

House T&I Committee Clears \$10 Billion Water Resources Bill

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The House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee approved almost \$10 billion for 664 U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' projects and studies at a business meeting this week. The bill, H.R. 2684, the Water Resources Development Act of 2005, could go to the House floor next week.

The legislation, sponsored by Committee Chairman Don Young (R-AK) is nearly identical to the House's 2003 version of the bill, which passed 412-8.

Environmentalists have said they are disappointed with the corps reform measures in the bill. Some of the same conflicts exist in the Senate. In April, Sen. Kit Bond (R-MO) introduced S. 728, with a price tag between \$7 billion and \$17 billion, according to some analysts. The bill sailed through an Environment and Public Works Committee markup. Bond's legislation would approve funding for Mississippi River lock expansion and restoration.

It was the corps' economic justification for the Upper Mississippi River lock expansion project that launched the debate over corps reform five years ago -- a debate that has stalled WRDA reauthorization three years in a row.

Environmentalists say Bond's legislation gives too much authority over project review to the Corps' chief of engineers, by assigning peer review of corps projects by the Army's inspector general. Groups such as Taxpayers for Commonsense and American Rivers say the House version, while calling for independent analysis of the costs and benefits of corps projects that exceed \$50 million, would leave decisions about the majority of projects up to the Corps. They are calling for a \$25 million trigger.

Committee staff in the House and Senate said they are working with Republican leaders to bring the bill to the floor as soon as possible. Floor amendments are expected on how the corps plans and reviews its projects, as well as on the Upper Mississippi River project -- one of the most expensive WRDA authorizations in history.

This weekly report is written by the American Society of Civil Engineer's Government Relations Staff. If you have any questions or comments about any items in this report please email govwash@asce.org.