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Ports, Waterways Would Get Funding Boost

Agriculture and shipping industry officials say the \$357 million funding increase for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in the Energy-Water bill would provide needed momentum to maintain and improve the nation's inland waterway system. The bill contains \$7.3 billion for the Army Corps to pay for construction and maintenance projects and adds six new studies and six projects.

"We're seeing this positive momentum occur, but the real key is maintaining that," said Mike Steenhoek, executive director of the Soy Transportation Coalition. He added there has been a significant increase in funding for the Army Corps over last five years, "nearly a 50 percent increase" and said there's even been bipartisan support.

The bill makes use of all estimated annual revenues from the Inland Waterways Trust Fund, but the Waterways Council, a coalition of shippers and the barge industry, says the number is too low. "Every year, they continue to lowball the revenues," said Tracy Zea, vice president of government relations for the Waterways Council. The trust fund should provide around \$118 million for FY20 rather than the \$107 million in revenues that the White House expects.