On Wednesday, the Senate voted on – and passed nearly unanimously by a vote of 99-1 - the biennial Water Resources Development Act (WRDA), which include a number of major provisions that benefit drinking water, wastewater, and stormwater infrastructure and policy. The conference report for the bill, known as America's Water Infrastructure Act (S. 3021), was passed unanimously by the House on Sept. 13.

The bi-partisan legislation includes provisions that WEF and its members have been supportive of and advocated for over the last several years. Specially, it will provide a two years extension to the EPA's Water Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act (WIFIA) program and authorize it to receive $50 million per year, which will conservatively provide $5 billion in low-interest federal financing for water infrastructure. The WIFIA reauthorization language includes a provision that permits State SRF programs to receive WIFIA loans directly with some preferential terms, such as 100% loan financing and one credit rating letter. The provision stipulates though that the SRF programs need to be funded at 105% of the fiscal year 2018 appropriation level and the state SRF programs cannot pass-through any of the WIFIA application fees to the SRF borrowers.

The bill also includes the creation of a new stormwater financing federal taskforce that WEF proposed and advocated for. The provision was originally legislation introduced by Rep. Denny Heck (D-WA) and passed by the House in July 2018. A similar provision was part of the Senate WRDA bill, which passed through Environment & Public Works Committee but not the full Senate. Specifically, the bill sets up a task force "composed of federal, state, and local governments and private (including nonprofit) entities to conduct a study on, and develop recommendations to improve, the availability of public and private sources of funding for the construction, rehabilitation, and operation and maintenance of stormwater infrastructure to meet the requirements of the Federal Water Pollution Control Act (33 U.S.C. 1251 et seq.)"

Other major provisions in the bill include:

- Authorization of $25 million per year in grants to non-profit entities to provide technical assistance to small publicly owned treatment works.
- Authorization of $225 million per year in fiscal years 2019 and 2020 in grants to states and directly to municipal entities for CSO, SSO and stormwater infrastructure projects.
- Reauthorization of the Drinking Water SRF for three years at $4.424 billion. Existing “Buy American” restrictions on non-American produced iron and steel will be extended through 2023.
- New two-year, $8 million grant program for small and disadvantaged communities to support drinking water infrastructure.
- Formally authorizing EPA's WaterSense program, which the President had been attempting to eliminate.
- New grant program to provide $1 million per year in fiscal years 2019 and 2020 to eligible organizations to support water workforce job training, such as on-the-job training, skills development, apprenticeships, test-preparation, and other purposes.
The Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works put out a bipartisan press release following passage of the legislation on Wednesday.

America's Water Infrastructure Act (S. 3021)