

June X, 2020

The Honorable Peter DeFazio
Chairman
Committee on Transportation & Infrastructure
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Sam Graves
Ranking Member
Committee on Transportation & Infrastructure
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman DeFazio and Ranking Member Graves:

On behalf of the members of the agriculture industry who rely on inland waterways for the moving of cargo, we appreciate your effort to craft and finalize a Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) in 2020. As the WRDA legislative process moves forward, we urge you to prioritize policies that will result in increased investments in inland waterways infrastructure.

As you know, the U.S. inland waterways system includes nearly 12,000 miles of navigable inland waterways. In addition, hundreds of aging locks and dams—the vast majority exceeding their originally engineered 50-year lifespans—are integral to continuing the movement of commerce. Without additional investment from the federal government, the backlog of infrastructure projects on the inland waterways system will continue to grow, causing delays which will in turn create higher cargo shipping costs.

Agriculture and agriculture-related products represent a quarter of cargo moved on the inland waterways system. However, these products tend to move the longest distance, which magnifies the impact of delays due to infrastructure issues for farmers and their agriculture industry partners. The global competitiveness of the U.S. farmer is directly tied to the efficiency of transporting product. The inland waterways system is the most cost-efficient mode of transporting agriculture and agriculture-related products. In fact, one 15-barge tow of dry cargo carries the same amount of freight as 216 railroad cars and 1,050 tractor-trailers.

American agriculture global competitiveness would benefit from additional federal investment to accelerate the completion of inland waterways infrastructure projects. Unfortunately, the current backlog of authorized Inland Waterway Trust Fund (IWTF) projects is growing. While progress has been made through increasing barge fuel fees in 2014 and subsequent cost-share ratio changes for specific projects from 50 percent General Revenue funds and 50 percent IWTF, to 85:15 or 75:25, more reliability is needed. In 2016, Congress addressed a similar cost-share ratio concern with coastal deep-draft navigation construction projects and changed the cost-share ratio on those projects to 75:25. We strongly urge Congress to give the same consideration to inland waterways and support a 75:25 cost-share ratio for IWTF projects in WRDA.

The strength of America's farm economy relies on the efficiency of its inland waterways system. If Congress maintains the current status quo of investment in inland waterways infrastructure,

delays along the system will continue to grow, and will lead to a diversion of cargo to more costly and less fuel-efficient modes of transport. We therefore urge you to adopt a permanent 75 percent General Revenue fund and 25 percent IWTF cost share ratio for IWTF projects in the 2020 WRDA.

Sincerely,

American Soybean Association
Indiana Soybean Alliance
Iowa Soybean Association
Kentucky Soybean Association
Mississippi Soybean Association
Missouri Soybean Association
National Association of Wheat Growers
National Corn Growers Association
National Grain and Feed Association
National Oilseed Processors Association
Nebraska Soybean Association
North Carolina Soybean Producers Association
North Dakota Soybean Growers Association
Ohio Soybean Association
Tennessee Soybean Association