September 9, 2013

Honorable Bill Shuster
Chairman, Transportation and Infrastructure Committee
2163 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington DC 20515

Honorable Bob Gibbs
Chairman, Water Resources and Environment Subcommittee
329 Cannon HOB
Washington DC 20515

Honorable Nick Rahall
Ranking Member, Transportation and Infrastructure Committee
2307 Rayburn HOB
Washington DC 20515

Honorable Tim Bishop
Ranking Member, Water Resources and Environment Subcommittee
306 Cannon HOB
Washington DC 20515

Dear Representatives Shuster, Rahall, Gibbs and Bishop:

On behalf of the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE), the Association of State Dam Safety Officials (ASDSO), the National Association of Flood and Stormwater Management Agencies (NAFSMA) and the United States Society on Dams (USSD), we express our gratitude for all you are doing to move the Water Resources Reform and Development Act this year.

As you prepare for markup on this critical legislation, we urge you to include a comprehensive levee safety program as part of WRRDA 2013. All of our organizations have public safety as an integral mission focus and our members are responsible for operation and maintenance of much of our nation's flood damage reduction infrastructure. We are well aware of the potentially devastating impacts that levee failures can have and urge you to take a comprehensive approach to address the nation's levee safety needs.

A National Levee Safety Program is a long-overdue investment needed to reduce the costs of future levee-related flood disasters. This investment will move the country away from a reactive and expensive disaster assistance environment to a less costly proactive, safety-oriented culture where the general public and governments are informed and participate in effective risk management.

Levee safety deserves a priority focus within national infrastructure needs. Levees protect much of the country's vital infrastructure from flooding. Throughout the nation, hospitals, roads, bridges, schools, power plants, and water and sewer treatment plants are protected by levees. The D-grade assigned to levees in ASCE's 2013 Report Card for America's Infrastructure serves as a call to action and provides evidence that we are in pay-me-now or pay-me-much-more-later situation, with the pay-me-later scenario including the possibility of loss of lives due to flooding in the future.
In order for the establishment of a National Levee Safety Program to be successful and cost-effective, ASCE, ASDSO, NAFSMA and USSD agree that the following components recommended by the National Committee on Levee Safety must be included in WRRDA 2013:

- Establishment of a National Levee Safety Program, including the appointment of an Administrator and staff by the Secretary of the Army (acting through the Chief of Engineers) and in consultation with FEMA;

- Establishment of a National Levee Safety Advisory Board that includes representatives with expertise in levee safety from State Levee Safety Programs, the private sector, local and regional governmental agencies and Indian Tribes;

- Development of State and Tribal Levee Safety Programs, including a role for local and regional entities with responsibility for operation and maintenance of levees.

- Establishment of Technical Programs, including the development of voluntary levee safety guidelines, publications, training and technical assistance;

- Provides for the Completion of the National Levee Inventory, including non-federal levees; and

- Levee Repair and Rehabilitation Fund to address non-federal levee issues that includes critical flood risk management and capability criteria guiding the award of funds under this program.

The undersigned organizations appreciate all that you are doing to address the nation's water infrastructure needs. Please feel free to contact any of individuals below with questions about these important levee safety issues.

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On behalf of non-federal members of USSD.