

May 17, 2022

The Honorable Tom Carper
Chairman
Environment and Public Works Committee
U.S. Senate
410 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Shelly Moore Capito
Ranking Member
Environment and Public Works Committee
U.S. Senate
456 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Carper and Ranking Member Capito,

On behalf of the undersigned organizations representing the U.S. recreational boating and fishing industries – we thank you for your leadership in including key recreation priorities in the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) of 2022 which will deliver historic wins for recreational boating and fishing access while growing the recreation economy and strengthening communities across the country. Civil Works projects carried out by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) are imperative to supporting sustainable recreational boating and fishing access on our nation’s waterways, harbors, lakes, and reservoirs. From establishing USACE recreation fee retention authority to the development of criteria for improved prioritization of dredging projects at small harbors, the bill your committee has advanced increases investments in recreation infrastructure, improves prioritization of navigation projects supporting recreation access, enhances federal initiatives to combat aquatic nuisance species, furthers the use of natural infrastructure solutions to increase coastal resiliency, and much more.

Outdoor recreation has long been an underrecognized economic driver in the United States, yet the outdoor sector accounts for 1.8 percent of U.S. GDP, generating \$689 billion in gross economic output, and supporting over 4.3 million jobs across the country. Overwhelmingly, recreational boating and fishing is the number one contributor to the U.S. outdoor recreation economy and is the largest activity in 39 states and the District of Columbia. In 2020, traditional outdoor recreation – such as boating, fishing, hiking, and RVing – thrived, with these activities increasing their contribution to the overall outdoor recreation economy by 22 percent. This increase was driven primarily by higher spending on boating and fishing, which was up nearly 30 percent.

Prior to the pandemic, an estimated 100 million Americans went boating every year, but as more and more Americans have looked to the outdoors for an escape, the recreational boating industry is experiencing record growth with 415,000 first-time boat buyers entering the market in 2020 alone. USACE’s role in supporting the increased demand for public boating access

opportunities is evident by the fact that there were 256 million visits to USACE lake and river projects in 2020 compared to the 237 million visitors the National Park Service (NPS) hosted.

In consideration of the extensive role USACE recreation sites played in the recreation economic boom the COVID-19 pandemic precipitated, Congress must start to fund and equip USACE like the leading recreation agency that it is through addressing critical recreation infrastructure needs, and you have taken critical steps towards achieving that in your water infrastructure bill.

On behalf of our members, we thank you for recognizing the role recreation plays in strengthening communities, growing the economy, and ensuring Americans can enjoy our public lands and waters for generations to come. As your committee moves to negotiate with your counterparts in the House, we encourage your consideration of an additional priority to improve an important USACE recreation management tool and stand ready to work with you to ensure the following provisions are included in the final bill.

Sincerely,

American Sportfishing Association

Association of Marina Industries

Boat Owners Association of the United States

Marine Retailers Association of the Americas

National Marine Manufacturers Association

WRDA 22 Policy Recommendations

We recommend WRDA 2022 reauthorization include key corrections to USACE's joint recreation management abilities through amending the challenge cost sharing cooperative management agreement (CCSMA) authority established in WRDA 2016 reauthorizations. While CCSMAs can help USACE better maintain and improve recreation facilities, several limitations have prevented USACE from implementing the CCSCMA authority to date. Under the existing authority, USACE is unable to use the recreation system (Recreation.gov) to collect and handle any non-USACE revenue and send the funds back to the partner, deterring partners who have shown interest in cooperatively managing parks with USACE. Additionally, the current authority only allows for cooperative management with non-federal public entities, but most of the interest USACE has received comes from the private sector, particularly nonprofit organizations. Making these key fixes to allow USACE to handle partner collected fees and expanding the

eligibility to nonprofit organizations will supplement federal investments in USACE recreation infrastructure and ensure USACE-managed sites across the country can remain open to the public for recreational use.

Supported Water Resources Development Act of 2022 Provisions

Sec. 104. Protection and restoration of other federal land along rivers and coasts. Allows Corps to carry out water resources development projects to benefit Federal land under the jurisdiction of another Federal agency

Sec. 116. Underserved community harbor projects. Authorized Corps to carry out projects to dredge underserved community harbors for sustaining water- dependent commercial and recreational activities at such harbors. Specifics cost-share requirements for such projects requires not less than 35 percent of annual funds be used for projects that include the beneficial use of dredged material

Sec. 119 Retention of Recreation fees. Allows Corps to retain not less than 80% of recreation fees collected at recreation sites for operation and maintenance of activities at that site. Allows collected fees that remain unobligated on the day before this Act's enactment to be used in the same manner.

Sec. 122. Lease Durations. Secretary shall issue guidance on instances in which a lease duration in excess of 25 years is appropriate.

Sec. 125. Reforestation. Encourages the Corps to consider measures to restore swamps and other wetland forests in studies for water resources development projects for ecosystem restoration and flood and coastal storm risk management.

Sec. 134. Water Supply Conservation. Provides the Corps with permanent authority to evaluate and approve water supply conservation measures at water resources development projects in States that have experienced repeated droughts. Specifies the Corps may evaluate a water supply conservation measure utilizing a natural feature or nature-based feature to reduce drought risk.

Sec. 135. Criteria for Funding Operation and Maintenance of Small, Remote, and Subsistence Harbors. Requires the Corps to develop criteria for the annual evaluation and ranking of maintenance dredging requirements for small, remote, and subsistence harbors and include such criteria in the annual Civil Works Direct Program Development Policy Guidance of the corps. Requires a biennial report to Congress that identifies the ranking of projects based on the criteria developed.

Sec. 137. Expediting Hydropower at Corps of Engineers Facilities. Assess opportunities to increase the development of hydroelectric power at Corps water resources development projects.

Sec. 138. Materials, Services, and Funds for Repair, Restoration, or Rehabilitation of Certain Public Recreation Facilities. Authorizes the Corps to accept and use non-Federal materials, services, and funds to repair, restore, or rehabilitate public recreation facilities at Corps-operated reservoirs during periods of lower water.

Sec. 211. Great Lakes Recreational Boating. Requires the Corps to prepare and submit an updated report to Congress on the economic benefits of recreational boating in the Great Lakes basin.

Sec. 213. Investments for Recreation Areas. Requires the Corps to submit a report on investments needed to support recreational activities that are part of authorized water resources development projects.

Sec. 217. Recreation and Economic Development at Corps Facilities in Appalachia. Requires the Corps to submit a plan to Congress to implement recreational and economic development opportunities.

Sec. 218. Automated Fee Machines. Requires the Corps to consider, to the maximum extent practicable, alternatives to automated fee machines for the collection of fees for the public use of developed recreation sites and facilities in West Virginia.

Sec. 220. Report on Concessionaire Practices. Requires the Corps to submit a report to Congress regarding concessionaire lease practices by the Agency.

Sec. 307. Modifications. Modifies state cost share requirement of Brandon Road project from 80 to 90 percent.

Sec. 325. Invasive Species Management. Increased authorized annual appropriations for invasive species partnerships between the Corps and applicable State and Federal agencies and adds the Lake Erie and Ohio River Basins as eligible locations for these partnerships.

Sec. 359. Recreational Opportunities at Certain Projects. A sense of Congress that two Corps projects in Vermont, Ball Mountain Lake and Townshend Lake, should be operated in such a manner as to protect and enhance recreation. Authorizes the Corps to modify, or undertake temporary deviations from, the water control plans for the projects, in order to enhance recreation.