TROUBLED WATERS:

CONGRESS, THE CORPS OF ENGINEERS, AND WASTEFUL WATER PROJECTS

A report by
Taxpayers for Common Sense
and **National Wildlife Federation**

March 2000

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Taxpayers for Common Sense (TCS) is a non-partisan advocate for American taxpayers. TCS is dedicated to cutting wasteful spending and subsidies in order to achieve a responsible and efficient government that lives within its means.

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TROUBLED WATERS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

No other federal agency has had - and continues to have - such a profound impact on the nation's environmentally sensitive floodplains, waterways and coastal areas as the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The ongoing construction and maintenance of Corps dams, navigation channels, flood control structures, and other water development projects dramatically alter the nation's landscapes. Furthermore, this major government program costs federal taxpayers billions of dollars each year, often for economically unjustified activities. While there are heartening signs of reform in the Corps Civil Works program, many Corps districts continue to pursue environmentally harmful, financially wasteful water resource projects. Still, we remain hopeful because various reforms have been advocated by certain members of the Corps leadership, the Clinton Adminstration, and a number of key leaders in Congress.

Stopping the Corps projects listed in this report would save the federal taxpayer more than $6 billion in coming years and prevent the destruction of irreplaceable wildlife habitat. Implementing the general policy reforms recommended in this report would improve the planning of Corps projects and save billions more taxpayer dollars.

Together, Taxpayers for Common Sense (TCS) and the National Wildlife Federation (NWF) are seeking to redirect the Corps' focus toward more fiscally and environmentally responsible management of the nation's water resources.

Reform of the Corps of Engineers is important to Taxpayers for Common Sense, which advocates elimination of unnecessary "pork-barrel" spending and subsidies. Because the Corps traditionally serves as an avenue for such spending, TCS has targeted the Corps as an agency in need of fiscal reform. TCS's participation in ***Troubled Waters*** is part of the Corps Watch Network, a nationwide network of organizations that works to reduce wasteful Corps spending and subsidies. This is an informal network to share information and strategies, and interested organizations are invited to participate.

Reforming the Corps is fundamental to the National Wildlife Federation's mission of improving floodplain management and land use practices in delicate environments. In July 1998, NWF released *Higher Ground*, a report highlighting the skyrocketing costs of flooding and the use of voluntary property buyouts in the nation's floodplains as a means of reducing flood risk and restoring riverine and coastal ecosystems. NWF's participation in the ***Troubled Waters*** report is part of a larger "Greening the Corps" campaign which advocates approaches to water resource use that serve both people and our environment.

The 25 projects profiled in this report - found to be some of the worst Corps projects in the country - represent a challenge to the Corps to re-evaluate the scope and focus of its mission. The report also challenges concerned citizens to engage the Corps regarding the impacts and costs of Corps projects on a regional level, and to unite with national Corps reform efforts.

Unique and unprecedented circumstances are arising that could, with the help of activists and citizens, produce major changes in the Corps over the next few years. This is due in part to recent Clinton Administration initiatives and evolving legislation, but it is also due to the increasing strength of grassroots efforts in many areas to influence the activities of Corps districts. This overall movement toward a more responsible Corps is a common-sense goal shared by taxpayer advocates, conservationists, and local communities across the country.

OVERVIEW

At the beginning of the 21st Century, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the nation's chief water resources agency, finds itself adrift in troubled waters - lurching forward without a clear direction or mission. Many organizations have long criticized the Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) for constructing enormously expensive and environmentally harmful water projects that are often driven far more by political motivations than national need. Corps projects have often been characterized by long and bitter battles, some ending in ecological disasters. These battles have become landmarks in the formation of public attitudes toward government waste, and better environmental protection.

Georgetown Reservoir Castle, Washington, D.C. (Photo: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers)

The growing environmental consciousness and tight federal budgets of the past two decades led many to believe the era of large, destructive, pork barrel-driven projects was becoming a matter of history. It is increasingly clear that as budget pressures ease and the federal focus on Corps reform diminishes, a resurgence of wasteful and damaging projects is looming on the horizon and in many cases has already begun.

THE LEGACY

The Corps is responsible for the construction and maintenance of over 1,500 federal water resources projects in the United States. Established in 1779, the Corps spent much of the 19th and 20th Centuries building and deepening more than 140 ports and harbors, constructing the nation's 11,000-mile network of inland waterway navigation channels, 8,500 miles of levees and floodwalls, and more than 500 flood control dams. More recently, the Corps has expanded its Civil Works program into coastal areas, spending federal funds to build seawalls and jetties, and pump sand onto beaches.

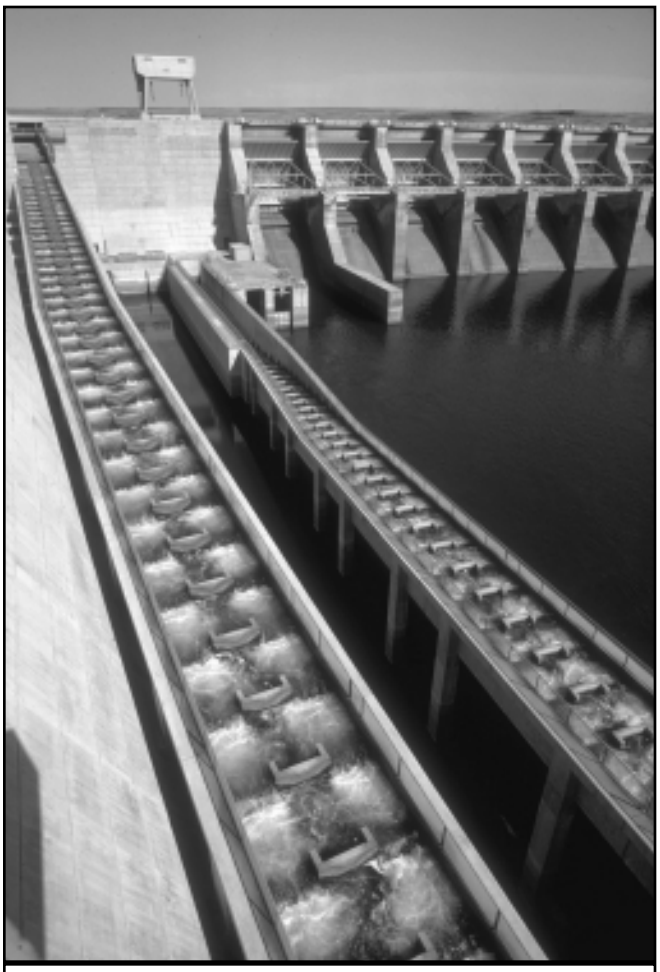
Although many of these projects have been critical to the nation's economic development, numerous Corps projects have demonstrated an overreaching will to control nature, and a naive belief that engineering has the capacity to fundamentally replumb and reshape the nation's rivers, floodplains and coastlines. Countless ecosystems and billions of dollars continue to be wasted in the continuation of traditional Corps policies and programs, which often fall short of their objectives and too often disregard fundamental fiscal and environmental responsibilities.

The Corps is one of the key levers the U.S. Congress uses to pull pork-barrel projects into individual Congressional districts. The Corps' biennial authorization bill, the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA), is generally passed shortly before the end of each Congress, in part to allow Members of Congress to brandish newly authorized projects before elections. Funding for these projects is typically provided in the annual Energy and Water Development Appropriations bills. Too often these projects only benefit select individuals or industries, and there is limited leadership in Congress or the White House to curtail this type of welfare.

When projects are guided by political interests or disguised beneficiaries, the cost to the taxpayer and the environment can be immense. The Corps has many guidelines that are supposed to ensure projects are economically justified, environmentally responsible and provide a fair return to the

taxpayer. Some of these guidelines are heavily biased toward large-scale construction solutions, and constrain creative approaches. Other guidelines that mandate important fiscal and environmental considerations are sometimes ignored by the Corps or overruled by Congress when they prove to be an inconvenience.

The extreme political pressure placed on the Corps to carry out construction without sufficient scrutiny has led to the authorization of a large number of marginal or unjustified projects. The Corps spends approximately $1.5 billion annually constructing water resource projects, yet the agency currently faces an enormous $27 billion backlog of projects already under construction, and untold billions worth of projects authorized for construction but not yet begun. In recent WRDAs, Congress has revived the imprudent practice of authorizing construction projects "contingent" upon the completion of future studies. The bills have been authorizing new projects faster than the Corps can keep up, with $5 billion in WRDA 1996, and $6 billion in WRDA 1999. Congress is currently contemplating a WRDA 2000.



Ice Harbor Dam, Washington (Photo: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers)

TWENTY-FIVE OF THE MOST WASTEFUL PROJECTS

Troubled Waters identifies 25 of the most wasteful and environmentally damaging Corps projects. With a federal cost of more than $6 billion, the projects represent what many grassroots taxpayer and conservation organizations have identified as among the worst projects in their regions. In many cases they illustrate recurrent problems with Corps programs, and provide lessons for where changes are needed. The projects identified are at virtually all stages, ranging from planning, to near-construction, to under-construction, to constructed projects that have continuing impacts. Some are old, long-stalled projects that special interests are trying to revive and move forward. Others are part of new waves of projects, like port deepenings or new beach replenishment projects. Still others are make-work projects for Corps districts and their contractors. All of these should be halted. In many cases, far less expensive and environmentally damaging alternatives are possible. ***Troubled Waters*** aims to highlight the harm represented by many of the worst projects, and to identify the need for a serious review of Corps missions, programs, and procedures.

THE CORPS OF ENGINEERS MISSIONS

Traditional Corps projects fall into two major categories: navigation (ports and inland waterways) and flood damage reduction (riverine and coastal). While it is arguable that Corps projects have generally decreased in scale over the past century, the overall financial costs and environmental impacts of these projects are clearly skyrocketing, due in part to the increasing rarity of aquatic wildlife habitat. To make matters worse, many

of these projects are being constructed at the behest of local developers, not with the national interest in mind.

NAVIGATION

PORTS AND HARBORS

With help from the Corps, port authorities across the nation are engaged in a "race to the bottom," deepening their harbors to accommodate an emerging class of huge new container ships. Few ports, however, will ever see these megaships. Industry analysts predict that these ships will visit a few hub ports, and then feeder vessels will trans-ship goods to other "niche" ports. To accommodate the largest of these ships, ports will have to be at least 50 feet deep. More than a dozen U.S. ports are aiming toward that end, forcing the taxpayer to subsidize a potentially huge overcapacity of deep draft ports and leaving the environment to deal with mountains of dredge spoils, some of which are highly contaminated.

• In Savannah, Georgia, the Corps has recommended a $230 million project to deepen the port to 48 feet. In their approval, the Corps cited numerous problems with the economic justification and environmental impacts of the deepening. The project's forecasted benefits are predicated on growth unparalleled in the port's history, and it would have severe impacts on a National Wildlife Refuge.

Savannah Harbor, Georgia (Photo: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers)

INLAND WATERWAYS

The inland navigation system receives by far the greatest percentage subsidy of any form of transportation. Barge operators benefit from a 90% taxpayer subsidy, including 100%

Upper Mississippi Lock and Dam #15, Davenport, Iowa and Rock Island, Illinois (Photo: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers)

of operation and maintenance expenditures to maintain the system. To justify construction of many of these waterways, the Corps developed wildly optimistic traffic forecasts. Many waterways carry a fraction of the traffic originally predicted, while having enormous impacts on freshwater ecosystems. The Corps is seeking to spend huge amounts of taxpayer dollars to expand the system based on increases in traffic projections that strain credulity.

• In a February 2000 affidavit, a Corps economist described senior Corps officials' efforts to justify a $1 billion expansion of locks on the Upper Mississippi River. The economist had led a team that studied the potential need for lock expansions for several years. The team determined that lock expansions would not be economically justified for decades, if ever. He was removed from the project, and according to his affidavit, corroborating e-mails, and internal Corps memoranda, the Corps manipulated economic data to justify the project.

FLOOD DAMAGE REDUCTION

RIVERINE

Although the Corps has spent more than $100 billion (in 1999 dollars) for structural flood damage reduction projects mostly built since the 1940s, the nation's average annual flood damages have climbed steadily to an all-time high of over $4 billion. Concerns have been raised that structural projects (e.g. dams,

levees, and channelizations) have induced more risky development in floodplains and increased disaster costs. Much attention has turned toward improving floodplain management and using voluntary buyouts and other nonstructural approaches to reduce flood risks. While the Corps recently sought and received important new authority in WRDA 1999 for its "Challenge 21" program to begin to use nonstructural approaches, the Corps continues to promote many extremely damaging old-style flood control projects that drain wetlands and floodplains for agricultural and urban development. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the Mississippi Valley.

• In the lower Mississippi River basin, the Corps is planning to spend more than $150 million to build the world's largest pump system. This project would drain a wide expanse of wetlands and bottomland hardwood forest for marginally productive agriculture along the Yazoo River. Congressional supporters obtained a waiver of all local cost-sharing for the project.

Clear Creek, Texas (Photo: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers)

SHORELINE PROTECTION AND BEACH REPLENISHMENT

The Corps is becoming increasingly involved in the re-creation of artificial beaches along much of the Eastern Seaboard. The agency is spending hundreds of millions of dollars to fight the natural forces of erosion, sand shifting, and sea-level rise without a clear understanding of the ecological effects and the ultimate costs to the nation. The Corps currently has

Beach Replenishment, New Jersey (Photo: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers)

more than 100 shore protection and beach replenishment projects at various planning and construction stages, most with a 50-year maintenance commitment. The Clinton Administration has tried to increase non-federal contributions for these projects, and has refused to budget for new projects until significant cost-sharing changes are enacted. Despite these efforts, Congress has increased funding for beach replenishment projects. In WRDA 1999, Congress authorized a dozen new projects, and in a token response to the Administration, enacted only minor local cost-sharing increases to future projects.

• In New Jersey, a series of Corps beach replenishment projects are planned for 127 miles of the state's coastline. Experts have predicted that the total costs could exceed $9 billion over 50 years. Little thought is being given to planning a strategic retreat from the coastline as sea-level rise and natural erosion processes occur.

CORPS AT A CROSSROADS... AGAIN

Reform of the Corps has had many fits and starts. The Carter Administration pushed the Corps toward a more environmental role. The Reagan Administration helped to revise the Corps' process of selecting and constructing water projects, and tried to make project beneficiaries pay a greater share of project costs. The 1986 Water Resources Development Act, enacted after a standoff of almost 10 years, ushered in a new era of project

cost-sharing and guidelines for project authorization, planning and construction. In 1996, the non-federal cost-share for structural flood control projects like levees and floodwalls was increased. In WRDA 1999, the non-federal maintenance cost-share for future beach replenishment projects was increased slightly. Also, WRDA 1999 included Challenge 21, the new nonstructural flood control program, and other changes to encourage communities to choose nonstructural alternatives such as setting back levees and using the floodplain for open space like parks and greenways.

Towboat and Barge, Coastal Louisiana (Photo: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers)

Crucial provisions enacted in 1986 are now in danger of being lost. For example, key cost-sharing reforms for deep-draft harbor dredging are under attack by port interests. Additional reforms have been relatively modest, suggesting a weak Corps embrace of environmental restoration and fiscal responsibility. One explanation is the divide between national leadership of the Corps and the district offices, as evidenced by the vastly different attitudes and approaches of the Corps in different regions. Another reason is that the Corps has not yet broken its strong ties to industry and agribusiness, which fund Congressional campaigns and play a large role in the selection of Corps projects. These factors make it difficult for the Corps to remain cohesive and consistent in its reform.

In the last decade, the Corps has moved into the area of environmental restoration, in part to repair some of the damage of existing Corps projects. In 1990, Congress made environmental restoration a primary mission of the Corps, on par with navigation and flood damage reduction. Restoration of the Florida Everglades, damaged by Corps water diversions and channelizations over the last 50 years, is estimated to cost close to $8 billion. Coastal Louisiana, whose marshes have been imperiled by the Corps' alteration of the Mississippi River, may need similar-scale restoration, the cost of which could exceed $15 billion. It is estimated that this region is losing roughly a football field worth of wetlands every 30 minutes. Similar restoration projects could easily occupy the Corps' time, funding, and effort through the next century. However beneficial, some of the efforts to undo the ecological damage of Corps activity will prove costly. It is crucial to avoid harmful new projects that will require costly new cleanups and restorations.

Conservationists generally applaud the Corps' restoration efforts, but view with concern the Corps' incursions into other areas such as irrigation and local water supply. Recently, the Corps has begun to participate in the construction of municipal wastewater treatment facilities in selected cities and Congressional districts - traditionally a function of local communities. A number of these projects lay the groundwork for development in the open space that surrounds existing communities, potentially leading to urban sprawl.

The Corps is at a crossroads. The 19th Century thinking that we can manipulate and control Mother Nature is changing. A gap remains, however, between the Corps' purported commitment to environmental and fiscal responsibility and the reality of Corps projects.

CUT THE FAT, FOLLOW THE RULES, PAY THE FAIR SHARE.

The research and the development of this report yielded several policy recommendations (pp. 9-12) that would significantly improve the projects constructed by the Corps, save the nation's taxpayers billions of dollars and protect the nation's ecosystems from significant damage. A number of the report's

recommendations can be distilled into three simple guidelines: cut the fat, follow the rules, and pay the fair share.

Cut the fat. The Corps currently has a $27 billion construction backlog that is growing. Assistant Secretary of the Army (Civil Works) Dr. Joseph Westphal announced at a February 2000 budget briefing, "But let me just tell you, the backlog is huge... I believe it is time to do some deauthorization." This backlog has many contributors: it is the product of pork barrel politics on the part of Congress, empire building and "make-work" projects boosted by the Corps, and industries intent on subsidies. Wasteful Corps projects, both new and existing, should be submitted to rigorous economic analyses and environmental impact reviews.

Salmon Barge, Snake River, Washington
(Photo: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers)

Follow the rules. The Congress and the Corps have made many rules in attempts to limit Corps activities to those that are in the nation's interest, both economically and environmentally. In many cases, the Corps has ignored or circumvented these rules. The Corps has manipulated the rules of economic evaluation to justify otherwise unjustifiable projects. The Corps has ignored rules intended to protect wetlands, and has constructed environmentally damaging projects without effective environmental mitigation. In other cases, standard local cost-share requirements have been reduced or waived. The Congress and the Administration should rein in the Corps and take responsibility to ensure taxpayers and the environment do not suffer.

Pay the fair share. Cost-sharing by local interests is intended to ensure that projects are truly needed, and that taxpayer dollars are not wasted on overbuilt projects. Targeted and directed user fees would reduce the overall federal expenditures on port deepenings and inland waterway maintenance, and ensure that navigation projects are located in areas where they are cost-effective and environmentally prudent. Increasing the local role in flood damage reduction projects, especially along the coast, helps encourage wise floodplain management.

CONCLUSION

Today, we find part of the Corps looking ahead into the 21st Century, and another part of the Corps stuck in the past. Conservationists and taxpayer advocates are concerned that the Corps often seeks new project opportunities with insufficient regard for their impact - environmentally destructive or protective, fiscally wasteful or prudent - rather than shifting their mission and priorities to reflect the nation's desires for fiscal restraint and a healthy environment. It is the responsibility of the Congress and the Administration to redirect and reshape the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to accommodate this vision. Stopping the 25 projects listed in this report and enacting the policy recommendations will help steer the Corps out of troubled waters.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The Congress and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers have long worked hand-in-hand to build many financially wasteful and environmentally harmful projects. The following recommendations advise how this cycle can be broken. Many of the recommendations are followed by a list of supporting examples from the report. This section lists cross-cutting recommendations, followed by mission-specific recommendations.

GENERAL

• Conduct national deauthorization review - The Corps currently has a $27 billion backlog of projects that Congress has directed it to complete. The Corps of Engineers should conduct an extensive review of all currently authorized projects in order to recommend deauthorization of Corps projects that are out of date and environmentally and fiscally wasteful. The Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) of 1986 made provisions for automatic deauthorization of projects that have not received funding for ten years. However, unconstructed and unjustified projects frequently are kept on life support by periodic infusions of funding.

• Eliminate contingent authorizations - In recent years, Congress has authorized a growing number of projects contingent on or pending a favorable Chief of Engineers Report. "Contingent authorizations" place extreme political pressure on Corps bureaucrats to bend to local interests and recommend project construction before evaluating all impacts. (Recent "contingent authorizations": Savannah Harbor, Columbia and Willamette Rivers)

• Reject "mission creep" and restrict the Corps to its missions - The primary Corps missions are navigation, flood control, and environmental restoration. However, the first and last projects in this report - an irrigation project and a project to provide wastewater treatment and water supply facilities around the country - demonstrate that the Corps has wandered outside the agency's missions. To gain a beachhead in these areas, the Corps provides larger subsidies than these projects would otherwise receive. Congress should restrict the Corps to its primary missions and reform policies to ensure established mission areas are carried out in an economically and environmentally responsible manner. (Projects outside Corps missions: Eastern Arkansas Irrigation, Wichita River Chloride, Environmental Infrastructure)

• Require Congressional authorization before expanding a project - In some instances, the Corps has classified significant expansions or rehabilitations of existing projects as "maintenance" to avoid obtaining new Congressional authorization. In doing so, the Corps is able to construct new projects without first determining their true need, cost, and environmental impacts. For example, the Corps has begun expanding the channelization of the Big Sunflower River flood control project to a length more than seven times longer than the original project, but has designated the expansion as "maintenance" to exempt it from required studies and cost-sharing requirements.

• Do not waive local cost-sharing - Cost-sharing by localities helps ensure that projects are genuinely necessary; a local cost-share that is too low or non-existent increases the demand for projects. A University of Pennsylvania study of projects in WRDA 1986 found that requiring local beneficiaries to pay more for projects reduced overall project spending by 35% and the federal portion by nearly 50% (DelRossi & Inman). In some instances, cost-sharing has been waived by Congress. In other cases, the Corps has generously designated the significant expansion of existing projects as major maintenance (100% federal) instead of new construction (with a local cost-share) or used other gimmickry to significantly reduce the local share of the cost. (Projects given a reduced local cost-share: Jackson Port, Big Sunflower River and Yazoo Pump, St. John's Bayou, Wichita River Chloride)

• Implement independent enforceable review of controversial Corps studies - Even though Corps guidance and law precludes economically unjustified projects, the Corps sometimes recommends projects with biased economic analyses. Typical flaws range from low cost estimates to highly optimistic traffic predictions or assumptions of other unlikely benefits. Congress and the Administration should convene

panels of qualified, independent reviewers to review economic, engineering and environmental Corps studies of controversial and large-scale projects. Their findings should be enforceable in the Corps planning process. (Projects with highly controversial Corps studies: Delaware River, Oregon Inlet, Upper Mississippi River, White River, Chesapeake and Delaware Canal, Yazoo Pump)

• **Deny public funding to projects that provide only private benefits -** Several Corps projects are thinly disguised as public projects, but many of them benefit just a few private interests. Many inland navigation projects, for example, subsidize the transportation costs of a few shipping and agribusiness companies. In the case of beach replenishment projects, some towns have taken advantage of federally funded Corps projects to replenish public beaches and then restricted public access to the rebuilt areas, effectively turning them into private beaches. Projects to rebuild private beaches are supposed to be 100% locally funded. (Projects that benefit a few private interests: Lock and Dams at Minneapolis, New Jersey Beach Replenishment)

NAVIGATION

• **Conduct national review of inland navigation waterways. Decommission low volume waterways -** The core of the inland navigation system - the Mississippi, Ohio and Illinois Rivers - provides significant economic benefits and moves 90% of the nation's commercial navigation tonnage. However, 17 of the remaining 26 river segments move just 2.6% of the commerce, and over the next several years will incur nearly 30% of the system's operation and maintenance costs. (Candidates for review and decommission: Apalachicola River, Missouri River, White River)

• **Reduce federal share of Operation & Maintenance (O&M) -** Tolls, user fees or other cost-sharing measures should be implemented to obtain at least a 50% non-federal cost-share for inland waterway O&M. Ongoing maintenance costs on the inland waterway system are paid entirely by the federal taxpayer. Without a local cost-sharing measure, many expensive, wasteful waterways remain operational. (Waterways without O&M contributions: Upper Mississippi River, Lock and Dams at Minneapolis, Apalachicola River, White River, Snake River)

• **Implement regional port planning -** There is a "race to the bottom" among U.S. ports to deepen harbors in hopes of attracting an emerging class of megaships with 50+ foot drafts. Though some deep draft harbors are necessary, not every port need be deep to be economically competitive - the need for smaller ports will remain. Widespread, uncoordinated harbor deepening projects will likely result in a huge overcapacity of deep draft ports and create mountains of additional dredged sediments that are already degrading coastal and aquatic environments. To halt the "race to the bottom," taxpayer and environmental advocates are pushing for regional port planning measures to guide future port development and deepenings. Through proper planning, deep ports can serve as hubs, while shallower ports can serve as "feeder" and "niche" ports. (Potentially unnecessary port and waterway expansions: Savannah Harbor, Delaware River, Columbia and Willamette Rivers, Chesapeake and Delaware Canal)

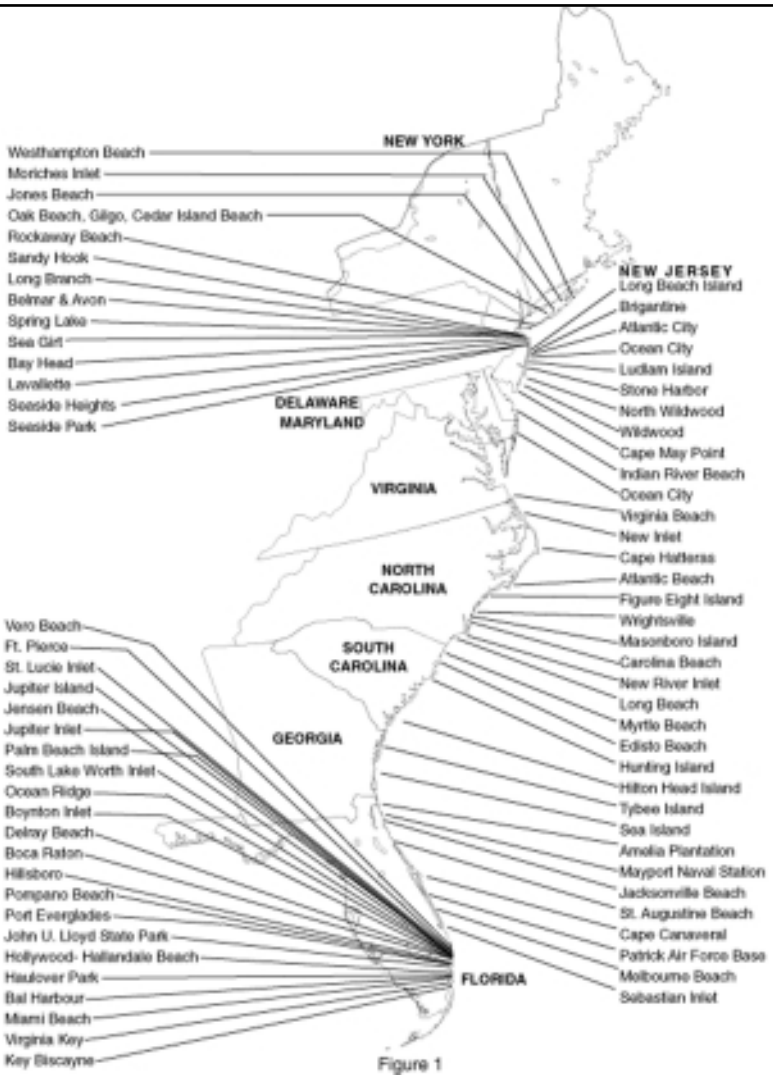
Major U.S. Ports That Are Seeking Deepenings

• **Adopt a Harbor Services User Fee -** One potential tool to tap market forces in order to guide regional port planning is a Harbor Services User Fee for harbor maintenance. A user fee that links vessel draft to the actual cost of port maintenance dredging will help ensure that deepening occurs only where it makes economic and environmental sense.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

FLOOD DAMAGE REDUCTION

• Encourage nonstructural flood damage reduction projects- Nonstructural flood control projects, which include voluntary buyouts of floodprone property, are often more cost effective, long-term solutions for flood damage reduction and environmental restoration. The Flood Mitigation and Riverine Restoration Program ("Challenge 21") authorized in WRDA 1999 is an example of a program that could potentially save hundreds of millions of dollars. Structural Corps projects, such as dams, levees, river channelizations, and wetland drainage, often degrade the environment and induce development in areas that still have significant flood risk. (Structural flood control projects that could induce high-risk development and/or degrade the environment: St. John's Bayou, Devils Lake, Clear Creek, Dallas Floodway, Auburn Dam, Big Sunflower River and Yazoo Pump)



East Coast Beach Replenishment Projects
(Map Courtesy of the Program for the Study of Developed Shorelines, Duke University)

• Encourage a strategic retreat from hazardous coastal development - The Corps is in the process of conducting a National Shoreline Study. The study provides an opportunity to consider sustainable coastal resource management approaches rather than strict reliance on traditional structural projects like seawalls, jetties, and sand pumping that encourage risky development on congested shorelines. Alternatives such as voluntary property buyouts, relocations, and land swaps for less risky areas should be explored. In the summer of 1999, the National Park Service led the way, abandoning decades of structural attempts to protect Cape Hatteras Lighthouse from eroding shorelines and relocating the lighthouse back from the coast to a protected area. (Projects that encourage risky coastal development: Long Island and New Jersey Beach Replenishments)

• Moratorium on new beach projects - Place a moratorium on new federal beach replenishment projects until the National Shoreline Study has been completed and its results are fully considered. Direct the Secretary of the Army to specifically address the effectiveness of beach replenishment and the economic and environmental impacts of such projects on ecosystems and neighboring beaches in the study.

Coastal Development, New Jersey (Photo: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers)

• **Increase the local cost-share of shore projects -** Noting that the benefits of shore protection projects are often highly localized, the Clinton Administration proposed to shift more of the maintenance costs of beach replenishment projects to localities. Congress responded with a small step in WRDA 1999 by shifting the cost-share from a 65% federal responsibility to 50% federal. This shift will not affect the ongoing 50-year maintenance costs of current projects. The federal role for initial construction of beach replenishment projects should be substantially reduced, and maintenance of these projects should be shifted to a 35% federal responsibility, as the Administration has proposed. These changes should affect all projects. (Projects that should include a greater local share: New Jersey and Long Island Beach Replenishments)

ENVIRONMENT

• **End projects that impair regional restoration efforts -** In some locations, the Corps is proposing or operating projects in direct contradiction to regional or national restoration efforts. In their planning process, the Corps tends to ignore indirect and cumulative impacts of a new project and maintains a narrow view of the project's scope. In some cases, the Corps is working against itself to restore an ecosystem degraded by one or more of its own projects. (Projects interfering with regional restoration efforts: Big Sunflower River and Yazoo Pump, Snake River, Upper Mississippi River)

• **Implement effective, adaptive environmental mitigation -** The Corps is often required to mitigate for environmental impacts. Corps mitigation efforts often rely on structural, engineered solutions, rather than solutions that try to mimic natural processes. Often the solutions are species-specific, don't achieve the intended goal, and entail burdensome costs. The ineffective policies of trucking and barging salmon around the four dams on the Lower Snake River are a perfect example of an expensive mitigation plan that has proven a failure.

Fish Mitigation Truck, Snake River, Washington (Photo: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers)

• **Do not promote projects that result in wetland destruction -** The Corps has a dual role of constructing projects that result in wetland destruction and issuing permits for non-federal projects that impact wetlands. As the issuer of wetland permits, the Corps is charged with upholding a national policy of "no net loss" of wetlands. Corps projects, however, are destroying wetlands at an incredible pace. (Corps projects that destroy wetlands: Big Sunflower River and Yazoo Pump, Eastern Arkansas Irrigation, St. John's Bayou)

PROJECTS

THE MOST WASTEFUL CORPS OF ENGINEERS PROJECTS

TOP 10 MOST WASTEFUL PROJECTS

1. East Arkansas Irrigation Projects (Arkansas)
2. Delaware River Deepening (Delaware, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania)
3. Upper Mississippi River Lock Expansions (Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota, Missouri, and Wisconsin)
4. Big Sunflower River Dredging and Yazoo Pump (Mississippi)
5. Oregon Inlet Jetties (North Carolina)
6. Apalachicola River Navigation (Alabama, Florida, and Georgia)
7. Lower Snake River Navigation (Idaho and Washington)
8. Savannah Harbor Expansion (Georgia and South Carolina)
9. New Jersey Beach Replenishment (New Jersey)
10. Long Island Beach Replenishment (New York)

OTHER WASTEFUL PROJECTS

(NOT RANKED, LISTED IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER BY STATE)

11. Jackson Navigation Spur and Port Facility (Alabama)
12. White River Navigation (Arkansas)
13. Auburn Dam (California)
14. Chesapeake & Delaware (C&D) Canal Deepening (Delaware and Maryland)
15. Missouri River Navigation (Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, and Nebraska)
16. Industrial Canal Widening (Louisiana)
17. Lock and Dam #3 Embankments (Minnesota and Wisconsin)
18. Lock and Dams at Minneapolis (Minnesota)
19. St. John's Bayou and New Madrid Floodway (Missouri)
20. Devils Lake Emergency Outlet (North Dakota)
21. Columbia and Willamette River Deepening (Oregon and Washington)
22. Clear Creek Flood Control (Texas)
23. Dallas Floodway Extension (Texas)
24. Wichita River Basin Chloride Control (Texas)

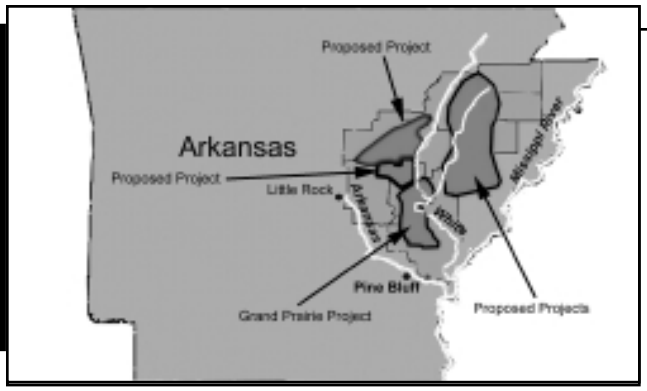
Not Pictured: Environmental Infrastructure (Nationwide)

WHITE RIVER, ARKANSAS

EASTERN ARKANSAS IRRIGATION PROJECTS

BENEFICIARIES FAVOR CHEAPER ALTERNATIVE

TOP 10



SUMMARY

The Grand Prairie Demonstration Project is the first of five proposed irrigation schemes, four of which would divert water from the White River system. Together, the projects would cost over $1 billion. Many of the Grand Prairie project's intended beneficiaries, eastern Arkansas rice farmers, are unwilling to help finance its construction. Hunters, wildlife watchers, and conservationists also oppose the plan due to the diversion's impacts on critical wetlands habitat.

THE STORY

The Grand Prairie Demonstration Project is a $275 million effort intended to relieve pressure on two aquifers being depleted by regional rice farms. Single-purpose irrigation projects are outside the scope and mission of the Corps. In fact, in 1991, the Corps terminated the project feasibility study due to conflicts with agency policy regarding agricultural water supply. Congress reauthorized the project in 1992.

Creation of the White River Irrigation District requires approval of a majority of the affected farmers in a referendum. To date, less than 40% of the farmers have signed-on; most are reluctant to pay $111 million in water taxes for the local share. After spending ten years and $20 million developing the project plan, the Corps and the Arkansas Soil and Water Conservation Commission (SWCC) refuse to consider any new alternatives.

Arkansas County farmers have formed a 300-member coalition in opposition to the project. The farmers' coalition has teamed with the Pine Bluff mill of International Paper to devise a water supply plan costing 90% less than the Corps plan. It would avoid the White River, help conserve the aquifers, and still allow irrigation of the same amount of farmland.

The Corps' project would dramatically reduce river flow, lead to major wetland loss, and increase pollutant loads through the White River National Wildlife Refuge, a Wetland of International Importance. Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt described this area as America's equivalent of the Amazon. The region is North America's most frequented wintering grounds for mallard ducks. The $635 million spent annually in the state on hunting and recreation will decrease significantly as the ducks' habitat is destroyed.

PROJECT POLITICS

The Arkansas SWCC is attempting to command broad new powers over water distribution in the state. When the Commision recognized that many farmers did not support the project, the agency kept the project alive by making a commitment to pay the local cost-share. It subsequently admitted that it did not intend to pay, but instead hoped that the local White River Irrigation District would foot the bill, pending farmer approval of the project. At the urging of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Environmental Protection Agency, the President's FY 2001 budget proposes a White River Basin Comprehensive Study (see also p. 27).

NATIONAL POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Restrict Corps projects to those within its stated missions. Irrigation is not a Corps mission.
- Do not promote projects that result in wetland destruction.

MORE INFORMATION

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Helpful Websites: www.nwf.org

DELAWARE BAY TO PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA

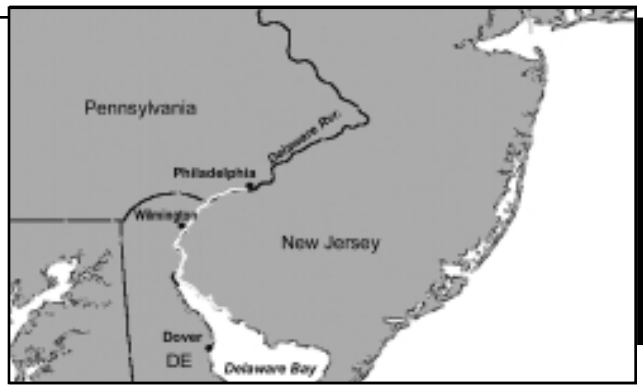
DELAWARE RIVER DEEPENING

FORMER PORT DIRECTOR SAYS PROJECT NO LONGER JUSTIFIED

TOP 10

SUMMARY

This $311 million project would deepen 108 miles of the Delaware River to the Port of Philadelphia from 40 to 45 feet. This project threatens to damage the banks of the Delaware, its wildlife, and nearby drinking water wells and aquifers. It may all be in vain because many of the intended beneficiaries, oil refineries located along the river, have not expressed an interest in deepening their own approach channels to accommodate larger ships.



THE STORY

The Corps attributes 80% of project benefits to deep-draft tankers being able to call directly upon the refineries' docks. Several oil refineries have stated, however, that the current practice of off-loading oil onto smaller vessels in Delaware Bay and shipping it upriver is acceptable. A spokesman for Sunoco said that the company has yet to evaluate whether spending $20-$50 million to deepen its approach channel would be cost-effective. Without the refineries' participation, the project will return $0.23 for each $1.00 spent.

Even at 45 feet deep, the Port of Philadelphia would be at a comparative disadvantage to deeper regional ports much closer to the ocean. A conference of leading industry consultants convened by the Port Authority concluded there is "no guarantee [mega] container ships will ever call here."

To raise project funds, the Delaware River Port Authority has raised highway bridge tolls by 50% and plans to lease space along the Delaware for storage of dredge spoils from this and other projects.

The Corps would dredge 33 million cubic yards of sediment, some containing concentrations of mercury, lead and PCBs. These spoils would be deposited at sites along the river. One site would be adjacent to Bombay Hook, a National Wildlife Refuge and a Wetland of International Importance.

Toxic dredged material could threaten drinking water supplies, wetlands, and recovering oyster populations. Plans to blast a granite portion of the riverbed pose risks to the endangered short-nosed sturgeon and to the underlying aquifer.

PROJECT POLITICS

Philadelphia's former port director has admitted this project is no longer justified. Yet, Sen. Rick Santorum (R-PA) continues to be one of the main project supporters. Nationally, the Corps is complicit in a "race to the bottom" among major ports - a race in which ports deepen their harbors to attract the largest container ships, while shippers play them against each other to obtain the lowest rates. The Corps appears to be playing along to promote business for itself.

NATIONAL POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Conduct independent, enforceable review of controversial Corps studies.
- Implement regional port planning to minimize redundancy, overcapacity and environmental damage in port expansion.

MORE INFORMATION

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ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI TO MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA

UPPER MISSISSIPPI RIVER LOCK EXPANSIONS

LOCK EXPANSIONS JUSTIFIED BY INFLATED PROJECTIONS

TOP 10

SUMMARY

In 2000, the Corps is likely to recommend that Congress approve a $1.2 billion project to expand several of the Upper Mississippi River System locks and dams before evaluating potential environmental costs. This recommendation would reverse conclusions of earlier Corps analyses that determined lock expansions were not economically justified.

THE STORY

The Corps has used a wide range of accounting gimmickry in an attempt to justify this project. After years of study, the Corps' own economists determined that expanded locks could not be justified. In apparent response to barge industry objections, the Corps revised its calculations and now predicts barge traffic will double by 2050, lengthening delays on the Upper Mississippi and Illinois Rivers. Independent reviews have refuted the Corps' more recent prediction and state that U.S. agricultural exports, which correlate to barge traffic, are stagnant and may even decline.

The Corps and the barge industry advocate by far the most expensive solution to potential delays on the Mississippi. The Corps has given only cursory consideration to less expensive, time-saving measures that do not require lock expansion, including the least-cost solution of scheduling barge traffic through the river system. These solutions would have much less impact on this already degraded environment.

In 1986, Congress recognized the Mississippi River as a nationally significant waterway and ecosystem, which includes 487,000 acres of protected lands. The Mississippi serves 60% of North America's migratory waterfowl. Though a 1998 U.S. Geological Survey report documents the degradation of the river due to the existing lock system, the Corps' project study fails to investigate the cumulative impacts of navigation on the basin's ecosystem.

PROJECT POLITICS

MARC 2000, a coalition of barge-owning agribusinesses dominated by such corporations as Cargill and ConAgra, is the driving force behind lock expansions. In 1999, the industry group pushed draft legislation that would direct the Corps to proceed with the plan before the Corps study was completed. Although the bill was never introduced, it attracted support from Rep. Kenny Hulshof (R-MO), Rep. Jim Nussle (R-IA), and Sen. Christopher "Kit" Bond (R-MO) and will likely be revived in 2000. MARC 2000's criticism of the Corps' initial analysis spurred the agency to "reassign" its original economist and have the New Orleans district conduct the final study. The original economist's affidavit and internal Corps memoranda and emails suggest the Corps has manipulated the subsequent economic analysis to justify expansion.

NATIONAL POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Conduct independent, enforceable review of controversial Corps studies.
- Reduce federal share of operation and maintenance costs on navigation systems from 100% to 50%.
- End projects that impair regional environmental restoration efforts.

MORE INFORMATION

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Helpful Websites: www.sierraclub.org; www.mrba.org; www.environmentaldefense.org

THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER DELTA, WESTERN MISSISSIPPI

BIG SUNFLOWER DREDGING AND YAZOO PUMP

WORLD'S LARGEST PUMP IS A GIANT MAKE-WORK PROJECT

TOP 10

SUMMARY

The $62.5 million Big Sunflower River Maintenance project and $165 million Yazoo Backwater Pumping Station are part of a Corps plan to replumb the Mississippi River Delta through a series of water diversions and channelizations. Designed to subsidize marginal agriculture, both projects would be entirely federally funded.

THE STORY

This is a classic example of the Corps creating work for itself. The Big Sunflower "maintenance" project includes dredging virtually the entire width of the river for 104 miles, and is designed to shunt water downstream and reduce seasonal flooding by a few inches. The Yazoo Pump, predicted to be the world's largest pump system, would move the shunted water from south Delta wetlands into the Mississippi River. Neither project will eliminate flooding in the low-lying region. The projects would severely disrupt natural water cycles in some of the last intact bottomland hardwood forests in the Mississippi Delta.

The Corps contends that the Big Sunflower project is not new construction - only "maintenance" of an existing 14-mile river channel - and is therefore exempt from cost-sharing requirements. This claim is made despite new project specifications that include dredging a river channel nearly seven times longer than the existing project.

The project is designed to benefit marginal agriculture, and very few claimed benefits involve reduced flood risk to homes or businesses. Some farmers fear the projects will increase erosion and limit water available for irrigation.

The environmental impacts of these projects would be significant and wide ranging. Productive wetlands would be drained, destroying bottomland hardwood forests that are home to waterfowl, eagles, deer, bear, fish, and alligators. The river itself houses a thousand-year-old colony of mussels, thought to be the densest mass of life in the world. Water quality would deteriorate through shoreline erosion and release of toxic chemicals trapped in river sediments, including heavy concentrations of DDT.

PROJECT POLITICS

The Yazoo Pump was exempted from local cost-sharing requirements in a stealth move by Sens. Thad Cochran (R-MS) and Trent Lott (R-MS) in the 1996 Water Resources Development Act. The Senators and the Delta Council, a farmers' chamber of commerce, have frustrated consideration of nonstructural project alternatives such as large-scale reforestation as supported by USFWS and EPA. The National Wildlife Federation and the Sierra Club have independently sued to halt the Big Sunflower project.

NATIONAL POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Do not waive local cost-sharing responsibility.
- End projects that impair regional environmental restoration efforts.
- Require new authorization before expanding a project or extending its useful life.
- Do not promote projects that result in wetland destruction.

MORE INFORMATION

Susan Rieff, National Wildlife Federation, 512-476-9805, rieff@nwf.org; Avery Rollins, Mississippi Sierra Club, 601-856-4437

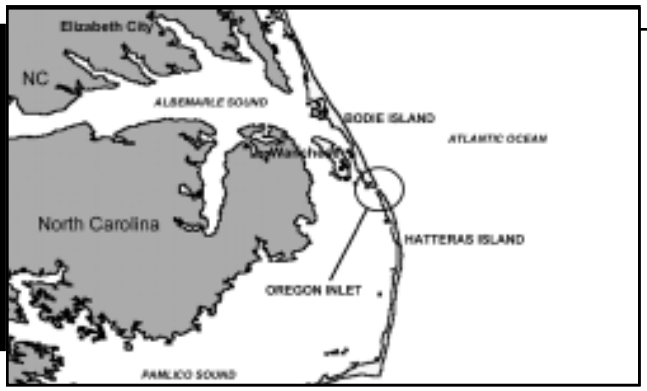
Helpful websites: www.nwf.org

TOP 10

OUTER BANKS, NORTH CAROLINA

OREGON INLET JETTIES

UNNEEDED JETTIES ARE ECONOMICALLY UNJUSTIFIED



SUMMARY

The Corps of Engineers plans to recommend spending $108 million to construct two jetties at Oregon Inlet, one of which would extend nearly two miles. The project is meant to stabilize an ocean access channel primarily for a small fishing fleet. Decades of scientific criticism and several independent review panels have determined that the jetties will do ecological harm to nearby federally protected lands and are economically unjustified.

THE STORY

Oregon Inlet naturally migrates southward, and the Corps claims that only jetties will guarantee ocean access to a fleet of 215 charter and commercial fishing boats. Some project opponents disagree, noting that routine channel dredging has allowed fishing to continue in the area for more than 30 years. Furthermore, the Corps concedes the improved channel will be unnavigable up to 25% of the time.

The project would amount to a federal subsidy of $500,000 per charter or commercial fishing boat. The Corps' economic study of the project has often been called into question. In 1988, the Office of Management and Budget appointed an independent consultant whose estimates showed that the project's costs outweigh its benefits. Other outside experts believe taxpayers will only receive a one-dollar return for every three dollars invested.

In 1979, the Department of Interior convened an independent panel of scientists to study the project's potential impacts on Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge and Cape Hatteras National Seashore. The panel concluded that jetties would encourage overfishing of an already depleted fishery and erode nearby beaches. In general, jetties have been known to exacerbate shoreline erosion. Major concerns first raised in the 1970s over the project's scope and design are yet unresolved.

PROJECT POLITICS

The Corps will soon complete all necessary project studies, putting the issue of project funding before Congress in 2000. The project's backers in Washington, D.C., are pressing the President's Council on Environmental Quality to mediate a land dispute between the Department of the Interior (DOI) and the Corps, regarding DOI's refusal to allow jetty anchors on federally protected land. In 1999, a Senate committee initiated an inquiry into the Oregon Inlet issue. This move may be related to past attempts by Sen. Jesse Helms (R-NC) to transfer control of the land from DOI to the Corps. In a similar attempt to gain control of the land, the North Carolina legislature passed a law in 1998 authorizing the Wanchese Seafood Authority to condemn the federal land on which the jetties would be anchored.

NATIONAL POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Conduct independent, enforceable review of controversial Corps studies.
- Conduct a nationwide deauthorization review.

MORE INFORMATION

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APALACHICOLA, FLORIDA TO COLUMBUS, GEORGIA

APALACHICOLA RIVER NAVIGATION

HIGHEST COST PER MILE IN THE SOUTH

TOP 10

SUMMARY

Federal taxpayers spend nearly $20 million each year to maintain the Apalachicola-Chattahoochee-Flint River System through Florida, Alabama, and Georgia. On average, fewer than two barges use the system each day, and less than half of these barges use the Apalachicola. Disposal of dredge material from the river is destroying some of the region's most productive wetlands and shellfish habitat.

THE STORY

This project was authorized in 1945 as a spur canal off the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway, though the intracoastal waterway in this region is vastly underused. One-third of the Apalachicola's barges barely use the river - many traveling from Alabama or Georgia unload their sand and gravel cargoes only three miles down its 100-mile long reach across the Florida panhandle. The Congressional Budget Office calculated that Apalachicola navigation costs more than 50 times the national average for navigation channels.

Disposal of maintenance dredge material along the river has already smothered one-quarter of the Apalachicola's banks with desolate mountains of sand. In hopes of minimizing sand accumulation on the riverbanks, the Corps has resorted to "mechanical redistribution" - dredging sand when the water is low and bulldozing it back into the Apalachicola when the water rises. Now the Corps proposes spending $46 million, plus $9.4 million annually for maintenance, on structural solutions to reduce the impacts of dumping dredge spoils in the river's side channels.

The Apalachicola floodplain is a biological factory fueling Apalachicola Bay, which may be the cleanest estuary remaining in the Southeast. The bay is home to 15% of America's and 90% of Florida's annual oyster harvest. The Apalachicola River basin contains one of the highest densities of amphibians and reptiles in North America, and is home to plants endemic to the region.

State and federal wildlife agencies have raised concerns over the loss of preferred habitats for federally protected fish and shellfish. Declines of 50-75% in gamefish populations near dredge material disposal sites have been documented.

PROJECT POLITICS

Florida environmental agencies have issued new permits restricting dredge material disposal. The State has also called for a re-evaluation of alternatives to reduce the disposal of dredged sediments within the riverbanks. The Corps has not adhered to past restrictions on sediment disposal. This issue caught the attention of Sen. Bob Graham (D-FL) who said that if Apalachicola navigation is determined to be environmentally unacceptable, "like the Cross Florida Barge Canal ten years ago, it will be deauthorized."

NATIONAL POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

• Conduct a national review of underused navigation systems. Decommission projects when appropriate.

MORE INFORMATION

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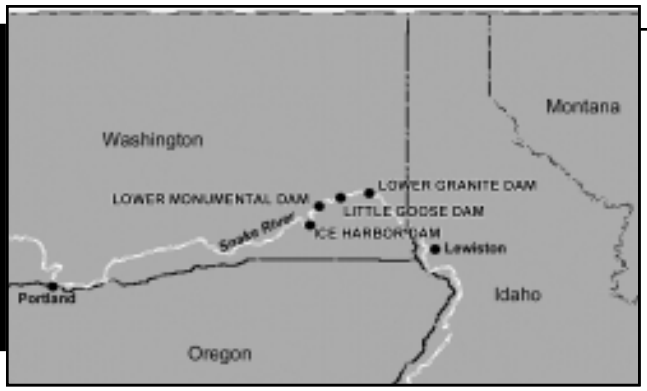
LEWISTON, IDAHO TO KENNEWICK, WASHINGTON

LOWER SNAKE RIVER NAVIGATION

DAMS EXPOSE TAXPAYERS TO LIABILITY FOR EXTINCTION

TOP 10



SUMMARY

The Corps spends around $32 million each year relating to four dams on the Lower Snake River to subsidize navigation. These dams are the major cause of the decline of five endangered species of salmon. If the fish go extinct, taxpayers may be liable for potentially billions or tens of billions of dollars in compensation payments to Native American tribes.

THE STORY

Operation of the four dams subsidizes a port in the foothills of the Rockies at Lewiston, Idaho. If the dams were retired, millions of dollars the Corps expects to spend in the next decade on a major rehabilitation of the dams would be saved. Retiring the dams would only marginally increase electric costs, but still keep Northwest electricity rates the lowest in the U.S.

Most scientists believe dam removal offers the best hope for recovery of the salmon. A Corps study predicts dam removal and restoration of historic salmon stocks could be an annual $340 million boon to the recreation and sport fishing industries, and would prevent a $172 million loss to the regional economy from losses to commercial fishing and other industries if the salmon go extinct.

Treaties between tribes and the U.S. guarantee tribal access to salmon, which have an important role in tribes' cultures and economies. Tribes want the fish, not money. But if salmon go extinct, taxpayers may be liable for billions to tens of billions of dollars in reparations.

Since salmon began seriously declining after dam construction, the Corps and Bonneville Power Administration have sought to recover fish stocks. Ratepayers and taxpayers have spent $3 billion throughout the Columbia River basin on recovery efforts that will not avert extinction. A 25-year trial program of pumping salmon out of the Snake and trucking or barging them past the dams is ineffective. Overcrowding during transport facilitates disease and high mortality rates, confuses the fishes' migratory instincts, and leaves them stunned and vulnerable to predators. Less than 1% of stocks return to the Snake's tributaries to spawn, a number too low to recover the species. Finally, the dams also violate the Clean Water Act.

PROJECT POLITICS

A 1995 court order directed the Clinton Administration to devise a long-term recovery plan by December 1999. The National Marine Fisheries Service has lagged in completing the environmental studies, postponing any decision until early 2000. Advocates fear the Administration will delay a final decision until after the 2000 presidential election. Sen. Slade Gorton (R-WA) has repeatedly sought to eliminate dam removal as an option by inserting riders into appropriations bills.

NATIONAL POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- End projects that impair regional environmental restoration efforts.
- Implement effective, adaptive environmental mitigation.

MORE INFORMATION

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Helpful Websites: www.taxpayer.net/snake; www.removedams.org; www.nwf.org/salmon

SAVANNAH, GEORGIA

SAVANNAH HARBOR EXPANSION

TRAFFIC FORECASTS WILDLY OPTIMISTIC

TOP 10

SUMMARY

This $230 million harbor deepening project is based on wildly optimistic traffic forecasts for the Port of Savannah. The project poses serious environmental risks to the Lower Savannah River and would likely result in port overcapacity in the South Atlantic region.

THE STORY

Through a seldom-used provision, the Georgia Port Authority (GPA) has planned its own project to deepen Savannah Harbor from 42 feet to at least 48 feet. The project was authorized in the Water Resources Development Act of 1999 contingent upon the Corps' approval of GPA's plan. The Corps admitted that it lacked the information needed to justify the project but approved it anyway, passing the buck to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the Environmental Protection Agency to make the ultimate decision to let the project proceed.

GPA plans predict growth unparalleled in the port's history and argues that a 48-foot deep harbor that can accommodate deep-draft container vessels is needed to bring new shipping business to Savannah. GPA's growth forecasts, however, do not account for ongoing consolidation in the deep draft shipping industry, and the limited demand for deep draft harbors. A preliminary economic study of the project indicates that costs far outweigh benefits, even before necessary environmental mitigation costs are factored in.

The list of environmental impacts of the Savannah Harbor Expansion is extraordinary. Saltwater intrusion caused by dredging would destroy many of the rare freshwater tidal wetlands in the Savannah National Wildlife Refuge and would likely preclude striped bass recovery in the Lower Savannah River.

Dredging would also decrease dissolved oxygen levels and imperil the endangered shortnosed sturgeon. Other environmental impacts of the project include: disruption and disposal of contaminated dredge material, erosion of the Fort Pulaski National Monument, erosion of beach and sea turtle habitat, increased ship collisions with endangered Right Whales, and degradation of commercial fish habitat.

The Corps has failed to conduct studies to address many of these impacts. Numerous environmental resource agencies have stated repeatedly that the decision to deepen the harbor is premature.

PROJECT POLITICS

Rep. Jack Kingston (R-GA) continues to pursue the project despite USFWS's opposition. Internal GPA notes read: "JK (Kingston) needs us to kick F&W's ass in the paper… don't let rinky-dink agency beat us." The contingent authorization of the project by Congress has placed extreme pressure on the Corps to sidestep thorough economic analysis and USFWS concerns.

NATIONAL POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Implement regional port planning to minimize redundancy, overcapacity and environmental damage in port expansion.
- Eliminate "contingent" authorizations.

MORE INFORMATION

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SANDY HOOK, NEW JERSEY TO CAPE MAY, NEW JERSEY

NEW JERSEY BEACH REPLENISHMENT

$60 MILLION PER MILE TO PUMP SAND ON ENTIRE JERSEY SHORE

TOP 10

SUMMARY

The Corps of Engineers is conducting the world's largest beach replenishment project to provide 100-foot wide beaches along all 127 miles of New Jersey's sea coast. Experts predict this series of projects would cost more than $9 billion over 50 years, at least 65% of which would be funded by federal taxpayers. Costs of periodic renourishment might be even higher because high erosion rates necessitate sand-pumping at least every six years. Guarantees of wide beaches promote further development of this already congested shoreline.

THE STORY

Beach replenishment is the Corps' latest remedy to a problem created by "newjerseyization," or armoring the coast with jetties and seawalls. Armoring accelerates erosion by blocking the natural drift of sand along the coast.

The Corps plans to conclude the first round of New Jersey beach replenishment by 2003. To date, Congress has limited project funding to only a fraction (about $200 million) of what is needed to replenish all 127 miles. The New Jersey project has spurred Florida, Delaware, Maryland, and New York to seek similar projects.

Although wider beaches provide recreation and some storm protection, they also encourage high-risk development. Coastal sprawl increases the costs of taxpayer-subsidized flood insurance payments when floods occur. New Jersey has regulated large development plans since 1973, but coastal developers have exploited a loophole allowing unregulated construction of complexes of fewer than 25 units.

Though taxpayers pay for the majority of the costs, recreational benefits on these beaches are often limited to private homeowners and resort guests. Many coastal communities dissuade public beach use by imposing strict parking regulations, allowing padlocked gates and posting "no trespassing" signs to block beach access.

Mining offshore sand and dumping it on New Jersey beaches disturbs valuable offshore shellfish habitat and the surf line ecosystem. Most artificial beaches wash out to sea in as little as a year after replenishment, further degrading offshore habitats.

PROJECT POLITICS

The Clinton Administration has been attempting to reduce the federal role in beach replenishment projects. The New Jersey Congressional delegation has consistently opposed efforts to increase local costs of existing projects. In 1993, the New Jersey Legislature sought to limit new coastal development in high-risk areas and initiate a voluntary property buyout program. Development interests and municipalities, however, pressured the state's Department of Environmental Protection into drafting weak regulations that remain as ineffective as previous rules.

NATIONAL POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Institute a moratorium on all beach replenishment projects until the costs of such projects are re-evaluated.
- Implement policies that encourage a strategic retreat from hazardous coastal development.
- Restrict public funding to projects that provide public benefits.

MORE INFORMATION

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FIRE ISLAND, NEW YORK TO MONTAUK POINT, NEW YORK

LONG ISLAND BEACH REPLENISHMENT

CORPS BUILDING BEFORE COMPREHENSIVE STUDY IS DONE

TOP 10

SUMMARY

An $800 million plan to stabilize barrier island beaches along the Atlantic coast of Long Island with groins was originally rejected by the Carter Administration in 1978. The Corps now plans to build two separate "interim" projects to pump sand onto Fire Island beaches. Together with another "interim" project built on Westhampton Beach in 1995, these projects will cover much of the original plan area.

THE STORY

By calling the projects "interim" solutions, the Corps is able to build them without first evaluating their cumulative impact on the affected coastal ecosystem. The Corps claims that the "interim" projects could be stopped if so recommended by an environmental study to be completed in 2002. This recommendation would be unlikely, since the Corps will have invested $53 million in initial construction by that time and will have committed to spend at least an additional $17 million in a planned renourishment of the beach by 2007.

The projects are intended to prevent breaches in the barrier islands that the Corps alleges lead to mainland flooding and other problems. Currently, the Corps fills breaches as they occur. Key project supporters are those who own houses on the barrier island's primary dune. The projects would provide only 44-year flood protection to at-risk homes and induce more development on and in front of the primary dune.

Experts predict the projects may require renourishment at least every five years over their life. Coastal geologists warn interfering with natural beach processes may actually increase flood risk.

Extensive development is threatening ecologically sensitive areas of Fire Island, a federally protected National Seashore. Coasts provide vital breeding and feeding grounds for fish, sea turtles, shellfish, birds and other wildlife. Mining offshore sand destroys offshore habitat, and dumping it on beaches smothers tidal wildlife. Over time, beach replenishment fundamentally alters the barrier island ecosystem.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and other experts recommend minimizing new development on the barrier islands. Improved zoning regulations, voluntary buyouts of high-risk property, and limitations on federal flood insurance for beachfront homes located on the primary dune are more sound policy options that would allow for natural rebuilding of the barrier islands.

PROJECT POLITICS

Rep. Rick Lazio (R-NY) has encouraged Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt to sign off on the "interim" projects. The local proponent of the project is the Fire Island Association, representing owners of expensive beachfront homes on the barrier island. This interest group has wielded its influence to secure a deal in which homeowners would pay less than 7% of project's construction costs. They have also hired Tom Downey, former Congressman of the district, to lobby the Council on Environmental Quality for approval of the original full-scale project. A promising development is a policy proposed by East Hampton, a town that stands to benefit from the full-scale project, encouraging retreat from the shore and restricting erosion control structures that often lead to increased erosion on adjacent beaches.

NATIONAL POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Institute a moratorium on all beach replenishment projects until the costs of such projects are reevaluated.
- Implement policies that encourage a strategic retreat from hazardous coastal development.

MORE INFORMATION

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PROJECT NOT DEAD UNTIL DEAUTHORIZED

JACKSON, ALABAMA

JACKSON NAVIGATION SPUR AND PORT FACILITY

THE STORY

In 1989, the Corps of Engineers Mobile District Office found no economic justification for this $23 million canal and recommended against it. Corps Headquarters overruled the District and ordered it to proceed with construction before evaluating less environmentally destructive alternatives. This refusal to evaluate alternatives violates the National Environmental Policy Act.

The 1000-foot spur canal off the Tombigbee River is meant to encourage barge traffic to a proposed Jackson, Alabama, port facility and industrial park complex. Although federal law normally requires the local sponsor to pay for 50% of inland navigation construction costs, locals would pay only 20% of this project.

The proposed canal would degrade 690 acres of U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service-designated critical wetlands and forest habitat. The Corps draft environmental study states that all value to fish and wildlife would be lost in the affected areas, and that "(habitat) replacement would involve several decades if not a century." In effect, this project will harm one acre of rare bottomland hardwood forest for every ten Jackson residents it benefits and amount to a subsidy of over $4,000 per resident of this small town.

PROJECT POLITICS

In February 2000, the Mayor and City Council of Jackson announced the town could not afford the local cost share and mitigation costs of the project. Rep. Sonny Callahan (R-AL), the project's main proponent in Congress, has indicated he would respect the town's decision. Until the project is deauthorized, it could still be revived. The President's FY 2001 budget proposed funding the project before the city said it couldn't afford its share.

MORE INFORMATION

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PROJECT THREATENS TWO NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGES

WHITE RIVER, ARKANSAS

WHITE RIVER NAVIGATION

THE STORY

The $40 million White River Navigation project would decimate the heart of one of the most important bottomland hardwood resources in the world to provide only marginal benefits to a few private shipping interests. The Corps' proposal calls for the massive widening and deepening of a 258-mile navigation channel to allow year-round barge traffic, most of which would cut through the White River and Cache River National Wildlife Refuges.

The Corps predicts annual benefits of $8 million for the Newport, Arkansas, area. The Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission fear that the project will damage much of the state's $635 million hunting, wildlife watching, and recreation industries.

The Corps plans to construct wing dikes along the navigable length of the river to narrow the channel and scour its bottom. This would flush sediments downstream to settle at the mouth of tributary sloughs and bayous, blocking natural outflow and drying up adjacent wetlands. Coupled with the proposed Eastern Arkansas Irrigation Projects (see p. 17), the navigation project would destroy an irreplaceable habitat that supports black bear, bald eagles, rich mussel beds, and many species of migratory birds.

PROJECT POLITICS

The Arkansas Congressional delegation has supported the project in Washington, D.C. Deauthorized in 1988 after a decades-long fight by hunters, anglers and conservation groups, the project was revived in 1996 with pressure from the Arkansas Waterways Commission. At the urging of the USFWS and the Environmental Protection Agency, the President's FY 2001 budget proposes a White River Basin Comprehensive Study.

MORE INFORMATION

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DAM KILLED MANY TIMES BUT NOT DEAD YET

METROPOLITAN SACRAMENTO, CALIFORNIA

AUBURN DAM

THE STORY

The proposed $2 billion Auburn Dam is a scheme to turn much of the Middle and North Forks of the American River into a reservoir for the purported benefit of water supply and irrigation interests. Rep. John Doolittle (R-CA), the project's main proponent and Congressman of the benefitting district, exploits Sacramento's flood risk by claiming that Auburn Dam is the only structure that will provide adequate protection to the city. Doolittle's opponents note that modifications to the existing Folsom Dam and area floodways will remedy the problem, cost much less, and save the American River.

In 1992 and 1996, Congress rejected Auburn Dam proposals because of regional earthquake risks and other reasons. In 1999, Congress directed limited modifications to Folsom Dam that will raise Sacramento's level of flood protection. Auburn Dam, however, is still alive. Initial groundwork for the project is already in place, and Doolittle is likely to push for its completion as long as he is in Congress.

The American River is an important recreation and natural resource area that provides valuable wildlife habitat. In 1999, California's Attorney General urged the Department of the Interior to return the American River to its historic channel.

PROJECT POLITICS

In 1999, Rep. Doolittle weakened elements of the Folsom Dam modification in order to keep the door open to additional flood control measures for Sacramento, including Auburn Dam. Rep. Doolittle also made an unsuccessful attempt to link the modification to unrelated water supply projects for his district that break cost-sharing rules. This attempt will likely be repeated if city flood control officials seek additional improvements in 2000.

MORE INFORMATION

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A REDUNDANT ROUTE RISKS TREASURED BAY

DELAWARE BAY, DELAWARE TO BALTIMORE, MARYLAND

CHESAPEAKE & DELAWARE (C&D) CANAL DEEPENING

THE STORY

This $90 million project to deepen the C&D Canal from 35 feet to 40 feet was authorized contingent on favorable Corps studies to improve a shortcut route to the Port of Baltimore. Current Corps studies show the project will neither increase shipping nor create more jobs. An independent review panel has determined that deepening cannot be economically justified. Justification of the last canal deepening projected major traffic increases, but traffic has actually declined to less than 15% of that projected.

Project benefits are based on expected time-savings over the main 50-foot deep route to Baltimore through the Chesapeake Bay. Most vessels do not take advantage of the savings, however, because of strict unloading schedules and the shipping lines' preference to unload during the least expensive day shift. The canal route also costs vessels 15-20% more due to higher pilot fees.

The project's economic justification hinges on dumping dredge spoils at a cheap, controversial open-bay site that, along with nutrient releases, would impact valuable fisheries and the endangered short-nosed sturgeon. Deepening the canal will likely cause other damage to the upper Bay ecosystem. The project will allow more polluted Delaware River water to enter the Bay, and saltwater intrusion and disposal of dredge spoils may further degrade groundwater supplies.

PROJECT POLITICS

Rep. Wayne Gilchrest (R-MD) has championed the ecological health of the Chesapeake Bay. He will support this project only if it meets this goal and is economically justified. The Maryland Port Authority has heavily lobbied the Governor, legislators and the public, claiming a deeper canal is crucial to the port's competitiveness.

MORE INFORMATION

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CORPS IS MANAGING RIVER TO EXTINCTION

SIOUX CITY, IOWA TO ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI

MISSOURI RIVER NAVIGATION

THE STORY

The Corps spends $3 million annually to manipulate Missouri River flows from upriver dams in Montana, North and South Dakota, and Nebraska primarily to enable shipping to Sioux City, Iowa. The slight navigation benefits - less than $7 million annually - come at the expense of the river and other, more valuable river-related activities. Missouri River recreation alone generates more than $87 million annually.

The Missouri River navigation system was built in the 1940s, based on predictions that 13 million annual tons of cargo would travel the river. Currently, a handful of barge operators transport only 1.8 million tons annually. Less than 1% of Great Plains grain is shipped on the Missouri. A study by an Iowa State University economist criticized the navigation boosters' claim that the mere potential for barge traffic on the river competes with rail and trucking to keep all transportation rates lower.

The cumulative impact of decades of unnatural flows is devastating what was once one of the world's most biologically productive rivers. Mismanaging the Missouri for navigation has led to the loss of more than 90% of the river's critical side channel, sandbar, and wetland habitat. Regulated flows also jeopardize three federally listed endangered species.

PROJECT POLITICS

In 1999, Sens. Christopher "Kit" Bond (R-MO) and Bob Kerrey (D-NE) pushed for legislation to fund restoration and preservation of critical habitat on the Missouri. As long as the river is managed primarily for navigation purposes, habitat restoration will not be successful. MARC 2000, a regional navigation interest group, continues to lobby the Corps, basin states, and Congress to maintain flows geared towards navigation on the Missouri River.

MORE INFORMATION

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SAFETY BOARD SAYS $641 MILLION WON'T FIX CANAL

NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA

INDUSTRIAL CANAL WIDENING

THE STORY

More than a third of all industrial chemicals transported on the nation's inland waterway system are shipped through historic neighborhoods of New Orleans, on a 5.5-mile canal that connects the Mississippi River to the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway. The Corps plans to widen, deepen, and expand the canal's locks at a cost of $641 million - at 83% federal expense.

The project was justified by predicting sharp increases in barge traffic and a need to fix antiquated locks. Since 1988, however, shipping on the canal has decreased 28%. The Corps has an alternative plan to rehabilitate the locks for $16 million if the full project is not built.

The canal has a long history of accidents and chemical spills. The National Transportation Safety Board considers the existing lock and canal to be risky and that expansion "would not necessarily reduce the hazards." Further environmental concerns include resuspension of sediments containing high levels of heavy metals and their disposal on and near wetlands, which could further contaminate nearby waters.

A Corps study admits construction noise, bridge closings, and increased traffic congestion will "reduce desirability of living or operating a business in the affected neighborhoods." The threat of these impacts has already reduced property values and impeded efforts to revitalize the neighborhoods.

PROJECT POLITICS

Rep. William Jefferson (D-LA), whose campaigns have been backed by shipping interests, is the project's staunchest proponent in Congress. Port Director Richard Brinson appears to be delaying the close of the controversial Mississippi River Gulf Outlet, a potential hurricane corridor connecting the Gulf to New Orleans, as ransom for beginning the canal project. Neighborhood groups have opposed this project for 30 years and fault the Corps for half-heartedly attempting to address their concerns.

MORE INFORMATION

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CORPS WANTS TO FIX A DIKE THAT ISN'T BROKEN

MISSISSIPPI RIVER NEAR DIAMOND BLUFF, WISCONSIN

LOCK AND DAM #3 EMBANKMENTS

THE STORY

This $15.4 million project would be a costly, unnecessary replacement of an existing dike system that helps maintain a navigation channel on this section of the Mississippi River. The Corps claims long-term erosion may undermine the dikes, even though the existing system has survived several major floods over the last 60 years while requiring only basic maintenance. In fact, studies have determined conditions exist only a couple of days a year where there is a slight increase in erosion risk. Annual maintenance of the existing dike costs less than $20,000.

Minnesota state economists have questioned the need for the project. The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has proposed a spillway alternative on the neighboring Vermillion River. The spillway would improve water quality on the Vermillion and fish passage past Lock & Dam #3, and would relieve pressure on the existing dike system.

Minnesota and Wisconsin's environmental agencies are concerned about the project's potential harm to fish and state-listed endangered mussels. The project would destroy 60 acres of hardwood forest in an already fragmented floodplain along the Mississippi. Construction of the new dike would also disrupt the popular privately-owned Diamond Bluff Associates hunting preserve.

PROJECT POLITICS

Despite much criticism by Minnesota and Wisconsin state economists, biologists, and environmental groups, the Corps stands alone as the project's main proponent.

MORE INFORMATION

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CITY FIGHTS CORPS TO GREEN THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER

MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA

LOCK AND DAMS AT MINNEAPOLIS

THE STORY

The uppermost 7.8 miles of the navigable portion of the Mississippi River between St. Paul and Minneapolis, Minnesota, is one of the most highly subsidized waterways in America. The $3.1 million spent by the Corps annually to maintain three locks and dams in Minneapolis subsidizes barge traffic to the city's Upper Harbor Terminal (UHT) and three private concrete and scrap metal companies.

Barge traffic has fallen well short of projections used to justify the project's initial $36 million construction. The Upper Mississippi River can accommodate 15-barge tows from St. Louis, Missouri, up to St. Paul, but only 2-barge tows can continue on to Minneapolis. Ending navigation on this short reach would have minimal impact on farmers and the local economy, and would not affect St. Paul.

The City of Minneapolis, like many other Mississippi River communities, has recognized the economic and environmental value of restoring its riverfront to provide parkland and greenways. In its proposed master plan, the city has recommended shutting down the UHT (which generates from one-half to two-thirds of the annual tonnage moved through the locks) and shifting non-river-dependent industrial activities to more appropriate sites. Regardless of whether the UHT is closed or not, more costs should be shouldered by the lock users and barging beneficiaries.

PROJECT POLITICS

American Iron and Steel is the major obstacle to Minneapolis' redevelopment plan. The metal recycler has sued the city to permit a new steel shredder, which would increase its barging needs. The company's influence has split city government over a proposal to move the business downstream.

MORE INFORMATION

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TOWN WOULD STILL BE AT RISK FROM FLOODS

EAST PRAIRIE, MISSOURI

ST. JOHN'S BAYOU AND NEW MADRID FLOODWAY

THE STORY

This $65 million project would destroy 36,000 acres of critical wetlands to create floodprone farmland. Though the project's purported main objective is to reduce flood risk in East Prairie, Missouri, the project would do little to solve the town's main flooding problems. Agribusiness interests are taking advantage of East Prairie's designation as an Empowerment Zone to obtain a 95% federal subsidy for the project.

Draining wetlands for agriculture produces negligible benefits, especially considering falling crop prices, and contradicts national agricultural policies to retire marginal farmland. Even with the project, flooding in East Prairie occur would still occur once every ten years due to inadequate stormwater drainage. There are more effective and less expensive project alternatives that focus on the town's needs.

The project's levees and pumps would drain tens of thousands of wetland acres and eliminate 75,000 acres of increasingly rare Mississippi River backwater habitat - a vital fish spawning and migratory bird habitat that once covered roughly 2.5 million acres in Missouri. The project will have significant adverse impacts on endangered least terns, white bass, mussels, waterfowl, and amphibians.

PROJECT POLITICS

This project would violate the Clean Water Act, NEPA, and Swampbuster regulations, which prohibit the conversion of wetlands for agriculture. Despite these violations and the project's questionable benefits, a few large agricultural landowners and Rep. Jo Ann Emerson (R-MO) continue to promote construction.

MORE INFORMATION

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COSTS DOUBLED WHILE BENEFITS DECLINED

DEVILS LAKE, NORTH DAKOTA

DEVILS LAKE EMERGENCY OUTLET

THE STORY

This $100 million project is a scheme to relieve rising water levels in Devils Lake by pumping water into the Sheyenne River, a major tributary of the Red River. The project's pumping plant and 13-20 miles of pipes, dams, and canals would reduce the surface elevation of Devils Lake by a only a few inches a year - less than 10% of the current annual rise - while damaging water quality and increasing flooding downstream.

The outlet's costs far outweigh its benefits, and the project would prove useless in periods of high inflows when outlet releases would have to be curtailed, or they would worsen flooding along the Sheyenne River. Since the project's initial economic review, the estimated cost has quadrupled, and benefits have likely diminished due to more than $300 million spent on other federal flood mitigation in the area.

In part because Devils Lake is a closed-basin system, its water contains high accumulations of salts and pollutants. Releases from the lake into the Sheyenne and Red Rivers would damage water quality downstream, facilitate the potential transfer of damaging invasive species to the Hudson Bay drainage basin, and could seriously harm regional fisheries.

Project proponents have long considered the Devils Lake project as part of the highly controversial Garrison Diversion - a project that would divert Missouri River water 200 miles across North Dakota to the Red River basin. Such an interbasin transfer could violate the Boundary Waters Treaty with Canada and have disastrous environmental impacts.

PROJECT POLITICS

Sens. Kent Conrad (D-ND) and Byron Dorgan (D-ND) are aggressively forcing the project forward despite the lack of economic, environmental and engineering justification, and despite strong opposition from downstream Minnesota, the Province of Manitoba, and the Canadian Government over environmental concerns.

MORE INFORMATION

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RACE TO THE BOTTOM BURYING ENVIRONMENT

ASTORIA, OREGON TO PORTLAND, OREGON

COLUMBIA AND WILLAMETTE RIVER DEEPENING

THE STORY

This is a massive, $196 million project to deepen 103 miles of the Columbia and 12 miles of the Willamette from 40 feet to 43 feet. It is an attempt by Portland, located 100 miles upriver, and several smaller ports along the river to keep up with other, deeper West Coast ports such as Seattle/Tacoma.

Much of the project's economic benefits are dependent on deepening the Willamette River, but the river cannot be deepened until toxins in the sediments are cleaned up. The Oregon Department of Environmental Quality is scrambling to organize a cleanup to avoid the river's designation as a federal Superfund site, which would delay the deepening project several years.

Project construction would require dredging 20 million cubic yards of sediment - the equivalent of nearly 2 million dumptruck loads - some of which contains high levels of DDT, PCBs, and dioxin. The Corps plans to dump dredged material on nearly 2,000 acres of wetlands, streamside forests, and farmland, and over 9,500 acres of near-shore ocean, threatening the West Coast's most productive Dungeness crab fishery - an annual $50 million industry.

Columbia River basin tribes have treaty rights for access to salmon and oppose the Corps plan for not providing time windows for migration of the endangered fish. The tribes also oppose dumping spoils in the open ocean and in the estuary. The National Marine Fisheries Service has identified areas of the estuary as critical salmon habitat.

PROJECT POLITICS

In WRDA 1999, Sen. Ron Wyden (D-OR) obtained contingent authorization of the project, and Sen. Slade Gorton (R-WA), a member of the powerful Appropriations Committee, is a strong supporter. Two counties, two cities, and three port districts downriver publicly oppose the project.

MORE INFORMATION

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CHEAPER BUYOUT PLAN HELPS WETLANDS AND HOMES

SUBURBAN HOUSTON, TEXAS

CLEAR CREEK FLOOD CONTROL

THE STORY

For years, the Corps has planned this $122 million project to reduce flooding in one area of Houston by speeding Clear Creek floodwater toward downstream communities surrounding Clear Lake. The project's channelization of Clear Creek would destroy hundreds of acres of forested wetlands.

The Harris County Flood Control District (HCFCD) has suggested an alternative to the Corps' plan that addresses some environmental and residential concerns. Though the HCFCD plan is an improvement - it reduces destruction of rare bottomland hardwood forests and wetlands from 330 acres to 190 acres - it would still likely increase flooding downstream.

The Corps and HCFCD have focused on options that would encourage sprawl in upstream areas. The trend of rapid development upstream will add to rainwater runoff in the area and worsen downstream flooding.

What has not been seriously considered is a $60 million nonstructural option to buy out all 400 homes within the floodplain. This option would reduce overall flood risk while preserving wildlife habitat and the $3 million local fishing and recreation industry. Property buyouts would also avoid dredging of toxins associated with a nearby Superfund site.

PROJECT POLITICS

HCFCD has not pursued buyouts, fearing a change in project scope would risk current authorization. However, Congress recently stipulated nonstructural alternatives can be re-evaluated using the same criteria as in evaluating structural projects. The area's Congressional delegation has indicated support for any plan that satisfies competing interests.

MORE INFORMATION

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POOR DESIGN COULD WORSEN FLOODING

DALLAS, TEXAS
DALLAS FLOODWAY EXTENSION

THE STORY

The poor design of this $127 million project, originally authorized in 1965, could increase flooding problems in the Dallas metropolitan area and poses major environmental threats to the Great Trinity Forest.

The Corps project is part of a larger state and city plan to redevelop downtown Dallas. Combined, the plans would split the Trinity River into two channels, extend existing levees downstream, build elevated toll-roads inside the levees, and cut a 400-foot wide swale through the Great Trinity Forest. The project would also require renovating four major bridges and building three new ones across the river.

Though the stated purpose of this project is flood control, the combination of road construction and levee extension will dramatically reduce the carrying capacity of the river channels. This could increase flood heights and defeat the project purpose. Development encouraged by the project would add to the overall flood risk in the area.

The project would destroy at least 34,000 trees and several hundred acres of valuable wildlife habitat in one of the nation's last urban forests. This area provides recreation benefits to thousands of residents and visitors.

PROJECT POLITICS

In 1998, city voters passed a referendum authorizing $84 million to build the toll-road portion of the project. Shortly after, the Corps revealed that the city would face hundreds of millions of dollars in additional costs to rebuild bridges. Regional Corps officials have chosen against lower-cost, permanent solutions such as voluntary property buyouts and flood easements as proposed by much of the Dallas community.

MORE INFORMATION

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POINT OF USE DESALINIZATION MUCH CHEAPER

RED AND WICHITA RIVERS, TEXAS
WICHITA RIVER BASIN CHLORIDE CONTROL

THE STORY

This $41 million project would block salt springs from feeding the naturally salty Wichita River, a Red River tributary, to subsidize the cost of water treatment in rural north Texas. Although water supply projects are typically a local responsibility, federal taxpayers will pay 100% of the cost of this project to supplement the city's current fresh water source, Lake Arrowhead.

Project opponents advocate a much cheaper, environmentally sensible alternative of desalinizing water at the point of use, as other cities along the saline Red River system do. The high concentration of natural salt deposits in the riverbed has caused $85 million of previously constructed chloride control structures to perform worse than expected. Some experts predict it may take 20 years after construction for the project to begin lowering water salinity levels.

In-river desalinization would decimate the river's endemic fish and threaten bald eagle habitat. The project would also require the creation of several large brine storage reservoirs. The Corps admits that these reservoirs would ultimately accumulate toxic levels of selenium. A similar brine disposal area at Kesterson, California, has proven to be lethal to large colonies of migratory birds.

PROJECT POLITICS

Rep. William Thornberry (R-TX) is the project's advocate in Congress, acting on pressure from the Red River Authority and the Red River Valley Association. Louisiana interests hope that successful chloride control on the Wichita will increase the feasibility of a larger project on the Red River.

MORE INFORMATION

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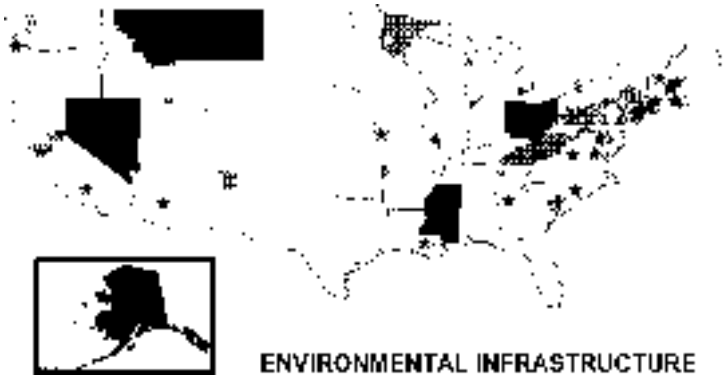
ROLLING OUT THE PORK BARREL FROM NEW YORK TO ALASKA

NATIONWIDE

ENVIRONMENTAL INFRASTRUCTURE

THE STORY

In 1992, Congress authorized a five-year experimental program for South Central Pennsylvania that has since grown into a national program. This program covers parts of 30 states and is heavily driven by Congressional politics. In most cases, the program authorizes the Corps to pay 75% of the construction and design costs for wastewater treatment and water supply projects for selected local communities. Wastewater treatment and water supply projects are typically funded wholly by local sponsors or through the Environmental Protection Agency's State Revolving Funds (SRF).



SRF funds must be repaid and are restricted for use on projects that have undergone a series of EPA-mandated environmental reviews. In contrast to SRF-funded projects, the Corps' "environmental infrastructure" projects are not subject to stringent environmental studies or standard economic analyses. Congressional authorization of these projects usually comes in the form of general, area-based authorities that do not evaluate the legitimacy of individual projects. Projects are generally selected and planned according to local development interests, and then funded by Congress.

A number of these projects lay the groundwork for new development in the open space that surrounds existing communities. This potentially contributes to urban sprawl, and does so at the expense of the federal taxpayer. Corps environmental infrastructure projects have received only limited funding in the Administration's budgets and Congressional appropriations bills, but Congress continues to add to the Corps' $27 billion construction backlog by authorizing them. The Corps was required to complete a report on the feasibility of implementing the Environmental Infrastructure program on a national basis by the end of 1998, but the report has still not been released.

PROJECT POLITICS

South Central Pennsylvania, which includes portions of the Congressional districts of Rep. Bud Shuster (R-PA, Chairman of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee) and Rep. John P. Murtha (D-PA), was the first region to host a major, region-wide Corps environmental infrastructure program. Since 1992, environmental infrastructure authorities have become increasingly common - WRDA 1999 authorized nearly $1 billion for new and existing environmental infrastructure programs across the nation. The cost-sharing requirements and authorization levels differ among these programs, suggesting that federal funding is related to the political influence of various Congressional districts.

MORE INFORMATION

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APPENDICES

ABOUT THIS REPORT

CRITERIA FOR SELECTING PROJECTS

The projects in the report were nominated by local citizen organizations and individuals, then researched by Taxpayers for Common Sense (TCS) and National Wildlife Federation (NWF) staff in consultation with local and national advocates. All projects listed in this report can and should be stopped.

CRITERIA FOR SELECTING TOP 10

The two report authors, Taxpayers for Common Sense and the National Wildlife Federation, selected the 10 Most Wasteful from the 25 water projects listed in this report. This list of 10 represents the most wasteful projects in the U.S. ranked according to the following criteria:

Cost to taxpayers, project economics and project effectiveness - High ranking went to projects with high overall costs to federal taxpayers, projects with costs that outweigh the benefits, or projects that are unneeded or do not achieve stated goals.

Impact on the environment - High ranking went to projects that destroy wetland, coastal, or riverine ecosystems, put endangered or threatened species at risk, expose humans and wildlife to hazardous chemicals, harm federal or state protected lands, or violate agency policies or federal law.

COST ESTIMATES

Cumulative waste of the 25 Projects - In calculating the cumulative waste highlighted in this report, only costs to federal taxpayers have been used. For new projects that have not been built, the total estimated cost of the project's life has been used. For ongoing projects, the average operation and maintenance cost over five years has been used. For beach renourishment projects, one-tenth of the total cost of the project's 50-year life has been used. For environmental infrastructure, the total of funds authorized in the Water Resources Development Act of 1999 has been used.

Cost for individual projects - Costs cited for individual projects are the total project costs, federal and non-federal. Project cost estimates are derived from studies, reports or statements of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Other economic values are derived from various federal, state, and local government agencies, expert scientists and economists, knowledgeable non-governmental interest groups, and credible media reports.

ALTERNATIVES

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requires study of multiple project alternatives and evaluation of each alternative's economic and environmental impact. While this report does not necessarily endorse any specific alternative, certain alternatives have been described that thus far have been inadequately considered by the Corps. This report recommends that the Corps follow the letter and spirit of the NEPA.

PROJECT POLITICS

This report has conducted a careful review of the actions of Congressional proponents and opponents of the listed projects. The actions of other public officials and interested third parties have also been reviewed. The research was generated after careful consultation with and input from taxpayer advocacy groups, environmentalists, community activists, scientists, economists and others.

MAPS

The maps for each project are illustrative, intended to show each project's general location.

CONTACTS FOR MORE INFORMATION

The people and organizations listed at the end of each project description are knowledgeable sources of information on the respective project. However, contacts do not necessarily endorse the particular article in which they are listed or the report in its entirety.

BENEFIT-COST RATIOS

In conducting economic feasibility studies for projects, the Corps is generally required to determine predicted costs and benefits of project construction. The benefit-cost ratio (B-C) is calculated by dividing project benefits by its predicted costs. A project is considered "justified" if its benefits, to whomever they might accrue, exceed its costs to taxpayers.

ACRONYMS

The following acronyms are used throughout:
B-C ratio - Benefit-Cost Ratio
CDF - Confined Disposal Facility
DNR - (State) Department of Natural Resources
EIS - Environmental Impact Statement
EPA - U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
FWS - United States Fish and Wildlife Service
MARC 2000 - Midwest Area River Coalition 2000
NED - National Economic Development
NEPA - National Environmental Policy Act
NWF - National Wildlife Federation
O&M - Operation and Maintenance
TCS - Taxpayers for Common Sense
WRDA - Water Resources Development Act

COMMERCIAL NAVIGATION

COASTAL PORTS

Type	Non-Federal Share (Construction)	Federal Share (Construction)	Non-Federal Operation & Maintenance
< 20 ft. Deep Harbor	20%*	80%	0%
20-45 ft. Harbor	35%*	65%	0%
> 45 ft. Deep Harbor	60%*	40%	50%

* The federal government will loan up to 10% of this amount to be repaid with interest over a 30-year period. LERRDs (see p. 39) may offset some or all of this amount.

INLAND NAVIGATION

Type	Non-Federal Share (Construction/Major Rehabilitation)	Federal Share (Construction/Major Rehabilitation)	Non-Federal Operation & Maintenance
Inland Waterways	50%*	50%	0%

* Taken from the federal Inland Waterways Trust Fund, which is generated through fuel taxes on inland barge tows; actual local beneficiaries do not make direct contributions.

FLOOD DAMAGE REDUCTION

RIVERINE

Type	Non-Federal Share (Construction)	Federal Share (Construction)	Non-Federal Operation & Maintenance
Structural Flood Control	35%*	65%	100%
Non-Structural Flood Control	35%**	65%	100%

* Structural flood control projects require a 5% cash outlay prior to construction. The remainder of the cost share may be provided by LERRDs (see p. 39).

** The non-federal cost share of non- structural flood control projects may be provided entirely by LERRDs (see p. 39).

Note: Non-federal share for structural flood control projects that were authorized prior to 1996 only require a minimum total contribution of 25%.

COST SHARING RULES FOR THE CORPS

SHORE PROTECTION

Type	Non-Federal Share (initial construction)	Federal Share (initial construction)	Non-Federal O&M (50-yr maintenance)
Beach Replenishment	35%	65%	35%*
Other Structural Projects	35%	65%	100%

* By 2002, the non-federal share of beach replenishment maintenance will increase to 50%.

AGRICULTURAL WATER SUPPLY

Type	Non-Federal Share (initial construction)	Federal Share (initial construction)	Non-Federal O&M
17 Western States Irrigation	*	*	*
Non-Irrigation Projects and Irrigation in Eastern States	35%	65%	100%

* Project construction funded from the Corps of Engineers budget, and ultimately repaid in conformity with Reclamation law.

MUNICIPAL AND INDUSTRIAL WATER SUPPLY

100% funded by non-federal interests

HYDROELECTRIC POWER

100% funded by non-federal interests

LERRDS

In most cases, a non-federal interest receives credit toward its share of the project cost for value of the purchased lands, easements, and rights-of-way, including suitable borrow and dredge material disposal areas, and performed relocations (LERRDs).

STEP 1 - PERCEPTION OF NEED AND REQUEST FOR FEDERAL ASSISTANCE

A local community (e.g. citizens, businesses, Congressional delegation, Corps district) and/or local government perceive a water resource-related need in their area. The perceived problem is beyond the local community's/government's capabilities (e.g. jurisdictional boundaries, financial resources, technical expertise) to alleviate or solve.

Local officials talk to the Corps about possible projects and contact the Congressional delegation if authorization of a project study is required. Technical assistance and some small projects can be constructed without Congressional authorization under the Corps' Continuing Authorities Program. If authorization is required, the Administration or a Member of Congress requests a study authorization through House or Senate Committees. The authorization is typically included in the biennial Water Resources Development Act (WRDA).

STEP 2 - STUDY AND REPORT PREPARATION

The study is assigned to a Corps District office. Funds to initiate a 12-18 month reconnaissance study are provided by Congress in the annual Energy and Water Development Appropriations Act.

If further study of the project is found warranted, the local sponsor must agree to share 50% of the cost of the feasibility phase. (Cost-sharing is not required for studies of navigation improvements to the inland waterway system.) Annual appropriations and non-federal monies are needed to continue the study. The feasibility phase results in a Feasibility Report (benefit-cost analysis and engineering feasibility) and an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) that are submitted to Corps Headquarters in Washington, D.C.

STEP 3 - REPORT REVIEW AND APPROVAL

The final EIS is released to the public and sent with the Feasibility Report to the heads of affected federal agencies, governors of affected States, the Assistant Secretary of the Army (Civil Works) and the President's Office of Management and Budget (OMB), who comment on the report. In most cases, the Corps proceeds with preconstruction engineering and design after the Feasibility Report is submitted.

The Feasibility Report and final EIS are combined in the Chief of Engineers' Report and if approved by the Administration, referred to the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure and the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works. The proposed project is considered for Congressional authorization.

STEP 4 - CONGRESSIONAL AUTHORIZATION

Corps Civil Works projects are normally authorized in the biennial WRDA, following Congressional Committee hearings. Occasionally, Corps proposals are authorized by separate legislation or as part of another bill.

Recently, some projects have been authorized contingent upon completion of a favorable Chief of Engineers report (Step 4 before Step 3). Other project authorizations have waived or modified local cost-sharing requirements as stipulated in the 1986 WRDA. Contingent authorizations and cost-sharing waivers have led to some of the most environmentally destructive, financially wasteful Corps projects.

STEP 5 - PROJECT FUNDING AND IMPLEMENTATION

Funding for the federal cost-share of the project is provided by Congress in the annual Energy and Water Development Appropriations Act.

The Secretary of the Army and non-federal project sponsors sign a formal Project Cooperation Agreement (PCA) once Congress has appropriated funds for project implementation. The PCA obligates non-federal sponsors and the Corps to participate in implementing, operating and maintaining the project according to requirements established by Congress and the Administration. The PCA embodies the specific cost sharing responsibilities of the Corps and the project sponsor (see cost sharing table, p. 38).

The Corps District develops project plans and specifications in the engineering and design phase. Construction is managed by Corps, but is usually performed by private contractors.

Most projects are operated and maintained by non-federal sponsors as agreed upon in the PCA. Subsequent Congressional appropriations are required if the project's operation and maintenance are federally funded or subsidized.

HOW TO AFFECT THE PROCESS

Though the Corps claims to invite public involvement at most stages of project planning, many activists have found that there are limited opportunities for public input. Since the advent of consistent 50% non-federal cost-sharing for feasibility studies, the Corps has in many instances become captured by the mentality that it is serving its "client," the local sponsor, rather than responding to the national interest, or taxpayers, who are providing the other 50%.

Despite these constraints, the greatest opportunity for public input occurs during the feasibility phase of project planning in which the project must be found economically justified and environmentally acceptable. The National Environmental Policy Act determines the scope of study for an EIS and provides the first major point of input. Draft and even final EIS's have public comment periods. During the course of the feasibility study, it is often possible to obtain and review economic and environmental studies and to engage the Corps and other cooperating agencies. Other federal and state agencies (e.g. Department of Natural Resources, state economists) have vital roles in the planning process and can be helpful in obtaining information regarding project planning.

Another opportunity for public input occurs when Congress is considering the project for authorization. Typically, a series of hearings are held before the passage of each Water Resources Development Act. This period is an appropriate time to contact Senators and Representatives, including members of the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure and the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works, regarding projects of concern in the bill.

Many of the projects cited in this report are far along in the planning process but represent instances where either political influence or fundamental flaws in Corps planning have allowed or encouraged a bad project to continue. In some cases, economic studies have been grossly manipulated, and environmental studies have not incorporated thorough analysis. In cases such as this, appeals must be made to state and federal elected officials, Corps and other agency leaders, the media, and citizens in the affected area to halt the project's progress. Unfortunately, the nation's landscape is riddled with projects that were allowed to go forward without thorough and objective study. The public pays the project's cost many times over when these mistakes are made. Through concerted and sustained efforts, even constructed projects can be deauthorized if they are proven to be environmentally destructive or financially wasteful.

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