



Ending a Challenging Year on a Good Note



On December 21, the U.S. House of Representatives passed the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) of 2020 with a historic win for the inland waterways. WRDA 2020—passed as part of a Omnibus Appropriations and COVID-19 relief package—included WCI’s top priority to adjust the cost-share for construction and major rehabilitation of inland waterways projects from 50% Inland Waterways Trust Fund (IWTF)/50% General Revenues to 35% IWTF/65% General Revenues for Fiscal Year (FY) 2021 through FY 2031. Projects whose construction starts between FY21-FY31, and for the duration of that project’s construction, will operate under the adjusted 35%/65% cost-share.

The Senate also passed the bill on December 21 by a vote of 92 to 6.

The WRDA bill also included a 902 cost-limit increase for Kentucky Lock and a Chief’s Report authorization for the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway—Brazos River Floodgates and Colorado locks. The cost-limit increase allows work on Kentucky Lock to continue to completion, and the Chief’s Report allows construction of new sector gates and channel widening to provide for more safe and efficient navigation. It will also improve water and sediment management capabilities on the Brazos River.

Particularly in a difficult COVID-19 environment, the passage of WRDA was a very significant win for the efficient modernization of the inland waterways system, potentially providing more than \$1 billion in additional construction funds over 10 years that should help dramatically reduce the backlog of authorized projects.

WRDA 2020 was a rider on the Omnibus Appropriations bill that included \$900 billion for COVID-19 related funding that was negotiated for months before its passage. The Omnibus also included the FY21 Energy & Water Development (E&WD) appropriations bill that funds the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

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FY21 funding for the Corps is \$7.8 billion, an increase of \$145 million above the FY20 level and \$1.8 billion above the Administration’s FY21 budget request.

Funding for the Investigations account is \$153 million, an increase of \$2 million above FY20’s level and \$50.4 million above the president’s request.

The Construction account received \$2.69 billion, an increase of \$11.6 million above FY20’s funding level and \$519.4 million

above the FY21 Administration request.

With \$113 million appropriated from the IWTF for FY21, a construction program of at least \$322 million will be possible. This provides the opportunity to fund Chickamauga Lock to completion, efficiently funding continuation of Kentucky Lock, and start a new waterways modernization project.

The FY21 funding measure also provided for nine new study starts and seven total new construction starts across the Corps’ Civil Works mission. For the first time since 2004, one of the new starts must be for inland waterways lock and dam modernization. The Corps FY21 Work Plan, which typically comes out 60 days after enactment of the appropriations bill, will detail which specific project is selected for the new start.

Operations and Maintenance received \$3.85 billion, an increase of \$59.7 million above FY20’s appropriated amount and \$1.8 billion above the FY21 budget request.

No new inland waterways user fees or taxes were included in the bill.

WCI strongly praised WRDA’s passage on a biennial schedule, as well as hailed the strong E&WD appropriations funding for the Corps for FY21, achieved in an extremely difficult economic period.

The efficiencies that will be gained by this WRDA 2020 construction cost-share policy change, achieved in such a difficult economic landscape, represents a historic win for WCI. Coupled with the strong FY21 funding for the Corps, 2020 ended on a high note.

As WCI’s new president and CEO, I remain proud of our strategic vision and hard work to stay the course to significantly improve navigation projects’ funding mechanism and to increase annual funding for critical lock and dam infrastructure improvements. WCI’s members were strident in their support for this victory, and the credit also goes to them.

Through strong teamwork and perseverance, the inland waterways industry and WCI’s members in particular can look forward to a much better year in 2021.



TRACY R. ZEA
President/CEO,
Waterways Council Inc.