

May 4, 2020

The Honorable John Barrasso
Chairman
Environment & Public Works Committee
U.S. Senate
410 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Thomas Carper
Ranking Member
Environment & Public Works Committee
U.S. Senate
456 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Barrasso and Ranking Member Carper,

On behalf of the National Marine Manufacturers Association (NMMA) – the leading recreational marine trade association in North America, representing nearly 1,300 boat, engine, and accessory manufacturers – I thank you for your leadership in developing the America’s Water Infrastructure Act of 2020 (AWIA) and commitment to keeping the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) on a biannual schedule. Regular authorizations off WRDA allow the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) to execute critical infrastructure projects that physically and fiscally strengthen communities.

Prior to the COVID-19 outbreak, the recreational boating industry had a significant impact on our nation’s economy, generating \$170.3 in annual economic impact that supported more than 35,000 businesses and 691,000 jobs. Additionally, the outdoor recreation economy as a whole – which is driven by boating and fishing and includes RVing, guided tours, and motorcycling and ATVing – accounted for 2.2 percent of U.S. GDP, \$734 billion in gross economic output, and 4.5 million jobs.

As our industry faces unprecedented economic and access challenges resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, I cannot stress enough the importance of healthy, accessible, and navigable waterways to revitalizing America’s recreational boating economy, and the small businesses and local communities it supports.

NMMA applauds the inclusion of specific AWIA provisions listed below that will take great strides in improving federal efforts to combat aquatic invasive species, expanding recreational access, and investments in key conservation and resiliency initiatives. We also encourage you to consider inclusion of additional provisions to ensure neglected maintenance of small and emerging harbors that support recreation activity receive the investments they need and deserve.

On behalf of our members, we appreciate the opportunity to provide initial comments on the committee’s draft WRDA bill. NMMA stands ready to work with you to develop comprehensive water infrastructure policies that provide recreational access and support local economies reliant on on our nation’s waterways.

Sincerely,

T. Nicole Vasilaros

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Senior Vice President, Government and Legal Affairs

National Marine Manufacturers Association

NMMA Policy Recommendations for Final WRDA Bill

Account for Recreation Economic Benefits in Project Prioritization

Given the significance of recreation in driving local economies, well maintained harbors and waterways used by recreational boaters will be essential to bouncing back from the present economic downturn. The bipartisan Safer Harbors for Our Recreation Economy (SHORE) Act will require the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) and the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to account for recreation-based economic impacts in cost-benefit analysis procedures used to prioritize funding for harbor maintenance, intracoastal, and inland waterways projects. Doing so will help ensure small and emerging harbors that support recreation activity are not chronically neglected due to low commercial traffic and allows these places to play a key role in getting more boaters out on the water and Americans back to work.

Expand Allowable Uses for Emerging Harbor Funds

Small and emerging harbors represent an important segment of our economy, providing economic health and stability coastal communities rely on. To support and protect the recreational access and essential services these places offer – which will be imperative as communities rebuild from the present health and economic crisis – the allowable uses of small and emerging harbor funds should be expanded to include maintenance dredging and disposal of sediments of marinas that are not within a federally authorized navigation project. By requiring material sponsor support through a non-federal match of at least 25 percent, this allowance to increase cost sharing would ultimately equate to more money available for additional projects.

NMMA Supported AWIA Provisions

Sec. 1002. Great Lakes comprehensive flood protection study.

Flooding throughout the Great Lakes has resulted in substantial losses in recreational access, causing erosion, damaging lakeside property, and causing many boat ramps to become damaged and inaccessible. The \$25 million in federal funding being dedicated to complete a report outlining shoreline protection and resiliency will help ensure sound management and policy and mitigate future impacts when the Great Lakes inevitably flood in the future.

Sec. 1035: Chesapeake Bay Environmental Restoration and Protection Program

The health of the Chesapeake Bay is not only critical to the recreational boating and fishing community around the Bay itself, but also to the entire Mid-Atlantic region, as the Bay is an important nursery for migratory fish like striped bass. The Chesapeake Bay Program coordinates data collection and distributes grants to states for Chesapeake Bay restoration efforts. This program helps states control pollution and manage runoff into the tributaries that feed into the Bay. NMMA is grateful for the increased funding authorized under this section.

Sec. 1037. Interagency task force on small dams and fish passages.

NMMA is supportive of the creation of an interagency task force to study small dams and fish passages. The removal of dams and creation of fish passage structures will benefit fisheries by allowing many fish species access to their native ranges. Throughout the country, the costs of many dams (e.g., environmental, safety and socio-economic factors) outweigh the benefits (e.g., hydropower, flood control, irrigation), and in many cases dams have outlived their useful purpose. Having a federal task force that develops a national strategy for identifying, prioritizing, and successfully removing or refurbishing small dams of concern by 2030 will allow for a more coordinated and comprehensive approach to considering removal of these structures.

Sec. 1041. Brandon Road study.

NMMA is strongly supportive of the Brandon Road project and the cost share agreement outlined in Sec. 1041. This important project is critical to protecting the Great Lakes from Asian carp, which are currently one of the greatest threats to the \$7 billion Great Lakes fishery.

Sec. 1074. Delegation of Work for Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan Projects.

NMMA supports this provision to delegate work and federal funds to the non-local sponsor for Everglades restoration projects. This delegation will help complete these projects in the most expeditious manner by allowing flexibility in the regulatory process.

Sec. 1093. Harmful algal blooms demonstration program.

In addition to their human health risks, harmful algal blooms (HABs) jeopardize fish populations and native aquatic habitat. From Florida beaches closed due to red tide, to fishing tournaments being cancelled in lakes across the country, HABs continue to harm recreational fishing opportunities and fisheries resources at a growing rate. The recreational fishing community welcomes additional research to detect and mitigate HABs.

Sec. 1096. Increasing access for recreation at Corps of Engineers projects.

NMMA is supportive of this effort to increase access at Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) facilities, which currently provide recreational boating opportunities in many parts of the country, particularly on USACE-managed reservoirs. The USACE is one of the nation's leading federal providers of outdoor recreation with over 400 lake and river projects in 43 states, supplying 14 percent of all freshwater fishing. NMMA is thankful for the access currently provided by the USACE and is supportive of efforts to increase these opportunities.

Sec. 1202. Expedited completion.

NMMA supports the direction to expedite completion and review of important Everglades restoration projects, including Lake Okeechobee, Western Everglades, Canal 111 South Dade, and Caloosahatchee River C-43 West Basin Storage Reservoir. Everglades restoration is a high priority for the boating community given its impacts on water quality in Florida and moving these remaining projects forward as quickly as possible will minimize negative impacts on habitat and natural resources.

Sec. 1401. Project Authorizations.

Loxahatchee River Watershed is an important component of Everglades restoration addressing quality, quantity, timing and distribution of water on the eastern side of the system and has undergone a thorough planning process. NMMA supports authorization of this project.

Sec. 1602. Invasive species in impaired waters.

Aquatic invasive species are currently one of the greatest threats to recreational fishing, as their introduction can completely disrupt a fisheries ecosystem. While much of the management and control of aquatic invasive species is done at the state and local level, increased technical and financial federal support would benefit these efforts.

Sec.1603. Aquatic invasive species research.

NMMA is supportive of this textual change to Sec. 1108 of AWIA 2018 (33 U.S.C. 2263a) as the Army Corps of Engineers Engineer Research and Development Center is already a leader research on AIS management and eradication that is shared across agencies. The inclusion of “prevention” will assure that ERDC is focusing on ways AIS can be avoided altogether.

Sec. 1604. Invasive species mitigation and reduction.

Increasing coordination between the federal government and states is key in preventing the spread of aquatic invasive species. The pilot projects authorized in this section will help to identify appropriate and reasonable approaches to allow boaters to continue to access waterways while minimizing the potential associated spread of aquatic invasive species.

Sec. 1606. Invasive species assessment, prioritization, and management.

NMMA strongly supports efforts to restore Florida’s Everglades, including the identification and eradication of invasive species. Invasive species are a key threat to this ecosystem and have proved challenging to control. As such, NMMA supports the development of a process to identify, study and eliminate them.

Sec. 1607. Asian carp prevention and control pilot program.

Asian carp are a significant threat to boating access and recreational fisheries not only in the Great Lakes but throughout the Mississippi River drainage. Where introduced, they have disrupted the natural ecosystem, resulting in declines in recreational fish populations. In addition, their behavior of jumping out of the water when motorized boats transit nearby create a serious risk to human health. Reducing their populations where they have already established, and preventing their further spread are critical to supporting recreational fishing opportunities and communities in many parts of the country. The prevention and control projects required in this section will hopefully provide tangible progress in

stopping the spread of Asian carp. We are thankful for your leadership to confront this issue at such a pivotal juncture.

Sec. 1608. Aquatic invasive species prevention.

NMMA is supportive of the provision in Sec. 1608 and the expansion of WRDA to include Asian carp beyond the Upper Mississippi and Ohio River Basins and tributaries to all six sub-basins of the Mississippi River, as all of these areas are threatened by Asian carp infestation.

Sec. 3006: Great Lakes Restoration Initiative

The Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) has provided billions of dollars for critical Great Lakes projects including invasive species control, Asian carp prevention, habitat restoration, and many other areas of interest. This section reauthorizes the GLRI and increases funding to \$375 million to restore and protect the Great Lakes through water infrastructure projects, as well as ecosystem restoration and invasive species control.

Sec. 3007: San Francisco Bay Restoration Grant Program

The health of San Francisco Bay is critical to the in-shore health of fish populations and the grants authorized in this section can be used to further the restoration, monitoring and maintenance of fish habitat. This section establishes a San Francisco Bay National Program Office to oversee a new grant program to implement the San Francisco Bay Plan – a comprehensive conservation and management plan. The provision is authorized \$25 million for each fiscal year 2021 and 2022.

Sec. 3008: Lake Tahoe Restoration Program

The section establishes cooperative agreements, grants, or other means for activities, studies, or projects identified in the Lake Tahoe Environmental Improvement Program. This section authorizes \$6 million is authorized in appropriations for fiscal years 2021 through 2024. These funds are critical to combatting invasive species, restoring and protecting the environment of the Lake Tahoe Basin.

Sec. 3009: Puget Sound Coordinated Recovery

Restoring the health of Puget Sound must remain a priority for our region and our nation as it is one of the most productive and critical regions for fish habitat in the country. This section establishes a Puget Sound Recovery National Program Office in the EPA which is tasked to coordinate all activities related to the restoration and protection of the Puget Sound and to promote the efficient use of program resources. Additionally, this section requires the Director of the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), in consultation with the Puget Sound Federal Task Force, to submit a financial report to Congress containing an interagency crosscut budget relating to Puget Sound restoration and protection activities. \$50 million is authorized for each fiscal year 2021 through 2025 to carry out this section. Restoration efforts in the Puget Sound generate jobs, goods, and services in the short-term and help to ensure the economic livelihood of the region in the long-term