

Testimony of April Snell, Executive Director, Oregon Water Resources Congress
Submitted to the United States House Appropriations Committee,
Subcommittee on Energy and Water Development

March 11, 2016

RE: FY17 Budget for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Civil Works

The Oregon Water Resources Congress (OWRC) is concerned about continued reductions to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) Civil Works budget and is requesting that appropriations for this program be increased to at least **\$5.5 billion** in FY17. The USACE Civil Works program addresses vital water resource needs throughout the nation, and in Oregon, the USACE Northwestern Division operates on our two largest river systems, the Columbia River and the Willamette River, as well as maintaining Oregon's coastal rivers for navigation. OWRC is concerned that the proposed FY17 budget for the USACE Civil Works budget is woefully inadequate to meet the growing water infrastructure needs of Oregon and our nation as a whole. Increased funding would help support and leverage collaborative state level planning efforts that USACE is engaged in Oregon and nationwide.

OWRC was established in 1912 as a trade association to support the protection of water rights and promote the wise stewardship of water resources statewide. OWRC members are local governmental entities, which include irrigation districts, water control districts, drainage districts, water improvement districts, and other agricultural water suppliers that deliver water to roughly 1/3 of all irrigated land in Oregon. These water stewards operate complex water management systems, including water supply reservoirs, canals, pipelines, and hydropower production.

FY17 Appropriations

We recognize that our country is facing difficult economic times and that we must make strategic investments with scarce resources. The USACE Civil Works program is a perfect example of a budget that should have funding increased because the water infrastructure it encompasses directly contributes to the economy as well protecting public safety and the environment. The Civil Works program includes the development, management and restoration of water resources related to supply, navigability, flood control, hydropower, recreation, and fish and wildlife habitat across the nation. The Administration's proposed FY17 budget for the USACE Civil Works programs is only \$4.620 billion, which is a reduction from the FY16 enacted budget of \$5.99 billion. That amount is only a drop in the bucket compared to the numerous unmet water infrastructure needs nationally. OWRC feels strongly that USACE needs substantial increased funding to provide critical repairs on our nation's aging water infrastructure to prevent catastrophic failure, as well as address routine operations and maintenance on other infrastructure before it becomes unrepairable.

Willamette Basin Reservoir Study

OWRC is currently collaborating with a broad water resources constituency in support an ongoing effort to explore options related to the reallocation of stored water in the Willamette Basin dams operated by the USACE. The USACE Northwestern Division operates 13 dams and reservoirs in the Willamette Basin, with a combined storage capacity of over 1.6 million acre

feet. Currently, only a small portion of the stored water is under contract for irrigation. Since the construction of the dams in the 1930s, Oregon has seen an increase in population, which in turn has spurred increased development, agriculture and a whole host of new demands on the reservoirs. Additionally, there are Endangered Species Act concerns and related fish restoration needs that were not contemplated when the facilities were constructed. As a result, there is strong interest within Oregon to complete the Willamette Basin Reservoir Study, and determine how the reservoirs can help meet the myriad of current and future water demands in the Willamette Basin.

The Oregon Water Resources Department (OWRD) has secured a 50% funding match (up to \$1.5 million) to support the study and that match was included as part of the Oregon's 2013-2015 budget. In February 2015, USACE received notification that a match of \$450,000 was approved as part of their FY 2015 work plan. All state and federal funding secured thus far has been carried over for work in progress on the Willamette Basin Reservoir study. OWRC would like to see continued funding to support ongoing efforts related to the study included in the USACE civil works budget FY17, and the Willamette Basin Reservoir Study incorporated into the USACE FY17 work plan. Federal funding would not only leverage scarce state resources but also the in-kind and direct contributions of other stakeholders participating in the project.

Planning Assistance to States

OWRC strongly supports providing funding for states to undertake planning activities to meet their water needs. Oregon is the model for watershed planning and does not need a new federal agency or Executive Branch office to oversee planning, however, federal funding and technical assistance is needed. Planning activities are conducted through local watershed councils, volunteer-driven organizations that work with local, state and federal agencies, economic and environmental interests, agricultural, industrial and municipal water users, local landowners, tribes, and other members of the community. There are over 60 individual watershed councils in Oregon that are already deeply engaged in watershed planning and restoration activities. Watershed planning in Oregon formally began in 1995 with the development of the Oregon Plan for Salmon Recovery and Watershed Enhancement, a statewide strategy developed in response to the federal listing of several fish species. This strategy led to the creation of the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (OWEB), a state agency and policy oversight board that funds and promotes voluntary and collaborative efforts that “help create and maintain healthy watersheds and natural habitats that support thriving communities and strong economies” in 1999.

Additionally, OWRC has been an active participant and supporter of the Integrated Water Resources Strategy (IWRS) adopted by the Oregon Water Resources Commission in August 2012. Efforts are currently underway to update the IWRS during 2016 to reflect the challenges presented due to longstanding drought throughout the state. The IWRS continues to be an important step forward in planning for the various water needs of Oregon but there is much more work to be done and little funding to implement. Providing funding for state-level planning activities will help support important efforts like the IWRS, and maximize the leveraging of state and federal resources, as well as providing viable models for other states to replicate. This approach will help leverage scarce financial resources at both the state and federal level while promoting cooperation and collaborative solutions to complex water resources challenges.

Additional Funding Programs

OWRC is encouraged by the recent additions to the ACOE Civil Works program including funding for climate change response, dam safety and earthquake hazard reduction; however, programs as important as these should receive even more funding. Like many other Western states, the severe drought conditions in 2015 have deeply impacted Oregon communities, (25 of 36 counties had formal drought declarations). For Oregon, the drought stems from a lack of snowpack that serves as the natural water storage throughout the year for many farms, communities, and fish and wildlife. The impacts may take longer to show, but drought can be as devastating as earthquakes, hurricanes, and other natural disasters. And like other natural disasters, the best way to survive and help communities recover is through coordinated planning and developing diverse tools to use when these crises occur. We know from our experience working with our state agency and partner organizations in Oregon that funding for planning, feasibility, and implementation of projects to increase drought preparedness and resiliency is a cornerstone to an economically, socially and environmentally sound approach for a sustainable water future.

Oregon also faces the uncertainty of when and how devastating the earthquake stemming from the Cascadia subduction zone will impact our entire state. The impending earthquake, coupled with our aging water infrastructure has the potential for ruinous results. Without increased earthquake preparedness and dam safety funding, both of which are included in the Administrations FY17 package for Civil Works, Oregon cannot mitigate the potential damage. While the Administration's FY17 funding proposals in these areas are a promising step forward, they are still not funded at nearly the level they need to be in order to be effective. We encourage the House to further fund these programs in order to effectively prepare the states for earthquakes and the failure of dams built in their communities.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we respectfully request the appropriation of at least \$5.5 billion for the USACE Civil Works budget for FY17. The critical nature of the water infrastructure services the USACE provides requires a budget that matches the seriousness of the national need and the importance of the water supply, navigation, public safety, and other natural resources benefits it provides. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony regarding the FY17 budget for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

Sincerely,

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