

June 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 holding the hearing entitled “Infrastructure: The Road to Recovery” to examine the role infrastructure will have in reviving the nation’s economy as we emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Prior to the current simultaneous health and economic crises, 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 – led by boating and fishing – accounted for 2.2 percent of U.S. GDP, \$734 billion in gross economic output, and 4.5 million jobs. Furthermore, a new report from the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis found the U.S. marine economy generated \$373 billion to U.S. GDP with recreation and tourism and boat building as lead contributing sectors.

Unfortunately, due to the COVID-19 pandemic and shutdowns necessary to slow its progression, America’s outdoor recreation economy was hindered when we needed the outdoors more than ever. A survey of the sector conducted by the Outdoor Recreation Roundtable in April shows that 79 percent of outdoor businesses have had to lay off or furlough employees, and 89 percent are seeing decreased revenue. However, we know there is a bright future for outdoor recreation ahead, as several sectors of the industry are already experiencing rapidly increasing demand.

These outdoor businesses are the backbone of our industry and are often foundational to a community’s economy. This crisis has laid bare the strong connection between recreation access and economic development and urgency in the need to prioritize recreation within the scope of national infrastructure strategy. With rising unemployment and Americans eager to experience the outdoors, investments in recreational infrastructure will allow our businesses to get back to what we do best: stimulate local economies, put people back to work, and allow Americans to benefit from time spent outside.

NMMA applauds the inclusion of provisions in the America's Transportation Act and the American Water Infrastructure Act 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.

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.

On behalf of our members, we appreciate the opportunity to provide comments on how recreation infrastructure can play an important role in helping the nation's economy recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. NMMA stands ready to work with you to develop comprehensive infrastructure policies that provide recreational access and support local economies reliant on our nation's waterways.

Sincerely,



T. Nicole Vasilaros, Esq.

Senior Vice President, Government and Legal Affairs

National Marine Manufacturers Association

NMMA Recreation Infrastructure Policy Recommendations

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.

Increase Small and Emerging Harbors Set Aside

The establishment of the set aside for small and emerging harbors from Harbor Maintenance Tax revenue ensured small harbors receive no less than 10 percent of USACE Operations and Maintenance funding each year for critical infrastructure needs. While an important first step in securing funding for these important places that are integral to driving economic activity in local communities, now more

than ever it's imperative that the set aside be increased to 20 percent to provide adequate funding to meet the needs of small and emerging harbors across the country.

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.

Reauthorize the Sportfish Restoration and Boating Trust Fund (SFRBTF)

The Sport Fish Restoration and Boating Trust Fund serves as the backbone for fisheries conservation funding in the United States and is a critical funding pool for boating infrastructure projects through the Boating Access and Boating Infrastructure Grant (BIG) programs. Taxes on fishing tackle and equipment, motorboat fuel, imported boats and fishing equipment, and small engines are pooled together to create this fund of about \$650 million a year. In turn, the money is then allocated to federal and state programs for recreational boating safety, fisheries management, habitat conservation, vessel pump-out stations, water and boating access infrastructure programs, and aquatic resource education programs, among others.

Unless Congress acts, the SFRBTF is set to expire in 2021. Because the boating infrastructure projects play such a large role stimulating local economies, any additional federal relief measure should include the bipartisan Sport Fish Restoration and Recreational Boating Safety Act of 2019. (H.R. 4828) to extend the authorization of the SFRBTF through 2024.