



Update on WRDA 2016

Since the second session of the 114th Congress began in January, there have been four hearings on WRDA, two in each the House and Senate committees of jurisdiction. The House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee Subcommittee on Water Resources and Environment held an informal roundtable in early February and a formal hearing in late February. The full Senate Environment and Public Works Committee held a hearing in early February and another in mid-March. For more information, please see the attached pdf, which includes four memos produced by TFG on each event.

The latest we have heard on the status of WRDA 2016 is that staff has already put together the base text of the bill. During the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee hearing on March 16th, Senator Inhofe (Chairman) said that the projects and studies included in the second annual report “will form the core of the 2016 WRDA.” Senate committee staff have indicated that a markup will happen “at some point in April.” Leadership in both committees have expressed their optimism that they can pass a WRDA this year.

In general, it is expected that WRDA 2016 will be smaller than WRDA 2014, but it is still unknown what policy concerns will be addressed. Discussions that took place earlier in the session focused on issues Members have with the section 7001 process. However, since the second annual report was released in mid-February, most agree the report was significantly better than the first report (released in 2015). Most, if not all, Members still have lingering concerns despite the improvements made by the Corps. Throughout these hearings, several Members from both parties and both chambers expressed their frustrations with the earmark ban, and the “unnecessary complications” that have resulted in the selection process for water resources projects. However, most discussions have centered on how to improve the section 7001 process created by WRDA 2014, not on how to seriously challenge the earmark moratorium.

Discussion on coastal issues has not been at the forefront of WRDA 2016 discussion; however, coastal restoration and protection have been mentioned by a couple Senators and roundtable/hearing participants. During the informal roundtable discussion held by the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee Subcommittee on Water Resources and Environment, Derek Brockbank, Executive Director of the American Shore and Beach Preservation Association, recommended that WRDA 2016: (1) require the Corps to produce a 10 year schedule of priority projects for coastal restoration and protection projects; (2) improve coordination on coastal research; and (3) promote regional sediment management. During the Senate Environment and Public Works hearing in February, Senators Tom Carper and Kirsten Gillibrand both asked about protecting coastal areas from flood and storm damage and the importance of investing in environmental restoration and natural infrastructure. Dr. Norma Jean Mattei, President of the American Society of Civil Engineers, recommended to the committee that the federal government revise its methodology for economic analysis of dredging costs to reflect gaining the benefits of using dredged material for coastal protection, environmental stewardship and other beneficial uses.