as usual approach to project planning. The five common sense reforms outlined below will produce cost-effective, modern solutions to the Nation's pressing water resources needs.

- 1. USE COST-EFFECTIVE, LOW IMPACT SOLUTIONS WHERE POSSIBLE. Congress should require use of nonstructural and restoration measures where they can provide an appropriate level of protection and benefits.** The Corps continues to promote environmentally destructive and costly structural projects even where less costly and environmentally protective low impact measures would provide better solutions. Low impact solutions are a cost-effective way to solve water resources problems while also protecting people; wildlife; and the many businesses that rely on healthy rivers, coasts, and wetlands; as required by the WRDA 2007 national water policy.
- 2. MODERNIZE OPERATION OF EXISTING PROJECTS. Congress should require the Corps to evaluate and update operations plans and water control manuals for large-scale Corps projects at least every 10 years and implement needed operational changes.** Major Corps projects are being operated under decades-old operating plans that do not account for current conditions or science (including more intense storms and droughts), put communities at risk, and aggravate contentious water quantity conflicts. Regular updating would ensure that taxpayer dollars are not wasted on antiquated, inefficient, and harmful operating plans; and that modern science, management approaches, and needs guide the operation of Corps projects.
- 3. FOLLOW RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE NATION'S FISH AND WILDLIFE EXPERTS. Congress should require mitigation consistent with recommendations made by the nation's fish and wildlife experts pursuant to the Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act.** Despite important criteria established in WRDA 2007 to ensure effective mitigation for fish and wildlife losses caused by Corps projects, the Corps continues to adopt mitigation plans that will not work, in part because they ignore expert recommendation made by federal and state fish and wildlife agencies. Requiring the Corps to follow these recommendations will make projects better and is fundamental to cost-effective government.
- 4. ELIMINATE WASTEFUL AND ENVIRONMENTALLY HARMFUL SUBSIDIES. Congress should establish a meaningful non-federal cost share for operations and maintenance activities (O&M) of little-used segments of the inland waterways system.** O&M for all segments of the inland waterways

system are currently funded 100% by federal taxpayers – not waterway users – and now represents the majority of the cost of this system, which percentage-wise receives the highest US transportation subsidy. Creating a meaningful non-federal cost share for O&M on little-used waterways would ensure that scarce tax dollars are spent on navigation systems that provide real value to the nation, and is a vital step for prioritizing national needs over inefficient and environmentally destructive maintenance of waterways that are rarely used.

- 5. FOCUS CORPS PROJECTS ON THE NATION'S MOST PRESSING NEEDS.** Congress should establish merit-based systems to prioritize Corps projects and reduce the Corps' more than \$60 billion backlog. The Corps currently has a more than \$60 billion backlog of unconstructed projects, including many that fail to address current needs and are ecologically unsound. Each of these projects requires periodic funding to remain on the project list, which under current funding levels will take more than 35 years to construct. Prioritizing the planning and construction of Corps projects, and deauthorizing outdated projects, will ensure that scarce tax dollars are spent only on scientifically and economically sound projects that serve the nation's current needs.