

Hicks-Ray Associates

Implementing Strategies, Achieving Success



October 17, 2016

TO: WESTCAS Membership

FROM: Hicks-Ray Associates

SUBJECT: Competing Versions of the Water Resources Development Act

Do you remember some years ago the commercial that ran during televised football game known as “You Make the Call.” This involved a review of a NFL play where the action was frozen and the announcer described what had just occurred and challenged viewers to step into the shoes of the referees and to, “Make the Call.” The WESTCAS Board of Directors and membership face a similar challenge in terms of creating a letter to House and Senate authorizers regarding what provisions should be included in the final version of the Water Resources Development Act.

The Senate passed its version by a vote of 95 to 3 in mid-September and the House at the end of September by a vote of 399 to 25. This overwhelming bi-partisan support is helping to drive momentum in support of a final version of the bill that could be passed during the lame duck session of the Congress. In terms of Corps of Engineers provisions both House and Senate bills share a number of similarities. But the Senate version is more than 400 pages longer than the House bill and costs about twice as much. This is due largely to Clean Water Act and Safe Drinking Water Act provisions that are a part of the Senate but not the House bill including:

--\$1.8 billion for EPA to make grants to help municipalities pay for controlling sewer overflows and storm water discharges.

--\$1.5 billion for the EPA to support the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative.

--\$1.43 billion for the EPA to make grants to assist small and disadvantaged communities with the cost of complying with drinking water regulations.

--\$500 million for EPA to make grants to public water systems and other entities to develop innovative water technologies.

--\$415 million for several federal agencies to perform ecological restoration activities in the Lake Tahoe Basin.

--\$325 million to support conservation and research activities for the Long Island Sound.

--300 million for the EPA to make grants to public water systems to fund projects including replacing service lines, to reduce lead in drinking water.

--\$125 million for EPA to provide technical assistance grants to small and medium water treatment works.

--\$100 million for EPA to make grants to fund lead-testing programs in schools and child care centers.

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We suspect that very few members of the water community, including those in the Arid West, would oppose these types of funding provisions. The challenge is drafting the WESTCAS WRDA letter in such a way that it helps support the push for a final WRDA bill that can pass during the lame duck session of the current Congress.

The position of the House Committee of jurisdiction is that a traditional WRDA that focuses on the historic missions of the Army Corps of Engineers and costs a reasonable amount of money represents the best path forward. The Senate authorizers take the position that WRDA and the lame duck omnibus offer a useful legislative vehicle that can be used to address a wide-ranging selection of national priorities ranging from Corps of Engineers projects to the drinking water crisis in Flint, Michigan.

It will probably be closer to Thanksgiving before we have a clear idea of where the House and Senate authorizers are headed in terms of a final WRDA bill. In the interim, WESTCAS members will be invited to "Make the Call" and help to develop the ideas that will go into writing this letter. The fall conference in Phoenix that begins in just over a week provides an ideal time to address this issue.

See you there!

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