

*Alabama Rivers Alliance**Alliance for the Great Lakes
Alliance of Nurses for Healthy Environments**American Rivers
Arkansas Public Policy Panel**Clean Water Action**Clean Water Network
EarthJustice**Endangered Habitats League**Environment America
Environmental Law & Policy Center**Freshwater Future**GreenLatinos
Gulf Restoration Network** Healing Our Waters- Great Lakes Coalition
Hip Hop Caucus**Illinois Council of Trout Unlimited**Junction Coalition
Kentucky Resources Council**Kentucky Waterways Alliance**Lake Champlain Committee
League of Conservation Voters**Milwaukee Riverkeeper**National Medical Association
National Parks Conservation Association**National Wildlife Federation
Natural Resources Defense Council**Ohio Conference of the NAACP
Ohio Environmental Council**Ohio River Foundation**PolicyLink
Puget Soundkeeper Alliance**Rural Coalition**Sierra Club
Southern Environmental Law Center**Utah Rivers Council**Waterkeeper Alliance*

February 28, 2018

The Honorable John Barrasso
Chairman
Environment and Public Works Committee
410 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Thomas R. Carper
Ranking Member
Environment and Public Works Committee
465 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Barrasso and Senator Carper:

On behalf of our organizations and our millions of members and supporters, we write to submit recommendations to address America's water infrastructure needs and challenges. As the Environment and Public Works Committee considers legislation addressing our nation's water infrastructure crisis we urge you to implement our recommendations to help ensure clean water for all.

As the Committee develops infrastructure legislation, we recommend focusing on the following themes regarding water infrastructure:

1. Significantly increase funding for our nation's wastewater, drinking water, and stormwater infrastructure by growing existing funding sources and developing new and innovative funding sources.
2. Ensure that infrastructure legislation requires, incentivizes, and supports resilient natural and nature-based solutions.
3. Incorporate measures to ensure affordability of clean water at both the consumer and community level.
4. Prioritize investment to address the greatest need.
5. Ensure that all current environment, health, and safety protections are retained and effectively and fully enforced.

1. Significantly increase funding for our nation’s wastewater, drinking water, and stormwater infrastructure by growing existing funding sources and developing new and innovative funding sources.

The Environmental Protection Agency has estimated that more than \$650 billion must be invested in water infrastructure over the next twenty years to meet current environmental protection and public health needs (\$384 billion for drinking water systems and \$271 billion for sewage systems and stormwater). In order to meet these needs the federal government must increase its investment in drinking water, wastewater, and stormwater infrastructure. This includes creating new and innovative sources of water infrastructure funding while also increasing existing sources of funding such as the Clean Water and Drinking Water State Revolving Funds as well as the Water Infrastructure Financing and Innovation Act funds.

Not only is investment in water infrastructure good for communities, it is good for our overall economy. According to the Economic Policy Institute, \$188.4 billion spent on water infrastructure investments over five years would yield \$265 billion in economic activity and create 1.9 million jobs. However, there must be an increase in overall environmental investments so as not to increase water infrastructure funding at the expense of other environmental programs.

2. Ensure that infrastructure legislation requires, incentivizes, and supports resilient natural and nature-based solutions.

Natural and nature-based solutions are alternatives to traditional grey infrastructure solutions and include such things as source water protection, protection and restoration of floodplains and fish and wildlife habitat, measures to increase water use efficiency, living shorelines, modifying or removing structures like levees and culverts to help restore natural hydrology, and green storm water infrastructure. For example nature-based solutions can mean planting trees and restoring wetlands rather than building a costly new water treatment plant, or choosing water efficiency and conservation instead of building a new water supply dam, or restoring floodplains instead of building taller levees. These solutions that protect, restore, and replicate natural systems and use water more efficiently have a wide range of social, economic, and environmental benefits.

For example, healthy wetlands and floodplains provide important protections from storms and floods in addition to providing vital fish and wildlife habitat. During Hurricane Sandy, wetlands prevented \$625 million in flood damages in 12 coastal states and reduced damages by 20 percent to 30 percent in the four states with the greatest wetland coverage. The purchase of 12,000 acres of easements along the 45-mile Iowa River corridor saved local communities an estimated \$7.6 million in flood damages as of 2009.

Communities across the country are proving that natural and nature-based solutions can solve their water resources needs while also saving money, growing the economy, and improving lives at the same time (see report *Naturally Stronger* attached). Any infrastructure legislation should prioritize the implementation of natural and nature-based solutions either on their own or integrated with traditional grey infrastructure as these solutions can transform and restore

our environment, invigorate our economy, confront inequities, and ensure adaptability and reliability in the face of climate change.

3. Incorporate measures to ensure affordability of clean water at both the consumer and community level.

Communities of color and low-income communities are disproportionately impacted by contaminated water that results from outdated, inadequate or failing infrastructure. This is due in part to the fact that rate payers in these communities cannot afford to have an increase in their water bills to pay for improvements to their water infrastructure systems. Access to safe, clean water and reliable wastewater and stormwater systems should not be a privilege for the few. No one should have to suffer from lead contamination, untreated sewage, or polluted runoff as these problems have severe impacts on the health, safety, and economies of our communities.

The federal government along with utilities and states need to ensure high caliber drinking water, wastewater and stormwater services are affordable to all by adopting and supporting low-income customer assistance programs and water conservation assistance as well as water affordability programs that include equitable rate structure and strategies that reduce system-wide capital and operating costs borne by all customers. Water equity matters – access to safe drinking water and reliable stormwater management and effective wastewater systems is a prerequisite for healthy, thriving communities, where everyone participates, prospers, and reaches their full potential.

4. Prioritize Investment to address the greatest need

Investments in infrastructure should be targeted to communities that have been shortchanged for far too long. Water infrastructure funding must be prioritized for communities that have critical infrastructure needs and lack the ability to meet those needs by raising rates or repaying funds from local sources. Infrastructure investments should be directed to water systems with the greatest water quality problems, based on a comprehensive review of available data and research.

5. Ensure that all current environment, health, and safety protections are retained and effectively and fully enforced

Effectively addressing our water infrastructure crisis requires the full suite of protections provided by the nation's environmental laws, including the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the Clean Water Act, the Endangered Species Act, and the Safe Drinking Water Act. These long-standing environmental laws were passed with strong bi-partisan support out of the recognition that all Americans want and need clean water, clean air, and a healthy environment.

These laws enable us to look before we leap and identify the best and most environmentally-sustainable, long-term solution for our water infrastructure needs. For example, reviews under NEPA provide critical public and expert input and transparency that lead to better, more effective water resources projects and substantial savings for federal taxpayers. Such reviews give the public a critical say in projects that can have profound impacts on their lives and livelihoods. NEPA reviews do not delay projects that are in the public interest. Project

delays are caused by poor planning, lack of interagency coordination, and long-standing funding constraints. Several Congressional Research Service reports conclude that lack of funding is the primary obstacle for project completion and has the greatest impact on project delivery timelines.

Our organizations strongly oppose all efforts to roll back, undermine, or eliminate the nation's environmental, health, and safety protection laws. Such efforts will result in infrastructure projects that damage the healthy natural systems that drive our economy, protect our communities, and improve our lives.

Measured against these important principles, the Trump administration's "Legislative Outline for Rebuilding Infrastructure in America" fails at every turn. Instead of providing meaningful funding opportunities, the plan would put the financial burden on state and local governments as well as private entities. Instead of providing for an equitable distribution of funds, the plan proposes financing options that will prohibit low-income communities from securing infrastructure investments. Instead of prioritizing natural and nature-based solutions or addressing the most pressing community needs, the plan has no prioritization system. Instead of protecting our waters and our environment, the plan would ensure greater levels of pollution and degradation by aggressively rolling back and eliminating critical and longstanding environmental protections. The administration's plan is not the way forward in fixing our nation's infrastructure crisis.

We respectfully request that you take our recommendations into consideration when developing any water infrastructure legislation. The Environment and Public Works Committee has the ability to create meaningful water infrastructure legislation that provides robust funding, promotes natural and nature-based solutions, and provides clean, affordable water for all while protecting our environment and our communities. The undersigned groups hope that you take the opportunity to do so.

Sincerely,

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