

WRDA Bill Finally Goes to Conference

September 15, 2006

The House this week agreed to request a conference with the Senate on the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA). The bill, H.R. 2864, authorizes between \$10 billion and \$12 billion in new water resources projects to be carried out by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Different versions of the bill passed the Senate in July and the House in July 2005.

The Senate version includes language to reauthorize the National Dam Safety Program and establish a new National Levee Safety Program within the Corps of Engineers. The House version does not include these provisions, although they are pending as separate bills in the House (see related story on Dams above). ASCE strongly supports the reauthorization of the National Dam Safety Program and the creation of the National Levee Safety Program.

The bills include provisions to require outside peer reviews of all Corps projects. ASCE supports peer review that is independent and does not inordinately delay projects. ASCE's Executive Committee recently passed Resolution 519 on this important issue.

Once a conference convenes, officials expect that the bill will be completed quickly. Both houses hope to complete work on the bill before Congress recesses at the end of September.

The bill contains funding to rebuild levees in New Orleans destroyed by Hurricane Katrina in 2005. On Thursday, the House voted to instruct the members of its conference committee to add a provision to WRDA that would require the Corps to rebuild the levees around New Orleans to resist a Category 5 hurricane. The five categories in the Saffir-Simpson scale are associated with wind speed of a hurricane. This weekly report is written by the ASCE Government Relations staff. If you have any questions or comments about any items in this report please contact govwash@asce.org.