

April 30, 2019

The Honorable Peter DeFazio
Chairman, Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
U.S. House of Representatives
2134 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Sam Graves
Ranking Member, Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
U.S. House of Representatives
1135 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman DeFazio and Ranking Member Graves:

On behalf of the National Marine Manufacturers Association (NMMA), I encourage you to consider the role recreation-based infrastructure plays in supporting the U.S. economy and prioritize these needs as the committee continues its work in developing a robust infrastructure package. While roads, bridges and commercial airports are key infrastructure touchpoints, infrastructure that improves the use and enjoyment of our environment – both on land and by water—and encourages outdoor recreation, should be also considered. In particular, NMMA requests inclusion of a specific **“Recreation Title”** in any final infrastructure package to fully address outdoor recreation infrastructure needs.

By way of background, NMMA is the leading recreational marine trade association in North America, representing nearly 1,300 boat, engine, accessory and trailer manufacturers. Recreational boating is a significant contributor to the U.S. economy, generating \$170.3 billion in annual economic impact that supports more than 35,000 businesses and 690,000 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 – accounts for 2.2% of U.S. GDP, \$734 billion in gross economic output, and 4.5 million jobs. In terms of GDP, outdoor recreation is larger than mining, utilities, and chemical products manufacturing.

Outdoor recreation is a substantial and rapidly increasing part of the U.S. economy. For our industry – and the entire U.S. economy – to continue to grow, it is essential that recreation infrastructure be addressed in a comprehensive infrastructure proposal.

Below my signature is a list of infrastructure policy recommendations – which have received broad bipartisan, bicameral support in recent years – that we encourage you to consider this Congress. NMMA appreciates your consideration and stands ready to assist you and the committee throughout this important endeavor.

Sincerely,



Nicole Vasilaros
Senior Vice President of Government Relations and Legal Affairs
National Marine Manufacturers Association

National Marine Manufacturers Association | 2019 Infrastructure Policy Priorities

I. Address critical dredging needs impacting recreational boating and study innovative recycling solutions for dredged materials:

Use the balance in the Harbor Maintenance Trust Fund (HMTF) to expedite the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) critical harbor maintenance and other operation and maintenance activities. The HMTF was created to ensure that our nation's harbors would always be properly dredged and fully operational, yet much of the fund's annually collected revenue doesn't make its way back to where it was originally intended and is desperately needed. Corps estimates that full channels at the nation's 59 busiest ports are available less than 35 percent of the time- and the conditions of small and emerging harbors are far worse. The result of insufficient funding for maintenance and dredging projects is deterioration of our nation's ports, harbors, and waterways that support thousands of jobs and commercial and recreational economic development nationwide.

There are sufficient funds in the HMTF to meet the maintenance dredging needs of all federally-authorized ports. Full utilization of the fund would provide the necessary funding to enable the Corps to dredge all federal harbors to their constructed widths and depths. Improperly dredged channels exacerbates user conflict in our busy ports and harbors, impacting safety and important access for recreational boaters as well.

Reform the Corps Federal Dredging Project Prioritization Process to accurately account for the economic benefits of investing in projects that facilitate recreational use. Under the current process, the Corps give priority to coastal harbors and inland waterways with the most commercial traffic based on tonnage and also provides priority for maintenance of channels at small ports that support significant commercial fishing, subsistence, or public transportation benefits.

This flawed system fails to properly account for the value created by access for recreational activities – effectively putting boaters and the recreational boating industry's \$170.3 billion annual economic activity at a disadvantage. Small recreation- based ports are critical access points for marinas and coastal communities where businesses depend on marine recreation-based economic activity. Additionally, without sufficient dredging in these areas, some recreational boaters are forced to use high traffic commercial channels, which can lead to potential user conflicts and safety concerns.

The prioritization process should be amended to ensure that a percentage of existing available funds be allocated for three different categories: high-tonnage, low-tonnage and commercial or recreational ports to ensure critical navigation and dredging projects are funded on an equitable, sustainable, and needs-based system. In addition, increases in social, cultural, and environmental benefits should be considered in the allocation of the three funding categories where appropriate.

Direct the Corps to Study Alternative and Recyclable Solutions for Disposal of Dredged Materials that deliver multiple economic and environmental benefits that add more value to local economies and avoid the continued traditional landfill disposal of dredged materials. Due to the naturally occurring process of sedimentation, overtime rivers, lakes, harbors, and bays can become filled with debris sand, mud, silt, and other materials that reduce waterway depths making them difficult to navigate-- posing environmental and safety hazards.

Proper dredging of these sediment materials plays a critical role in providing access to the recreational boating and fishing communities and maintaining clean and healthy waterways for local ecosystems. ACOE estimates that hundreds of millions of cubic yards of dredged materials need to be excavated each year from rivers lakes, harbors, and bays across the country to keep the nation's waterways open for commercial and recreational use.

II. Direct the Government Accountability Office (GAO) to study Corps maritime facilities, capacity, and maintenance to expand access to critical waterways.

The Corps is one of the nation's leading federal managers of outdoor recreation with more than 400 lake and river projects in 43 states, and managing 55,900 miles of shoreline and 3,748 boat ramps across the country. A review of the Corps' recreational infrastructure assets is necessary to identify locations that need investment in new and/or additional boat ramps and updated parking areas and public facilities, which serve as the gateway to water recreation.

The Sport Fish Restoration and Boating Trust Fund, initiated in the 1950's at the behest of the boating and angling community, is a user fee-user benefit system, that provides \$600 million annually for aquatic conservation and infrastructure projects. From boat ramps and docks to boating safety to fish habitat conservation, this Trust Fund aims at re-investing in outdoor recreation and infrastructure. Yet, the Trust Fund cannot meet all the outdoor recreation needs. We see a particular lack funding of for recreational maritime infrastructure, including: sufficient parking for vehicles with trailers, outdated ramp utilities, paved roads and ramps, and sufficient bathrooms and trash receptacles at public boating facilities. Facility improvements, such as trash and decontamination stations, will ensure boaters have proper facilities to be good stewards of the environment, and prevent environmental harms, including the spread of aquatic invasive species. Improperly dredged ramp channels can also result in safety concerns for marine vessels and operators, and reduces/eliminates coastal access for small communities and marina businesses.

III. Direct the Government Accountability Office (GAO) to study the economic impact of outdoor recreation on property managed by the Corps to ensure recreation projects are appropriately funded.

In addition to recreation, the Corps has several other different functional business areas, such as flood control, navigation, and hydropower. Resources for project maintenance are applied across these various areas to ensure the appropriate level of maintenance is performed for each of the functioning areas.

The ACOE estimates its overall deferred maintenance and repair (DM&R) backlog to be in the neighborhood of \$2.28 billion. According to a November 2018 GAO report, in 2008 the Corps implemented an asset management process for its Civil Works Programs whereby the agency "ranks maintenance projects identified during the budget formulation process based on the value or level of service the project is expected to provide as well as how critical they are and funds as many of the priority projects as possible given available funding and the rest are deferred."

Given that Corps is a leading federal manager of outdoor recreation and the outdoor recreation economy accounts for 2.2 percent of U.S. GDP and supports 4.6 million jobs across the country, accurate findings on how much recreation on Corps properties contributes to local economies and the nation's GDP each year as well as how many jobs are supported through the outdoor recreation industry's economic activity is critical information in determining appropriate prioritization of ACOE DM&R recreation projects. Other major federal land and water managers such as the National Park Service and U.S. Forest Service regularly report on outdoor recreation economic research to better understand the full range of societal benefits and economic activity supported by the agencies' efforts. Economic metrics for outdoor recreation should be used in determining prioritization of Corps maintenance projects.

IV. Increase the gas tax and ensure additional revenue from motor boat fuel is properly attributed to Sport Fish Restoration and Boating Trust Fund (SFRBTF).

Under current law, the Sport Fish Restoration and Boating Trust Fund (SFRBTF) receives revenue of about \$600 million from taxes on fishing tackle and equipment, motorboat fuel gas tax, imported boats and fishing equipment, and small engines. Seventy two percent of SFRBTF is funded directly from motorboat fuel gas taxes.

SFRBTF serves as the backbone for conservation funding in the United States and is the critical funding pool for vital state and national recreational fishing and boating programs, including recreational boating safety programs, fisheries management, habitat conservation, vessel pump-out stations, water and boating access infrastructure programs, and aquatic resource education programs.

We recognize the ability of the federal government to tackle infrastructure improvement is reliant on a reliable and long-term funding stream. While private investment through P3s mentioned above, are an important element, an increase in the gas tax should also be considered. Any increase in the gas tax would only be supported by our industry, if the additional funding is properly attributed to motor boat fuel consumption and the overall SFRBTF.

V. Direct the Government Accountability Office (GAO) to study and assess the status of Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) in the United States.

In November 2015, GAO released the study, *AIS: Additional Steps Could Help Measure Federal Progress in Achieving Strategic Goals* ([GAO 16-49](#)), which examined the Aquatic Nuisance Species Task Force activities and challenges in addressing AIS. The report rightfully states “addressing aquatic invasive species is a complex, interdisciplinary issue with the potential to affect many sectors and levels of government operations.” It is our belief that since the 2015 study, the situation surrounding AIS has not significantly improved. Therefore, we request that GAO update and build upon its past work on this topic by studying the effectiveness of current AIS programs and decontamination procedures; availability of decontamination stations in relation to usage and inspection procedures; need for a national decontamination standard; and inspection wait times.

Further investment in pump-out and decontamination stations will improve boating facilities and assist in preventing the spread of AIS.

The spread of harmful plants, animals and other organisms threaten America’s water habitats and have lasting economic damage for the anglers, boaters, local communities, and industry. According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the environmental impacts of both aquatic and terrestrial invasive species are second only to habitat destruction as a cause of global biodiversity loss, and managing these invasive species costs an estimated \$137 billion annually to the U.S. economy. One important tool to fight the spread of these AIS are decontamination stations at boat ramps.

Congress should authorize new programs to promote AIS decontamination stations. Decontamination stations, placed near boat ramps, provide a place for officials to ensure that boats being launched are not contaminating U.S. bodies of water with invasive species or bacteria. These facilities would follow in the footsteps of the AIS decontamination stations established by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and those in Wyoming established by the National Park Service.

Private and state investment is not currently being met by the market demand, thereby jeopardizing the fight against clean water. Clean Vessel Act grants, authorized by the Sport Fish Restoration and Boating Trust Fund, provides grant funds for the construction, replacement, renovation and maintenance of facilities that assist recreational boaters in the properly disposing of on-board septic waste. In 2017, more than \$15 million was awarded to support clean waters and recreational boating opportunities, yet over \$17 million was requested. This deficit again shows the need and funding streams are not matched and opportunity to improve the fight for clean water is substantial.

VI. Improve broadband access in federally managed lands and waters to support recreational safety and enjoyment.

According to the Brookings Institution, at least ten percent of American's lack access to a broadband internet connection. Many those Americans live in what would be considered "rural" areas. Federal Communications Commission (FCC) regulations on Internet Service Providers (ISPs) have improved access to broadband for rural areas, however the access divide remains stark. In some states, such as Alaska, 14% fewer Americans have access to broadband when compared to urban areas.

For recreational boating and angling, reliable mapping across different federal agency jurisdictions and access to broadband is a critical safety and enjoyment issue for navigating our nation's waterways. Lack of broadband can put boaters at perilous risk without information about navigational channels, changes in weather, and access points. For example, lack of broadband access at Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary has posed a risk for some boaters in obtaining accurate weather during changing conditions. This can pose as a serious safety concern for vessels on the water. From a user perspective, broadband access improves the overall recreational experience on the water, allowing consumers to connect with others and boost their enjoyment.