



Laura Ziemer
Senior Counsel and Water Policy Advisor

March 8, 2017

The Honorable Garret Graves, Chairman
Subcommittee on Water Resources & Environment
House Committee on Transportation & Infrastructure

The Honorable Grace Napolitano, Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Water Resources & Environment
House Committee on Transportation & Infrastructure

Re: Letter for the Record for the March 9, 2017 Subcommittee Hearing on Infrastructure

Dear Chairman Graves and Ranking Member Napolitano:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit for the record the following testimony in response to the Subcommittee's March 9, 2017 hearing on "Building a 21st Century Infrastructure for America: The Role of Federal Agencies in Water Infrastructure." The priorities for an Infrastructure Package, whether developed by the Trump Administration or by Congress, outlined below are critical to American infrastructure and jobs, and provide multiple benefits, for river health, transportation, agriculture, and water infrastructure.

Trout Unlimited (TU) represents more than 150,000 conservation-minded members, organized into 380 chapters in 35 state councils. Our mission is to conserve, protect and restore the Nation's trout and salmon fisheries and their watersheds. We have 280 staff spread across America who work with our members and a wide variety of partners – including farmers, ranchers, miners and state and local agencies – to accomplish our mission. TU works on projects that build drought and flood resilience for our rural communities and agricultural regions and address rural transportation infrastructure and public safety while simultaneously building partnerships on projects that provide multiple benefits. TU believes that linking investment in natural infrastructure with water infrastructure upgrades is essential in order to reduce inefficiencies and project delays, and maximize benefits, including improved trout habitat and watershed health.

A Comprehensive Infrastructure Package should feature strategic, cost-effective investments and promote collaboration of stakeholders, not ill-conceived process shortcuts.

The need for water infrastructure is great, but we must meet this need with smart and collaborative solutions. A recent Treasury Department study demonstrated these points. The House Natural Resources Committee's March 1, 2017 hearing aimed to identify examples of regulations and statutes that inhibit infrastructure growth, and to examine ways to remove unnecessary impediments from projects critical to American infrastructure and jobs. Background for the hearing came from the December 2016 Treasury Department's commissioned [report](#) of 40 proposed infrastructure projects of "major economic significance." Of the four primary challenges to completing the 40 projects identified in the report, the report concluded the following:

Trout Unlimited: America's Leading Coldwater Fisheries Conservation Organization
321 East Main Street, Suite 411, Bozeman, MT 59715
office: (406) 522-7695 • cell: (406) 599-2606 • email: lziemer@tu.org • www.tu.org

- The report's major finding was that "lack of funds is by far the most common challenge to completing these [40] projects." (at pp. 2, 6).
- The smallest challenge (less than half of the next-smallest challenge of increased capital costs) was environmental regulation compliance and NEPA review; and, the report noted that recent legislative and executive reforms would be helpful in meeting that challenge (at p.6).
- Lack of consensus on multi-jurisdictional projects was a much larger source of delay and an obstacle to completion than either compliance with environmental regulations or increased capital costs (at p. 6).
- Three of the 40 infrastructure projects identified as being of "major economic significance" were investments in restoring aquatic ecosystem functioning to protect against flooding, and scored among the highest cost-benefit ratios of all the projects (at p. 4 ("planning underway" project numbers 5, 6, and 10) and pp. A-46, A-48, and A-56).

Investment in Natural Infrastructure should be Linked with Water Infrastructure Upgrades to Maximize Cost-Effectiveness and Create Multiple Benefits.

Every aging, century-old piece of irrigation and water delivery infrastructure in the West is an opportunity to build flood and drought resilience through improved water storage and delivery and improved river health. Every obsolete culvert on Eastern highways, and pollutant-leaching abandoned mine across the nation, offers opportunities to improve watershed health. Flood and drought resiliency, and improved fish habitat, come from functional watershed processes, which work more cheaply and more effectively with less capital investment than constructed structures. Restoration of watershed function is a sound investment that pays dividends over the long-term, without the depreciation in value and on-going, mounting expense of operation and maintenance of built structures. Linking a water infrastructure project with upstream or downstream investments in natural aquatic functioning increases the cost-effectiveness of the project and increases the range of project benefits. A Comprehensive Infrastructure Package should:

- Substantially increase funding for the State Revolving Fund (SRF) and link investments in water and waste-water treatment with substantially increased Section 319 investments in non-point source pollution control and watershed function. Linking Section 319 with SRF funding would help ensure that structural and watershed function investments are integrated in order to maximize cost-effectiveness.
- Prioritize those infrastructure investments that provide multiple benefits. These projects both upgrade existing infrastructure, but at the same time restore natural riverine processes that provide flood mitigation services through intact floodplains, for example. Other projects will relieve water delivery bottlenecks by improving natural flows that provide drought resiliency while upgrading water delivery infrastructure.
- Strongly support the regional, cooperative initiatives, which have taken watershed restoration and infrastructure reform to scale. Successful western examples are the Klamath and Yakima River basin collaboratives. **These multi-stakeholder investment plans stack benefits, and they recognize economic and business risks of avoiding upgrades and missing opportunities to promote resiliency.** These are investment plans that have been made with a whole-system view—not just straight update and replace, but based upon comprehensive, system-level evaluations. They are supported by a broad range of stakeholders, including states, counties and communities.

The cost is high of neglecting these essential water infrastructure upgrades. Neglect of water infrastructure risks floods from failing dams, under-sized culverts, and bridges that need larger spans across floodplains. Neglect of water infrastructure also makes the impact of drought worse by wasting water in failing water delivery infrastructure. We urge the Subcommittee to support an Infrastructure Package that provides multi-sector benefit, cost-effective projects that build partnerships and are smart, high-yield investments

Thank you for your interest in this important discussion. Please do not hesitate to contact me at lziemer@tu.org or (406) 522-7695 if more detail or specific examples would be of assistance.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'L. Ziemer', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Laura Ziemer