

## **Statement for the Record of the American Society of Civil Engineers**

**U.S. House of Representatives  
Committee on Transportation & Infrastructure  
Subcommittee on Water Resources and Environment**

**Water Resources Development Act of 2026: Stakeholder Priorities**

**December 17, 2025**

The American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) thanks the committee for the opportunity to submit the following statement for the record detailing our priorities for the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) of 2026. We also wish to express our appreciation to the committee for its commitment to keeping WRDA on schedule for reauthorization, as it has done biennially since 2014. Doing so ensures greater certainty and predictability for new and ongoing U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) water resources projects and provides an opportunity to make needed updates to federal water resources policy. ASCE looks forward to working with the committee in the weeks and months ahead to further improve our nation's water resources infrastructure.

Over the past two WRDA cycles, Congress has enacted into law multiple key policies supporting the safety and enhancement of our nation's infrastructure. This includes reauthorization of the National Levee Safety Program, the authorization of a new national inventory of low-head dams in 2022, and reauthorization of the National Dam Safety Program along with an adjustment to the Inland Waterways Trust Fund cost share formula in 2024. In March 2025, ASCE released the latest version of its *Report Card for America's Infrastructure*. Thanks in large part to the enactment of these policies in WRDA, grades for all four of the water resources infrastructure Report Card chapters improved from 2021 to 2025, with the grades for Dams and Levees both improving from "D" to "D+", Ports improving from "B-" to "B", and Inland Waterways improving from "D+" to "C-". Congress passing effective WRDA legislation every two years is critical to the condition, capacity, resilience, and lifespan of our nation's water resources infrastructure. We are grateful for the opportunity to continue to be a part of that conversation and encourage the committee's support for the following ASCE priorities.

### **Support for High Hazard Potential Dams**

The United States is home to more than 92,000 dams serving a variety of functions from water storage and flood control to irrigation and recreation. Of those dams, 18 percent (or nearly 17,000 dams) are classified as having high-hazard potential. This means a failure of one of these dams would likely result in the loss of life and significant destruction of property. While hazard potential is not an indicator of a dam's overall condition, almost 2,600 of the nation's 17,000 high-hazard potential dams have been assessed to be in poor or unsatisfactory condition. Since 2012, the number of high-hazard potential dams has grown by nearly 20% due to increased downstream development. Compounding the problem, the average age of the nation's dams is 64 years, which is 7 years older than in 2021, and 7 out of 10 dams nationwide are more than 50 years old according to the Association of State Dam Safety Officials (ASDSO). These trends, along with increasingly severe weather events producing higher levels of precipitation, will continue to place increased strain on the nation's high-hazard dams.

Federal programs like the National Dam Safety Program provide states with grant funding to support certain administrative and dam monitoring activities by state level dam safety programs. However, these state assistance grants may not be used to support dam rehabilitation projects or dam repairs. One of the few federal funding streams available to support dam repair and rehabilitation is the High Hazard Potential Dam Rehabilitation Grant Program, or HHPD Program. The HHPD Program was first authorized in 2016 under the Water Infrastructure Improvements for the Nation (WIIN) Act and provides competitive grants to states to support

rehabilitation projects for dams that pose the greatest risk to the public. Since 2019, the HHPD Program has provided \$71.1 million in grant funding across 40 states and Puerto Rico, despite being historically underfunded through annual appropriations and having much of the funding provided through the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act reprogrammed or rescinded.<sup>1</sup>

The HHPD program's legislative authority is set to lapse in September of 2026. Reauthorization of this critical program will be necessary to ensure that it is available to address the growing challenges to high-hazard dams nationwide. As such, ASCE strongly encourages the inclusion of H.R. 5414, the Dam Assessment and Mitigation Support (DAMS) Act into any WRDA legislation taken up in Congress in 2026. The DAMS Act would reauthorize the HHPD program for five years. It would also allow states to use their own risk-based priority systems, in lieu of federally created systems, to identify dams in greatest need and better prioritize grant applications in a manner that best meets the needs of their own communities.

### **Revision of National Dam Safety Program State Assistance Grant Formula**

In 2024, WRDA reauthorized the National Dam Safety Program, which had lapsed at the end of Fiscal Year 2023. The National Dam Safety Program provides resources to states to support inspection and monitoring activities, staffing needs, and emergency planning through State Assistance Grants. The 2024 reauthorization of this program ensures those funds can continue to flow directly to state dam safety programs. WRDA 2024 also included provisions to incorporate low-head dams into the National Inventory of Dams. Low-head dams are small, river spanning structures which produce dangerous currents that have been shown to harm public safety. ASCE supported the incorporation of these structures into the inventory to improve the overall safety of the nation's dams. State Assistance Grant allocations to states are determined by multiple factors, including number of dams in a state. WRDA 2024 altered this formula factor by including the number of low-head dams in addition to dams (33 U.S.C. § 467j(a)(2)(A)(ii)(I) & (II)). This poses multiple challenges to states and may affect their ability to receive valuable resources for their dam safety programs.

While the development of a national inventory of low-head dams continues to be a priority for ASCE, it is a process that is still in its early stages and not yet fully developed. Additionally, many states do not regulate or collect data on low-head dams, and the federal government currently lacks the resources and proper mandate to provide incentives to states to collect and upload low-head dam data into the budding inventory. Until USACE has had time to properly develop the low-head dam inventory, including assisting states with the process of counting and collecting data on low-head dams, factoring low-head dams into the total number of dams that determine State Assistance Grant allocations may divert funding away from states that have significant dam safety needs but lack the capacity to properly account for low-head dams. These circumstances reduce the overall safety of the nation's dams. To address these challenges, **ASCE recommends striking the language incorporating low-head dams into the grant formula from the 2024 law and to instead continue supporting robust efforts to grow and develop the National Low-Head Dam Inventory.**

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.fema.gov/grants/mitigation/learn/dam-safety/rehabilitation-high-hazard-potential-dams/awards#2019>

## **Reauthorization of the National Levee Safety Program**

USACE has identified more than 24,000 miles of levees across the country providing flood protection to over 2,300 communities nationwide. The nation's levee systems protect more than 23 million people, and \$2 trillion worth of property value-- including 7 million buildings and 5 million acres of farmland-- that sit behind them. Since the creation of the National Levee Safety Program, USACE has made significant progress developing a national regulatory and support framework to improve the safety of the nation's levees.

The National Levee Safety Program was first authorized in 2014 for the purposes of supporting the standing up of state levee safety programs, creating a comprehensive database of the nation's levees, developing guidelines for levee safety best practices, and supporting repair and rehabilitation of the nation's levees. The National Levee Safety Program was last reauthorized in the 2022 WRDA and has continued to make significant progress. In 2024, USACE produced the first National Levee Safety Guidelines, providing a consistent yet flexible set of best practices for levee management, reducing flood impact, utilizing nature-based solutions to improve levee safety, and addressing the needs of underserved communities living behind levees. Additionally, USACE has made significant progress developing its National Levee Database, providing more detailed data on USACE's levee portfolio, as well as dams owned and operated at the state and local level. As previously noted, this progress played a large role in ASCE's decision to raise its grade for the nation's levees in its *2025 Report Card for America's Infrastructure* from D to D+.

The National Levee Safety Program's legislative authority is set to expire at the end FY 2028. In 2024, the House's WRDA bill included a 4-year reauthorization of the National Levee Safety Program. That provision, however, was not included in the Senate WRDA bill, and was thus not included in the final WRDA signed into law by President Joe Biden in early 2025. To ensure that it can continue to develop and provide needed assistance to states, **ASCE strongly encourages the inclusion of a 5-year reauthorization into WRDA 2026.**

## **Addressing the Water Resources Project Backlog**

In each WRDA bill, Congress authorizes new navigation, ports, and flood protection projects and feasibility studies for USACE to begin work on. In 2024, Congress authorized 21 new water resources projects with an authorized total federal funding level of more than \$10 billion. While authorization of new projects every other year is essential to USACE planning, and provides the agency with a degree of predictability, Congressional appropriators have not been able to fund water resources projects at a fast enough pace, creating a current project backlog of more than \$100 billion. This backlog results in project delays, increased overall costs, and can create challenges to project development and design. **ASCE encourages Congress, including the Senate Environment & Public Works Committee, House Transportation & Infrastructure Committee, and House and Senate Appropriations Committees, to work closely with the USACE to develop plans and strategies to address and reduce the water resources project backlog.**

## **Utilize Harbor Maintenance Trust Fund for Maintenance Dredging Activities**

Waterside infrastructure needs, such as maintenance dredging, are paid for through the federal Harbor Maintenance Trust Fund (HMTF). The HMTF collects revenue through a 0.125% user fee on the value of cargo shipped. The 2020 WRDA included full utilization of the \$10 billion balance of the HMTF by allowing \$500 million to be appropriated in FY 2021, with an increase of \$100 million annually until 2030. The full expenditure of the HMTF has been a longtime priority and ASCE strongly supported Congress's effort to address this issue in 2020.

Dredging is a critical and continuously needed activity for ports. Channel depth determines the size of vessels that can call at a port, and maintenance dredging is important for making sure ports can safely accommodate large ships and compete with one another.

In 2025, Ports received the highest grade on ASCE's *Report Card for America's Infrastructure*, earning a grade of B. Port investment decisions are largely driven by the need to upgrade aging facilities and maintain the depth of channels and harbors to keep them safe and navigable. **To help ensure the continued functionality of our nation's ports, ASCE urges Congress to continue to spend down the balance of the HMTF on maintenance dredging activities.**

## **Conclusion**

ASCE appreciates the opportunity to provide the committee with this statement on its priorities for the 2026 Water Resources Development Act. We strongly believe that our nation must prioritize investments in its water resources infrastructure to ensure public safety, a strong economy, and the protection of environmental resources. Support for America's dams, levees, ports, and inland waterways is needed to close the growing funding gap and to ensure the country has world-class 21st century infrastructure.