
WRDA 2026: WHY GETTING IT ACROSS THE FINISH LINE MATTERS

Action Needed

NWC encourages Congress to pass the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) of 2026 this year and maintain a regular two-year WRDA cycle to keep studies, projects, and policy updates authorized and proceeding.

Why WRDA Matters to Non-Federal Sponsors

Non-Federal sponsors (NFS) are state, local, and tribal governments, as well as special districts like port authorities, levee districts, and water and flood control districts. These governmental entities partner with the Corps to deliver water resources infrastructure that serves both national and local needs.

Most Corps Civil Works projects are cost-shared between the federal government and non-federal sponsors. Sponsors contribute funding, acquire and provide real estate, coordinate locally, and assume long-term operation and maintenance responsibilities once construction is complete. These commitments represent substantial public investments at the state and local levels.

Why the Two-Year Cycle Matters

Since enactment of the Water Resources Reform and Development Act of 2014 (WRRDA 2014), Congress has maintained a dependable two-year WRDA cycle. This consistency has allowed NFS to:

- Plan budgets with greater confidence.
- Advance feasibility studies on predictable timelines.

What is WRDA?

Water Resources Development Acts (WRDAs) are the principal authorizing legislation for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps/USACE) civil works/water resources program.

WRDA is the legislation through which Congress establishes authorities for Corps studies, projects, and policy updates that support **the Corps' mission and business lines** across the United States, including:

- Navigation
- Flood and Storm Risk Management
- Aquatic Ecosystem Restoration.
- Hydropower
- Emergency Management
- Watershed Planning
- Recreation.
- Water Supply

- Make informed business decisions based on anticipated federal action.
- Respond to emerging risks without waiting years for new authorization.

A missed WRDA cycle delays new authorizations, increases cost escalation due to inflation and market changes, and undermines navigation and flood risk management decisions that depend on timely federal action. The nation is better served when WRDA remains regular, reliable, and aligned with community needs.

How the WRDA Development Process Works: A Two-Step Process

A. STEP 1: THE AUTHORIZATION PROCESS: WRDA is “Step 1” of a Two-Step legislative process for water resources development.

WRDA is developed and considered by the **Congressional Authorizing Committees** with jurisdiction over the Corps’ civil works/water resources program:

- In the House of Representatives: The Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure/Subcommittee on Water Resources and Environment.
- In the Senate: The Committee on Environment and Public Works/Subcommittee on Fisheries, Water, & Wildlife.

These committees will need input for the development of a WRDA by holding hearings; gathering input from Congressional Members, stakeholders, and the Corps; developing legislative language; and advancing WRDA bills for consideration by the full House and Senate.

Building a WRDA bill involves coordination among Congress, the Corps, and non-federal sponsors:

(1) Identifying Needs and Opportunities. Non-federal sponsors need to work with the Corps to identify water resources challenges, define potential solutions, and determine whether projects are ready for Congressional authorization. This includes developing proposals for feasibility studies, securing local cost-share commitments, and coordinating with Congressional delegations.

WRDA matters because it:

- **Authorizes new studies and construction projects** that can address flood and storm risk, navigation reliability, ecosystem health, water supply, and other civil works needs of non-federal interests.
- **Updates program policies** that govern how Corps projects are planned, funded, and delivered.
- **Provides greater clarity and predictability** so sponsors can plan budgets, advance feasibility studies, make informed business decisions, and respond to emerging risks.
- **Connects federal policy with local reality** by ensuring projects reflect both national purpose and community needs.

Without Congress regularly passing WRDA legislation, water resource infrastructure planning becomes uncertain, project delivery slows, and communities face greater risks and higher costs.

(2) Technical Assistance and Information. The Congressional authorizing committees request information from Members of Congress, the Corps, and non-federal sponsors to understand:

- What water resources issues and their potential project solutions are ready for feasibility studies and determine whether they are ready for Congressional authorization.
- Which projects have completed feasibility studies (Chief's Reports) and are ready for authorization for construction.
- What technical, environmental, or economic considerations apply.
- What policy changes are needed to improve project delivery.
- What local and regional support exists for proposed projects.

(3) Potential Sources of WRDA Input to the Authorizing Committees.

(a) Section 7001 Annual Report Process (created in WRRDA 2014). The Corps prepares and submits this report to Congress, known as the "Section 7001 Annual Report to Congress on Future Studies and Projects." This is an annual report that identifies non-federal proposals for water resource studies, projects, and modifications. It helps Congress select projects for authorization in WRDAs. The following are the Section 7001 criteria for inclusion of a new or modified study or project in WRDA legislation:

- Needs to be related to the Corps' authorities and one or more of the core missions;
- Needs/Is Required to have specific Congressional authorization;
- Has not been previously Congressionally authorized;
- Has not been included in a previous annual report (under 7001); AND
- Able to be carried out by the Corps, if authorized.

(b) Committee Hearings (from witnesses/written submitted testimony).

(c) Member-Directed Requests Submitted to the Committees (including in response to Committee outreach for proposals). This has (again) become the primary process for WRDA input to the House and Senate authorizing committees in recent years. Requests may include relevant separate legislation introduced by the requesting Member.

(d) Corps Input to the Committees: Policy, projects (including Chief's Reports), technical assistance to Congress.

(e) From Potential Non-Federal Sponsors and Other Stakeholders. Including through non-federal interests' stakeholder meetings with Congressional Members and Committees.

(4) Committee Deliberation and Development. The authorizing committees evaluate potential WRDA provisions based on the input received from the Section 7001 Annual Report Process, Member-directed requests, the Corps, non-federal interests, and other stakeholders.

This process includes:

- Follow-up hearings or meetings with agency officials and stakeholders.
- Review of completed Chief's Reports and feasibility studies.
- Assessment of policy proposals to address delivery challenges.
- Coordination with Congressional delegations representing affected communities.

(5) Legislative Action. Once committee work is complete, WRDA moves through the legislative process:

- Committee markup and approval; reporting the bill out of committee to the full House or Senate.
- Floor consideration of the respective bill in the House and Senate.
- Conference committee (if needed) to resolve differences between House and Senate versions of the WRDA bills.
- Final passage by the House and Senate.

(6) Enactment of the Bill: If successfully passed by the House and Senate, the final WRDA bill is sent to the President for signature and enactment.

(7) Implementation. After WRDA is enacted, the Corps issues implementation guidance and begins advancing authorized studies and projects, working with non-federal sponsors to meet requirements and deliver work on the ground.

B. STEP 2: THE APPROPRIATIONS PROCESS: WRDA authorization is essential, but it does not provide funding. Authorization for a project or activity on its own is not enough for the Corps to proceed. The Corps also needs to receive Appropriations (approval to obligate and expend funds) through an annual Energy and Water Development Appropriations Act before the benefits from a WRDA bill's authorizations can be realized.

- **Need for Authorizations + Appropriations:** Hence, the Appropriations process is "Step 2" of the Two-Step legislative process for water resources development.

The annual Congressional appropriations process is handled by different committees than the authorizing committees: The House and Senate Appropriations Committees/Subcommittees on Energy and Water Development.

This means non-federal sponsors and other stakeholders must engage not only with the authorizing committees during WRDA development, but also with the appropriations committees after WRDA enactment to ensure authorized projects receive timely funding.

The Bottom Line.

WRDA is the foundation of the Corps Civil Works program. It authorizes the water resources studies, projects, and policies that allow the nation to maintain safe navigation channels, reduce flood risk, restore ecosystems, and meet other water resources needs.

For non-federal sponsors who cost-share these projects, WRDA provides the certainty needed to plan local investments, commit resources, and deliver infrastructure that serves both national and community priorities. A regular, predictable WRDA cycle keeps the partnership strong and ensures America's water resources infrastructure continues to meet the nation's needs.

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