



NATIONAL WILDLIFE FEDERATION®

People and Nature: Our Future is in the Balance

WATER RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT ACT

WHAT IS WRDA?

The Water Resources Development Act is a biennial piece of legislation that is the main vehicle for authorizing water projects to be studied, planned and developed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. It is also the legislative vehicle for implementing policy changes with respect to the Corps' water resource projects and programs.

Sizing up the Corps of Engineers

The Corps is responsible for:

- 1,481 projects under construction
- 926 coastal and inland harbors
- 11,000 miles of commercial navigation channels
- 8,500 miles of levees and floodwalls
- 276 locks at 230 sites
- 383 major lakes and reservoirs
- 75 hydropower facilities

WRDAs to Date:

- 1974
- 1976
- 1986
- 1988
- 1990
- 1992
- 1996
- 1999
- 2000

Congress passed the first WRDA bill in 1974. Before that, Congress authorized flood damage reduction projects through Flood Control Acts and navigation projects through River and Harbor Acts. After 1976 there was a 10-year hiatus of no WRDAs and no new project authorizations due to a major standoff among the House, Senate and White House over cost-sharing and environmental mitigation policies for Corps programs. In 1986, Congress passed a landmark WRDA bill containing 300 new projects, a similar number of deauthorizations for outdated projects, and for the first time, a requirement that all local sponsors pay a portion of project costs. While WRDAs are generally considered in the even years of congressional sessions, no WRDA passed in 2002 due to gridlock over Corps reform policies. This year, 2003, may be the next opportunity to pass a WRDA that could reform the way the Corps plans and develops water resource projects.

WHAT IS THE STATUS OF WRDA?

The 107th Congress (2000-2002) did not pass a WRDA due to pressure from congressional members, activists and interest groups opposed to authorizing new projects without policies to reform the way the Corps plans and develops water projects. In the Senate, the authorizing committee did not pass a WRDA bill. In the House, the authorizing committee passed a WRDA bill that would have authorized \$4 billion worth of new water projects without any reforms. The bill died before reaching a vote on the House floor after a failed attempt to pass the bill without debate or discussion about the need for reforms. No WRDA bill has been introduced in the 108th Congress to date.

WHERE DO WRDAs COME FROM?

The Administration sometimes initiates WRDA by sending a proposal to Congress or the authorizing committees themselves initiate it. WRDA authorizing committees are the Environment and Public Works (EPW) Committee in the Senate and the Transportation and Infrastructure (T&I) Committee in the House. Usually, the committees hold one or two hearings in the spring with general questions of what various constituencies might like to see in a WRDA bill and what certain Members would like to include. In both chambers, Committee staffs solicit other proposals from members of Congress and particularly, from powerful members in leadership positions, who can steer the bill through their respective chambers. Staffs and Committee chairman develop the bills with uncharacteristic “bi-partisanship” for rapid Committee action. This normally occurs in July and September – just before the elections. The public generally gets very little time to see the bills in advance of Committee action and many of the most controversial proposals are added in “manager’s amendments” on the House and Senate floors. Thus, the public and media are often kept in the dark about the matters of greatest concern. While this is always a difficult process for public interest organizations, there are important opportunities to include program reforms and good projects in WRDA bills.

DOES CONGRESS HAVE TO PASS A WRDA EVERY TWO YEARS?

There is no requirement that the Congress pass a WRDA – but there is often congressional interest in doing so. Because WRDAs are the vehicle for authorizing new Corps studies and projects, it is a pork-barrel bill by design and there is tremendous pressure by members of Congress seeking particular project authorizations to pass the bill. Yet, as evidenced by the decade-long hiatus between the 1976 and 1986 WRDAs, it is possible for Congress not to pass a WRDA bill, although several were attempted during that period.

Estimated Cost of WRDAs (in billions)

	<u>Federal</u>	<u>Nonfederal</u>	<u>Total</u>
1986	11.5	4.5	16
1988	1.1	0.6	1.7
1990	2.5	1.4	3.9
1992	2.0	0.9	2.9
1996	3.8	1.4	5.2
1999	4.2	1.9	6.1
2000	4.3	3.0	7.3

DOES WRDA DETERMINE HOW MUCH MONEY THE CORPS RECEIVES TO PURSUE PROJECTS?

WRDA is legislation that authorizes the Corps to pursue a project, and may set limits on how much the Corps may spend on a particular project or types of projects. WRDA does not give the Corps any money for projects. All funding for Corps projects must be part of the Energy and Water Development Appropriations bill – which is a separate process managed by the House and Senate Appropriations committees.

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