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The Honorable James L. Oberstar
Chairman
Committee on Transportation and
Infrastructure
U. S. House of Representatives
2165 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable John L. Mica
Ranking Member
Committee on Transportation and
Infrastructure
U.S. House of Representatives
2163 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Oberstar and Ranking Member Mica:

As you know, our nation's water resources infrastructure is vitally important to America's economic and environmental well-being. As such, water resources policies should properly reflect a balance between human and economic uses along with environmental and ecological considerations. The purpose of this letter is to express our concerns about a draft bill entitled the "Sustainable Watershed Planning Act." While we have had several discussions with staff over the course of the past year on this issue, we are writing to you now out of concern that this legislation, as drafted, could be included in the forthcoming Water Resources Development Act.

The stated goal of the draft legislation is to

Establish the Office of Sustainable Watershed Management [within the Executive Office of the President] to assess, coordinate, and implement policies and actions to ensure the sustainable use of the water resources of the United States.

The National Waterways Conference supports efforts directed towards long-term coordination and planning of water resources and water infrastructure. To that end, we applaud efforts to foster cooperation and partnership between and among the Federal government, states, tribes and other water resources stakeholders. However, the draft legislation would mandate a heavy-handed top down approach, which is contrary to the traditional management of water resources at the state and local level. Further, such a structure would create bureaucratic uncertainty, confusion and duplication of authorities among the Federal agencies.

The draft bill would also direct the development of watershed plans for the purposes of promoting water efficiency, improved water quality and improved ecological health of the watershed. The bill would also require Federal projects to maximize ecological benefits. This narrow focus ignores the multiple uses of our water resources, including navigation critical to our economic competitiveness, life-saving flood control, municipal and industrial water supply and hydropower production. Any watershed plans must necessarily address all water resources uses.

Dedicated to a greater understanding of the widespread public benefits of our nation's water resources infrastructure.

Telephone:
(703) 243-4090

Fax:
(866) 371-1390

Web Site:
www.waterways.org

During the course of our discussions with staff, we have provided detailed comments on the draft bill designed to promote the development of state and regional watershed plans, including several alternatives to establishing a new office with water oversight. We respectfully suggest that the draft watershed legislation is not the appropriate mechanism to achieve the goal of long-term, sustainable watershed planning, and we urge you not to include those provisions in the forthcoming WRDA bill. We look forward to continuing our discussions with the staff on this important goal.

Sincerely,

Amy W. Larson

Amy W. Larson, Esq.
President
National Waterways Conference, Inc.

The National Waterways Conference, established in 1960, is the national organization to advocate for the enactment of common sense policies recognizing the widespread public benefits of our nation's water resources infrastructure. Membership is comprised of the full spectrum of water resources stakeholders, including flood control associations, levee boards, waterways shippers and carriers, industry and regional associations, port authorities, shipyards, dredging contractors, regional water districts, engineering consultants and state and local governments. www.waterways.org