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May 25, 2016

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Water Bill supports Beneficial Use of Dredged Sediment

On Wednesday, the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure passed a Water Resource Development Act (WRDA) that included a new pilot program to beneficially use sediment dredged from navigation channels to restore shorelines, beaches, and wetlands. The Senate WRDA (S.2848), which passed in committee in April, also included a provision on beneficial use of dredged material (section 2017).

Sediment – the sand, silt, clay and organic material used to build and restore coastal shorelines – is a resource in increasingly short supply. One critical source of sediment for coastal projects is the material dredged for navigation purposes, including river and channel maintenance and port deepening. However, by law, the Army Corps of Engineers must dispose of dredged material as cheaply as possible. This often means that valuable sediment is dumped far off-shore, even when it could be beneficially used in the coastal system to provide storm protection, restore habitat or raise coastal lands to keep pace with changing sea levels, erosion, and increased storm events.

The House WRDA bill requires the Army Corps of Engineers to choose ten sites across the country to collaboratively work with States and local partners to use dredged sediment for projects “reducing storm damage to property and infrastructure; promoting public safety; protecting, restoring, and creating aquatic ecosystem habitats; stabilizing stream systems and enhancing shorelines; promoting recreation; and supporting risk management adaptation strategies.”¹

“Sand is a valuable natural resource and needs to be treated as such,” said Derek Brockbank, Executive Director of American Shore & Beach Preservation Association. “The House and Senate WRDAs take an important first step to ensuring the Army Corps of Engineers use the sediment they dredge for beneficial purposes – restoring beaches and wetlands, adapting to sea level rise, and protecting communities from hurricanes and coastal storms.”

“States welcome the opportunity to work with the Army Corps of Engineers to ensure that scarce sediment is retained and used for coastal storm protection, environmental restoration, and other purposes,” comments Mary Munson, Executive Director of the Coastal States Organization. “We are encouraged by this language that we believe improves the likelihood of using dredged sediment for these purposes, rather than wasting it by dumping it offshore” she concludes.

¹ Sec. 109 “Beneficial Use of Dredged Material” (p.12) HR. __ Water Resources Development Act 2016
<http://transportation.house.gov/uploadedfiles/wrda2016.pdf>

Congressman John Garamendi (CA-3) has been a strong proponent of beneficial use of dredged material in San Francisco Bay, and worked to get this provision included in WRDA.

“Beneficial reuse of dredged sediment is just common sense, and the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee took a good step today by advancing WRDA,” said Rep. Garamendi. “The provisions on beneficial reuse will provide opportunities for natural flood protection and ecosystem restoration, which are two of the Army Corps’ mission goals.”

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ASBPA Executive Director Derek Brockbank is available at (202) 827-4246 for comment, interviews or background.

ABOUT ASBPA: Founded in 1926, the American Shore and Beach Preservation Association (ASBPA) is a 501(c)3 nonprofit that advocates for healthy coastlines by promoting the integration of science, policies and actions that maintain, protect and enhance the coasts of America. For more information on ASBPA, go to www.asbpa.org, www.facebook.com/AmericanBeaches or www.twitter.com/asbpa.

ABOUT CSO: The Coastal States Organization (CSO) represents the Nation’s Coastal States, Territories & Commonwealths on ocean, coastal, and Great Lakes resource issues. For more information on CSO, go to <http://www.coastalstates.org/>, <https://www.facebook.com/CoastalStatesOrganization>, or https://twitter.com/coastal_states.