December 14, 2017

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
United States Senate
317 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Minority Leader
United States Senate
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Paul Ryan
Speaker
United States House of Representatives
1233 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Democratic Leader
United States House of Representatives
235 Cannon House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Ron Johnson
Chairman
Committee on Homeland Security and
Governmental Affairs
United States Senate
328 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Claire McCaskill
Ranking Member
Committee on Homeland Security and
Governmental Affairs
United States Senate
730 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Bill Shuster
Chairman
Transportation and Infrastructure Committee
United States House of Representatives
204 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Peter DeFazio
Ranking Member
Transportation and Infrastructure Committee
United States House of Representatives
2134 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 2051

Re: Disaster Recovery Reform Act (H.R. 4460) and Inclusion of Sec. 207(b)

Dear Representative:

The undersigned 24 organizations who are members of the Water Protection Network urge that Section 207(b) be stricken from H.R. 4460 (Disaster Recovery Reform Act). Section 207(b) would create a new back-door funding mechanism for U.S. Army Corps of Engineers flood damage reduction projects (USACE Projects) through FEMA’s Hazard Mitigation Grants Program.

Given the large capital expenses commonly associated with USACE Projects, we are concerned that allowing funding of these projects through the Hazard Mitigation Grants Program (HGMP) could drain FEMA’s HMGP funds very quickly. Given that HMGP funded projects have been proven to be cost
effective and have excellent ratios of benefits-to-costs\(^1\) that are generally far higher than those achieved by USACE Projects, we do not support Sec. 207(b). The bill would weaken FEMA’s Duplication of Benefits policies that currently bars FEMA from providing funding for flood damage reduction projects carried out by USACE.

The nation needs to rely more on non-structural flood mitigation strategies such as helping willing homeowners relocate out of harm’s way, protecting critical infrastructure that cannot be sited elsewhere, and restoring floodplain areas that provide habitat as well as act as enhanced buffers against flooding – projects which FEMA’s HMGP primarily supports. But these programs already receive far too little funding and receive far less funding than USACE Projects on an annual basis.

The proposed Sec. 207(b) would widen an already existing disparity in our nation’s funding of flood risk reduction strategies, sending funds that are likely to be used on non-structural projects to large, capital-intensive structural USACE Projects.

H.R. 4460 legislation includes many other positive provisions that would encourage communities to update building codes, incentivize states to develop long-term plans for addressing the risks of flooding disasters, and allow FEMA to help communities rebuild in a manner that makes them more resilient. But Sec. 207(b) undermines this otherwise good piece of legislation. We urge you to strike Sec. 207(b) from H.R. 4460.

Please do not hesitate to contact Marisa Escudero at 202-797-6644 or any of the undersigned with regards to this letter.

Sincerely,

American Rivers
Meghan Boian
Associate Director, Policy and Government Relations

Apalachicola Riverkeeper
Dan Tonsmeire
Riverkeeper

Atchafalaya Basinkeeper
Dean A. Wilson
Executive Director

Audubon Missouri
Anita Randolph
President

Citizens Against Widening the Industrial Canal
John Koeferl
President

Citizens Committee to Complete the Refuge
Carin High
Co-Chair

Florida Wildlife Federation
Manley Fuller, III
President

Friends of the River
Ronald Stork
Senior Policy Staff

Great Egg Harbor Watershed Association  
Fred Akers  
Administrator

Great Rivers Habitat Alliance  
David Stokes  
Executive Director

Kentucky Resources Council, Inc.  
Tom FitzGerald  
Director

Kentucky Waterways Alliance  
Bijaya Shrestha  
Water Policy Director

Louisiana Audubon Council  
Barry Kohl  
President

Missouri Coalition on the Environment  
Heather Navarro  
Executive Director

Missouri Parks Association  
Deborah Schnack  
President

National Wildlife Federation  
Melissa Samet  
Senior Water Resources Counsel

Natural Heritage Institute  
Jerry Meral, Ph.D.  
Director, California Water Program

Natural Resources Defense Council  
Rob Moore  
Senior Policy Advisor

Northwest Environmental Advocates  
Nina Bell, J.D.  
Executive Director

Prairie Rivers Network  
Carol Hays  
Executive Director

The River Project  
Melanie Winter  
Director

Save the River  
Lee Willbanks  
Executive Director  
Upper St. Lawrence Riverkeeper

Surfrider Foundation  
Stefanie Sekich-Quinn  
Coastal Preservation Manager

Utah Rivers Council  
Nick Schou  
Conservation Director