



Chairman Hal Rogers

House Committee on Appropriations

**Hearing on U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Civil Works
FY 2017 Budget
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Opening Statement As Prepared**

Mr. Chairman, thank you for yielding, and Assistant Secretary Darcy and Lieutenant General Bostick, I appreciate you taking the time to be here today. I welcome you back to the Energy and Water Subcommittee. As we continue with hearings for Fiscal Year 2017, I want to express my hope that this Committee will be able to work together to draft responsible bills and move them to the House floor under regular order. I have every confidence that this subcommittee will be able to do so again this year.

The projects managed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers have a crucial economic impact on communities across the country. From repairing dams on Corps lakes to protecting communities from the threat of flooding, the Corps plays a central role in ensuring the safety of the places we call home. In my District in Kentucky, the Corps has completed a historic infrastructure project at Wolf Creek Dam, conducted critical flood mitigation projects and enabled tourism and recreational opportunities on Lake Cumberland. As we've discussed before, the Corps has recently prioritized the town of Martin, KY, which for years has lived under the constant threat of flooding. I appreciate the Corps' attention to this important project and hope that we can continue to work collaboratively to ensure that the citizens of Martin reside on safe ground.

Unfortunately, in recent years, much of the good work performed by the Corps has been overshadowed by bureaucratic hurdles and regulatory overreach that are not just slowing economic growth – but outright killing jobs across the country.

First, you have allowed an overtly partisan White House and the EPA to dictate your regulatory agenda – to usurp the authority provided by Congress to the Army Corps of Engineers under the Clean Water Act. This Administration has been relentlessly targeting coal operations, kowtowing to and coordinating with extreme environmental organizations, both through burdensome new rules and their arguably unlawful enforcement. The effects have been dramatic and devastating.

In the years before President Obama took office, we had over 15,000 coal miners in my area – supporting their families and their communities with stable, high-paying jobs. Now – we have around 5,000. Despite this staggering unemployment and economic depression, this Administration continues to march on with its “keep it in the ground” strategy with regard to coal. Not only do these policies completely turn these coal communities upside-down, but they weaken our national energy economy by neglecting our most plentiful and reliable natural resource. Time and again, I have seen job creators in my District and around the country struggle to do business under this wrong-headed regulatory regime. They have seen their permit applications left to languish and decisions on their lease modifications needlessly delayed. Each new regulation and each delay of an important permit decision threatens much-needed jobs and leads to uncertainty for thousands of workers. This is no way to do business, and it's no way to grow an economy.

As I have said many times before, the Waters of the United States, or WOTUS, rule is a prime example of this backwards, job-killing, regulatory strategy. The Corps and the EPA joined forces to expand federal jurisdiction over every waterway they could get their hands on, and we are feeling the impact of this regulatory overreach in my District. Not only does this rule burden coal companies, farmers, developers, and homeowners with hefty compliance costs, we now know that the Administration illegally used taxpayer dollars to try to convince the American people that it was a good idea when it was still under review. This demonstrates a lack of transparency and accountability on the part of these agencies, and an unwillingness to understand how their actions impact real lives and real communities. Both Congress and the courts have fired back against this rule, and I believe it's time for you to move on as well.

Second, in addition to destroying coal jobs in Appalachia and elsewhere, I fear the Corps has also lost sight of its role in economic development and its commitment to its recreation mission. As you know, the local economies in Appalachia are struggling amidst an onslaught of environmental regulations. The people of Southern and Eastern Kentucky are hard at work trying to replace these jobs, and recreation and tourism is an important part of this effort. Unfortunately, the Corps has put up roadblock after roadblock every time my constituents want to pursue a job-creating opportunity that requires their involvement. I am continually perplexed by the Corps' reluctance to support tourism and recreation on Corps lakes and rivers, when instead they should be fast-tracking every opportunity for development in this economically depressed region.

These topics are crucial to struggling economies in rural Appalachia, and for coal communities across the country. My hope is that we can set the right priorities in the budget in order to ensure that the Corps is enabling the success of these communities, not holding them back from achieving their potential. I look forward to hearing your testimony today, so that we may understand how the Corps plans to address these important issues. Thank you and I yield back.

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