

## **PROPOSAL FOR: INTEGRATED WATER RESOURCES PLANNING**

### **WATER RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT ACT OF 2016**

**Background and Issue:** Water resources management is becoming a complex challenge for local communities as they confront issues such as severe and persistent drought in the West and extreme wet weather events in the Midwest and East that are causing drinking water supplies to diminish, water quality to be impaired, or both. Depending on where you live, storm events can either lead to replenished water supplies or to larger water quality deadzones, which is why increasingly, communities are integrating management of local water resources to ensure optimization of these storm events.

In the water resources development program of the Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE), the primary purposes are flood risk management, navigation, and aquatic ecosystem restoration. Water supply and water quality are considered local responsibilities and the Corps does not plan projects for those purposes. However, enhanced coordination between the ACOE and municipalities during the Corps' planning process for flood control projects could identify potential conflicts with local water resource plans and potential opportunities for integrating water resources management that could improve water supplies and water quality outcomes.

### **Integration Leads to Improved Water Quality**

Municipalities located in wetter climates in the Midwest and the eastern seaboard are spending increasing amounts of local ratepayer dollars on controlling urban stormwater runoff in order to mitigate adverse water quality impacts due to overflows from wastewater collection systems or from pollutants discharged from separate storm sewer systems during rain events. For example, ratepayers in northeast Ohio and in Chicago, Illinois will spend \$3 billion each to mitigate the consequences of stormwater on local environmental infrastructure; St. Louis, MO will spend \$5 billion. Enhanced coordination between the ACOE and local stormwater agencies would help local stormwater management efforts addressing water quality challenges to succeed and ensure that federal and ratepayer investments are being efficiently utilized.

Where this coordination is occurring, the results will indeed benefit local water quality. For example, Milwaukee, WI has proposed a flood mitigation project to be undertaken with the ACOE along the Underwood Creek tributary of the Menomonee River. The purpose of the project is to reduce public safety risk, provide wetland mitigation, improve aquatic habitat, and satisfy Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources and ACOE requirements for the Milwaukee County Grounds Floodwater Management Facility project. The project scope includes the design and construction of removing approximately 4,400 linear feet of concrete channel liner on Underwood Creek and replacing it with a bioengineered channel. Through coordination with the City's stormwater management planning efforts, the Corps is designing a project that will construct a series of pools and riffles in a low-flow channel to

not only enhance the aquatic habitat of Underwood Creek, but also help the City meet its water quality objectives in the Menomonee River by reducing high fecal coliform levels caused by urban stormwater run-off.

### **Integration Leads to Improved Water Supplies**

Many communities in the U.S. are challenged to find sufficient water supplies to meet their growing needs for industry, agriculture, homes and businesses, and the natural environment. While the arid regions of the West have long been challenged to find innovative ways to stretch and supplement their water supply, other regions are experiencing more frequent droughts and greater pressures on existing water resources. As a result, a number of these municipalities are developing plans for stormwater management, water reuse, and aquifer recharge in an effort to meet local water supply demands.

For example, the City of Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (LADWP) is undertaking a stormwater capture project in an effort to reduce reliance on expensive imported water. In fact, LA's water goal includes reducing purchases of imported water by 50% by 2025 and sourcing 50% of water locally by 2035. Meeting these goals will include an increase to 150,000 acre-feet per year (AFY) of storm water capture – the capture of rainfall and runoff from open space and urban lands for direct use or groundwater storage. Currently 27,000 AFY (8.8 billion gallons) is captured, suggesting a significant ramp-up of efforts these next twenty years. These efforts will both be influenced by ACOE actions and have the potential to impact ACOE' work in the community and potentially upstream.

### **Proposed Provision for Integration of Water Resources Planning**

While there are a number of good examples where this kind of positive coordination between ACOE flood management and local urban stormwater control projects is occurring, including specific language in the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) encouraging continued and greater coordination of these efforts would both highlight Congress' desire to see increased collaboration between the ACOE and local communities and inspire similar efforts in other parts of the country. The language below, if included in a final WRDA, would enhance coordination with municipalities during the ACOE planning process and lead to better water resources management for purposes of municipal water supply and water quality goals.

*“sec. xxx. – INTEGRATED WATER RESOURCES PLANNING. In carrying out a water resources development feasibility study, the Secretary shall coordinate with communities in the watershed covered by such study to determine if local water management plans exist or are under development for the purposes of stormwater management, improving water quality, aquifer recharge, or water reuse. When such local water management plans do exist in the watershed, the Secretary shall, in cooperation with affected local public entities, avoid adversely affecting the purposes of local water management plans and, where feasible, incorporate the purposes of the local plans into the Secretary's feasibility study.”*

Committee Report Language -- The Committee is aware that many cities and towns are facing water supply and water quality challenges as a result of prolonged drought, wetter

conditions, or increased population. Some of these municipalities have developed municipal stormwater management plans that will improve local surface water quality or increase water supply that may include water storage, aquifer recharge, or water reuse. As the Corps of Engineers develops flood damage reduction projects for a watershed, there is the possibility that such plans could harm a community's ability to carry out its plan to improve water quality or water supply. In some cases, the flood waters that the Corps is planning to move through the watershed as quickly as possible could be used for purposes under local water storage, aquifer recharge, or water reuse plans or for addressing local water quality conditions. This section requires the Secretary, when carrying out a feasibility study for flood damage reduction to determine if local water management plans exist and to incorporate the purposes of those local plans into the federal project when feasible. The goal is for the Secretary to recommend projects that will not only meet the federal study purposes, but also, assist local communities in meeting the objectives of their local water management plans for water quality and water supply. For example, as the Secretary plans a project for flood damage reduction, there may be an opportunity to move flood waters to a location where they could benefit a local plan for improvements in surface water quality conditions, water storage, aquifer recharge, or water reuse.

For more information on this issue, contact:

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