

WATER RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT ACT (WRDA)

REQUEST

Support passage of the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) of 2006 (S.728 or H.R. 2864) with the inclusion of the *Texas Environmental Infrastructure Program* to help Texas implement the State Water Plan.

Local political subdivisions in Texas have a long and successful history of partnering with The Corps of Engineers (Corps) on water-related issues. This partnership has led to a strong foundation for decision making, water policy and leveraging of resources to ensure proper management of the State's water resources. Local governments and the Texas Water Development Board (TWDB) have been working to enhance this partnership by utilizing Corps resources on water supply issues. There are over 60 major reservoirs in Texas with capacity greater than 50,000 acre-feet. The Corps owns and operates 30 of these reservoirs. More than 35 percent of the State's surface water is stored behind Corps reservoirs. Corps management of these water assets provides for an excellent opportunity in helping to meet the needs of Texas as described in *Water for Texas – 2002*, also known as the State Water Plan.

In 1997, the 75th Texas Legislature passed Senate Bill 1 (SB1) to address water management and planning in Texas. SB1 put in place a regional approach to water planning, creating 16 Regional Water Planning Groups (RWPG) across the State based on water sources, river basin, economic growth centers and other factors unique to the area. The 16 regional planning groups comprised a total of approximately 450 members from various interests. The groups spent three years developing the first regional plans, holding over 900 public meetings across the state. TWDB worked closely with the regional planning groups, conducted stakeholder meetings and consolidated the regional plans into a comprehensive planning document, the State Water Plan. The human and capital investment in this endeavor has been significant. Through this collaborative water planning process that begins at the grassroots level, Texas has identified its water needs for the next 50 years and has developed specific strategies and projects to meet those needs.

Since 1997, the TWDB has gained the reputation as the premier State water planning organization in the nation. For the past three years, the TWDB and the members of the Texas Water Conservation Associations (TWCA) have worked closely with the Corps to identify new authorities that would expand the partnership with the Corps that would aid in the implementation of the State of Texas' 50-Year Water Plan. This partnership has been built around the Corps' Civil Works Strategic Plan which focuses on the need to develop innovative and collaborative approaches to water resources development. Strengthened coordination and collaboration will lead to a more focused and energized approach to water management in the state. TWDB and the Corps recognize that all of the intensive and extensive labor expended on the State Water Plan has produced a guide for addressing water needs across the State. With an identified need of \$18 billion through 2050 for water supply, both agencies fully believe that implementation of the strategies and projects within the State Water Plan necessarily must be

carried out to ensure water for human health and welfare, economic development and environmental sustainability. Implementation is a necessary and logical next step. Considering the enormous needs in Texas, the prospect of adequate local and state resources for implementation to address these needs is not reasonable. A state-federal partnership would leverage resources (e.g., funding, knowledge, skills, experience) to improve the prospects for meaningful and critical implementation of the State Water Plan.

The WRDA proposals of interest to Texas are highlighted in HR1368 by Congressman Michael Burgess. Rep. Burgess' bill lists the key provisions that Texas seeks in WRDA, as follows:

- Authority for the Corps to provide technical support to state and local governments (expansion of the Planning Assistance to States Program (Section 22),
- Authority for the Corps to fund the collection and analyses of water data,
- Development of a coordinated regulatory framework which includes a consistent approach among involved Federal agencies,
- Efficient use of Federal water projects to achieve provisions of the State Water Plan goals; and
- Expansion of Environmental Infrastructure Programs for various regions and rural areas of the State.

With the events of 2005 in New Orleans (Hurricanes Katrina and Rita), have taught the nation a new lesson on the importance of maintaining and improving our nations aging water infrastructure. This renewed awareness of the need to improve the water resources infrastructure of the nation was evidenced on January 25, 2006, 78 Senators signed a bi-partisan letter to the Majority and Minority Leaders of the Senate stressing the importance of moving forward with a new WRDA in 2006.

In 2005, the House of Representatives passed its version of WRDA (H.R. 2864). The Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works also passed its version of WRDA (S.728) in 2005, but final Senate passage of the Bill has not occurred. Both Bills include new authorities that will expand the Texas/Corps partnership, which will aid in the implementation of the State Water Plan (comparison of the two Bills is attached). Enactment of WRDA in 2006 is paramount to the continued success of the TWDB and TWCA Membership in meeting the future water needs for the State of Texas.