



## GETTIN' IT DONE!

Hydroelectric dam at Lake Whitney on the Brazos River in Texas with the Floodgates open



**W**hile there may not appear to be much besides COVID-19 being debated in Congress these days, it's not true! On May 6, the Senate Environment & Public Works (EPW) Committee marked up and unanimously passed, by a 21-0 roll call vote, America's Water Infrastructure Act (AWIA) of 2020, which includes the committee's version of the biennial Water Resources Development Act (WRDA).

Waterways Council Inc.'s (WCI) top WRDA priority to adjust the cost-share for construction and major rehabilitation of inland waterways projects was included in the EPW Committee's bill, favorably reported to the Senate. The Senate EPW Committee's provision adjusts the cost-share from 50% General Revenues/50% from the Inland Waterways Trust Fund (IWTF) to 65% General Revenues/35% IWTF. This adjustment will allow for more efficiency in the process to deliver inland waterways construction and major rehabilitation projects in a timely manner.

In addition to the cost-share provision, the Senate bill authorized the Chief's Report for the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway Brazos River Floodgates and Colorado River Locks at the adjusted 65% General Revenues/35% IWTF cost-share.

The bill also urges the Corps to expedite the completion of the Kentucky Lock Post Authorized Change Report (PACR), which sets a new authorized amount for the total cost of construction on that priority project.

At press time, no schedule has yet been announced for the AWIA/WRDA bill to be considered on the Senate floor. But in

the House, the Transportation & Infrastructure (T&I) Committee received Members' WRDA priorities on May 1, and (again, at press time) has begun negotiations between the Majority and Minority. Markup of the bill in the House is expected in the June or July timeframe. WCI continues to urge that the House includes a 75% General Revenues/25% IWTF cost-share adjustment. This same adjustment was made in WRDA 2016 for most deep draft ports. An April "Dear Colleague" letter led by Rep. Conor Lamb (D-Pa.) and Rep. Brian Babin (R-Texas) sent to the House T&I Committee garnered 78 signatures in support of this 75% General Revenues/25% IWTF cost-share provision. Several other House Members have expressed their individual support for and requests to T&I for this provision.

There remains strong bipartisan support for WRDA passage this year, as testified by the unanimous Senate EPW vote, and statements made by both House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy.

On the appropriations front, preliminary work on Fiscal Year 2021 (FY21) appropriations bills is underway with a goal in the House, even if aspirational, to pass all 12 individual appropriations bills by the July 4 recess. The House and Senate Energy & Water Development (E&WD) Appropriations subcommittees already held Corps budget hearings in February before the coronavirus stay-at-home orders.

The House E&WD Subcommittee has reportedly received its 302(b) allocations, which is the total amount of money in FY21

that each subcommittee can spend on projects and programs within its jurisdiction. In the Senate, Subcommittee chairs reportedly don't have their 302(b) allocations yet, but they could be similar to FY20's levels as a result of two-year budget agreement that remains in place.

On the infrastructure-funding front, there has been talk that infrastructure could be included in an emergency supplemental funding bill, but it has yet to come to fruition. In fact, at press time, House Democrats had introduced their plan for the next round of COVID-19 rescue funding—the Health and Economic Recovery Omnibus Emergency Solutions (HEROES) Act. The bill directs more than \$3 trillion toward additional stimulus checks for Americans and particularly healthcare workers, forgives student debt, protects renters/homeowners from default and eviction, and includes provisions to assist farmers. This bill does not include broad infrastructure funding. In the event that an infrastructure package begins to take shape, WCI will continue to urge that inland waterways infrastructure funding be included.

As the nation seeks normalcy after COVID-19, we should look to the inland waterways as a means toward economic recovery. Beyond enabling waterborne transportation of critical cargoes, our inland waterways system aids in flood control, creates a stable water supply for nearby communities and industries, generates hydroelectric power, offers recreation opportunities such as fishing and water sports, provides regional economic development, increases property value, and enhances national security capabilities.

Our river transportation network also allows American farmers, energy producers, manufacturers, constructors, and other commodity shippers to compete in a tightening global marketplace. The inland waterways also help to sustain more than 541,000 jobs, which strongly bolster the U.S. economy, while transporting freight in the most energy-efficient, environmentally friendly, safest way.



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