



National Wildlife Federation

Office of the President

11100 Wildlife Center Drive • Reston, VA 20190-5362 • 703-438-6000

September 25, 2018

Environment and Public Works Committee
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Re: America's Water Infrastructure Act of 2018

Dear Chairman Barrasso, Ranking Member Carper, and Members of the Committee:

The National Wildlife Federation writes in strong support of a number of vital measures within America's Water Infrastructure Act of 2018 (S. 3021), and asks that the Senate take up the legislation without delay. We thank Chair Barrasso and Ranking Member Carper for their bipartisan work in developing this legislation that will protect people, wildlife, and the nation's economy. We also greatly appreciate the conferees removal and modification of a number of provisions that could have harmed important natural resources by undermining environmental reviews and restricting public input and for certain water resources projects.

The America's Water Infrastructure Act is an important down payment in addressing the deep infrastructure needs in our country, and we note particularly the several critical provisions that will support communities in addressing and recovering from natural disasters such as Hurricane Florence, including supporting enhanced natural resilience to guard against these threats.

The bill expands investments in drinking water and wastewater systems, including providing resources to restore storm-damaged water systems, and reauthorizes the Safe Drinking Water Act for the first time in 20 years. In addition, funding is doubled over three years for the Drinking Water State Revolving Fund (SRF), a core federal – state partnership that works to ensure safe drinking water for millions.

The legislation also meaningfully promotes the use and restoration of natural defenses —healthy wetlands, coasts, floodplains—that provide important and sustainable protections from storms and floods, essential fish and wildlife habitat, clean water, and extensive economic opportunities. During Hurricane Sandy, wetlands prevented \$625 million in flood damages in 12 coastal states. During Hurricane Katrina, coastal wetlands reduced storm surge in some New Orleans neighborhoods by two to three feet, and levees with wetland buffers had a much greater chance of surviving. We are pleased that America's Water Infrastructure Act will build on this record of success in protecting our communities.

Importantly, the bill also approves a long-overdue reservoir that will help restore a more natural flow of clean water to the Everglades system, which will help restore the vital Everglades ecosystem and reduce polluted discharges that trigger outbreaks of toxic algae that have plagued Florida's environment and economy.

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Additional important provisions, include extending the independent peer review requirements, first passed in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, by five years; making important improvements to the Army Corps of Engineers' disposition study process; and setting the stage for additional improvements in water resources planning by requiring studies on the way the Corps plans, values, and operates its projects, and on whether the Corps' actions have a disproportionate impact on minority and low-income communities.

While the National Wildlife Federation does continue to have concerns with certain provisions and projects authorized in the bill due to their adverse implications for wildlife and vital habitats, we applaud this bipartisan success.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Collin O'Mara". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "C" and a stylized "O'Mara".

Collin O'Mara
President and CEO