

From gloom to boom



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What a difference a few months made, as two key priorities for WCI (and the inland waterways system overall) that were in the balance since WCI's Board of Directors meeting and Capitol Hill fly-in early February were finally resolved by Congress in March.

Those who attended the fly-in advocated for our 2024 priorities, one of which was to secure Fiscal Year (FY) 2024 Energy and Water Development (E&WD) appropriations for the full amount supportable by annual diesel fuel tax receipts deposited into the Inland Waterways Trust Fund (IWTF). A second priority was to secure a reallocation of funding from the McClellan-Kerr Arkansas River Navigation System (MKARNS) 12-foot deepening project to the Three Rivers project to ensure Three Rivers is completed efficiently.

In early March, the House of Representatives, followed by the Senate, passed a \$435 billion FY24 appropriations minibuss package of six bills that included E&WD that will fund the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers through September 30, 2024. Passage of the FY24 E&WD appropriations bill avoided a catastrophic setback to the inland waterways construction program if Congress had enacted a full-year Continuing Resolution (CR). Under a full-year CR, \$59.3 million was the most funding inland waterways construction projects could have received,

nearly \$400 million below what was included in the final FY24 E&WD bill.

The Corps' Civil Works mission received \$8.68 billion, an increase of \$1.27 billion from the FY24 President's budget request. For the Corps' FY24 Construction account, \$1.85 billion was appropriated, an increase of \$36 million from FY23 enacted levels. Of that funding, inland waterways construction projects received a record level of \$456 million, with at least \$120 million coming from the IWTF, which supposedly will fund to completion three of six active construction projects.

The Corps' Investigations account received \$132 million, up \$1.75 million from the FY24 President's budget request. Specifically, for Bayou Sorrel Lock (LA), \$800,000, requested by Cong. G. Graves (LA-06), and the J. Bennett Johnston Waterway (LA), \$500,000 (to examine the feasibility of deepening the waterway to 12 feet), requested by Sen. Cassidy (LA). The Mississippi River and Tributaries (MR&T) account received \$367 million, a \$140 million increase from the President's FY24 budget request. Inland waterways projects funded are:

- Channel Improvement funding of \$57.9 million was provided for Arkansas, Illinois, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri and Tennessee.
- Helena Harbor - \$580,000.
- Baton Rouge Harbor, Devils Swamp - \$564,000.

- Greenville Harbor - \$1.23 million (included a \$300,000 increase above the budget request of \$934,000, requested by Sen. Hyde-Smith (MS).
- Vicksburg Harbor - \$1.24 million (included a \$300,000 increase above the budget request of \$944,000, requested by Sen. Hyde-Smith (MS).
- Memphis Harbor - \$2.43 million (same as the President's FY24 request).

The Corps' Operations and Maintenance account was allocated \$5.55 billion, a \$1.24 billion increase from the President's FY24 request.

On February 28, the Corps released its FY24 construction spend plan to the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law that reallocated almost \$83 million (100% federally funded, as part of \$2.5 billion provided by the infrastructure package) from \$92.6 million provided to the MKARNS 12-foot deepening project to the Three Rivers Project. This funding will facilitate phase two of the contract that will complete this important project.

Our work continues toward a more efficient, modern, reliable inland waterways system for the future. At press time, we await the FY24 work plan from the Corps of Engineers, and the FY25 budget was released by the Administration on March 11 with the appropriations process underway.



Tracy Zea
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Waterways Council Inc.

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