

Environment & Energy Committee Policies & Priorities

The National Association of Regional Councils (NARC) believes that protection of the natural environment and the development and management of natural resources requires coordination at all levels of government and is best achieved through a holistic and regional approach.

Regional councils operate across a wide range of environmental issues, serving as designated water quality management agencies, designated air-quality planning agencies, solid waste management districts, brownfields coalition organizers, and conducting a range of other environmental planning and programming activities.

WASTEWATER

NARC believes that adequate resources should be provided to regions to ensure that they are able to meet current and future wastewater and stormwater needs. The nation's wastewater and stormwater infrastructure is aging and much of the current infrastructure needs repair or replacement. According to the 2017 American Society of Civil Engineers Infrastructure Report Card, more than 56 million new users are expected to be connected to centralized treatment systems over the next two decades, costing an estimated \$271 billion to meet current and future demands.¹ Additionally, the nation's inland waterways, with a D grade in the Report Card, are affected by the quality of the stormwater infrastructure. Whether in combined sewer or separated areas, stormwater management is necessary to improve the quality of local waterways and work towards water quality standards. Significant federal investment, distributed to the local level, is needed to improve the functionality and resilience of our water systems.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The federal government should:

- Support the “One Water” principle by applying a holistic, integrated planning approach to all Safe Drinking Water Act and Clean Water Act permitting (drinking water, wastewater, stormwater, combined sewer overflow) so that maximum flexibility and cost effectiveness is built into the decision-making process.
- Ensure that national standards protect the safety of America's water infrastructure systems, without hindering local activities.
- Support and incentivize the development of regional stormwater management plans and programs for local governments that are consistent with state stormwater program goals and EPA guidelines.
- Support regional efforts to coordinate above-ground transportation infrastructure improvements with underground water infrastructure improvements.
- Incentivize coordination by local governments to develop regional wastewater treatment plants and other infrastructure that serves multiple jurisdictions.
- Authorize and increase funding for the Clean Water State Revolving Fund (CWSRF) to ensure adequate resources for wastewater storage and treatment facilities in both urban and rural regions.
- Expand opportunities for intermunicipal agencies and interstate agencies to participate in CWSRF lending, including supporting pass-through arrangements like sub-state revolving funds and interstate lending.

¹ American Society of Civil Engineers. 2017 Infrastructure Report Card.

- Authorize and increase funding for the Water Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act (WIFIA) program and increase flexibility for WIFIA funding.
- Reaffirm a commitment to, and fund, the Clean Water Act Section 208 Areawide Water Quality Management Plans, which promote efficient and comprehensive programs for controlling water pollution from point and nonpoint sources.
- Explore the creation of a Water Trust Fund (WTF) to provide dedicated and sustainable funding for water resources and infrastructure (both drinking and waste water) with an emphasis on aging infrastructure.
- Authorize and increase funding for the Sewer Overflow and Stormwater Reuse Municipal Grant program.
- Authorize and increase funding for the federal Great Lakes Restoration Initiative.
- Increase the federal government's research and development programs to aid the efforts of local and state governments in the control of non-point sources of water pollution and contaminated sediments.
- Increase funding for the EPA Clean Water Act Section 319(h) grant program and reduce the 40 percent local match of the Non-Point Source Grants Program which has been a burden on the communities the funding would be intended to benefit.
- Continue to fund Clean Water Act Section 604 (b) grant programs that help regions address important non-point source water quality challenges and assist with water quality planning initiatives.
- Fund integrated planning (IP) legislation and the new U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Office of the Municipal Ombudsman.
- Fund research to determine the impacts of climate change on water resources and infrastructure.
- Encourage the inclusion of sustainable practices such as green infrastructure in water infrastructure projects.
- Provide assistance for local governments and regional councils for public education and communication on water infrastructure, conservation and sustainability issues.
- Provide federal matching funds for local governments to develop projects that reduce flood damage risks and accomplish other goals under the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA).
- Provide sufficient funds to reduce the backlog of projects authorized under WRDA.
- Provide funding to support local, regional and state water quality monitoring programs.

DRINKING WATER

Congress should invest in state, local, and regional government infrastructure to maintain a clean and safe supply of drinking water. In addition, Congress should recognize the work of regional councils in their efforts to assist local governments in addressing quality and supply issues by increasing the amount of funds available for planning, technical assistance, and response to emerging water issues.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The federal government should:

- Increase funding to regional councils to and facilitate regional drinking water plans and programs.

- Authorize and increase funding for the Drinking Water State Revolving Loan Fund to ensure adequate resources for drinking water storage and treatment facilities in both urban and rural regions.
- Support efforts to reduce the potential of per-and polyfluoroalkyl substance (PFAS) contamination in drinking water and provide federal funding for researching, testing and remediation of contamination caused by PFAS substances.
- Using the “polluter pay” principle under Superfund, it is critical that federal agencies hold those accountable for PFAS contamination and funding settlements be directed to the states to minimize public health and environmental contamination.
- Encourage EPA to strengthen federal regulations on PFAS by establishing drinking water standards.
- Provide funding to support water and wastewater treatment plant upgrades to handle emerging contaminants in source water in addition to those waste streams generated from those treatment processes.
- Ensure that PFAS regulation does not interfere with critical firefighting functions.
- Adopt consistent messaging regarding lead and copper recognizing that reducing the public health risk associated with lead is a shared responsibility and requires a collaborative effort by public health agencies, water supply agencies, code officials and federal, state and local agencies.
- Lead abatement must be addressed comprehensively and in alignment with the Federal Action Plan to Reduce Childhood Lead Exposure. The Department of Health and Human Services needs to account for lead elsewhere in the homes, such as internal plumbing, paint and dust.
- Incorporate lead service line replacements as part of a community’s asset management program.
- Encourage EPA to allow flexibility in the types of corrosion control treatments that also consider potential water quality impacts to receiving streams and water bodies.
- Support the development of innovative new drinking water systems, including desalination.

AIR QUALITY

The National Association of Regional Councils (NARC) supports federal funding to incorporate and encourage regional councils and MPOs to achieve comprehensive air quality improvement through reductions in criteria pollutants and/or greenhouse gases. Since the passage of the Clean Air Act (42 U.S.C.), regional councils have played a critical role in the nation’s efforts to ensure clean air through short and long-term planning and program implementation. NARC is committed to ensuring regional councils have the tools and resources they need to address greenhouse gas and/or air quality concerns.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The federal government should:

- Adopt flexible policies to aid in the reduction of air pollutants, recognizing that there is no “one-size-fits-all” solution for air quality improvement and greenhouse gas reduction, and allow flexibility for local government implementation.
- Coordinate federal agencies regulating air quality and/or greenhouse gases reduction to avoid conflicting regulations and/or actions.

- Provide states, local governments and regional councils the incentives and resources to support cost effective planning and management programs to meet federal goals in air quality and greenhouse gas reduction.
- Allow states, local governments, and regions to set reasonable standards and establish flexible mechanisms to achieve federal standards for air quality improvement and greenhouse gas reduction.
- Encourage the use of reasonable, market-based solutions to reduce carbon emissions.
- Direct a portion of proceeds from any market-based program to units of local government and multi-jurisdictional regional organizations to support emissions reduction efforts.
- Encourage the integration of greenhouse gases reduction and/or air quality improvement strategies into plans that build livable communities.
- Regularly evaluate the National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) to ensure they are necessary and attainable and ensure NAAQS standards are accompanied by proven technologies and sufficient time to assist in implementation.
- Support state, regional and local efforts to work towards attainment and encourage EPA to recognize the role of international emissions transport, especially as it affects ozone nonattainment areas.
- Include opportunities for Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) and regional councils to incorporate sustainability practices (e.g. linking transportation and land use planning) in their plans to reduce criteria pollutants and/or greenhouse gases.
- Encourage and give credit for voluntary reductions in air pollution.
- Encourage educational efforts in communities that show not only does air quality impact our environment, but also has an effect on our public health and regional economies.
- Support the development and application of technologies that will reduce, capture and/or store greenhouse gases and other air pollutants.
- Encourage strategies to buffer the effect of greenhouse gases reduction (e.g. energy cost increases) on lower-income populations.
- Authorize and increase funding for the Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Program (CMAQ) with priority to nonattainment areas.
- Increase the flexibility of Buy-America requirements for CMAQ program investments so that local governments can continue their efforts to transition to alternative-fuel fleets and ensure that the projects which are most cost-effective in improving air quality can be funded
- Continue research on the effects of greenhouse gases and air quality issues.
- Direct funding to MPOs to implement strategies that enable attainment of federally-mandated performance measures related to transportation and air quality.

RESILIENCE

The National Association of Regional Councils (NARC) recognizes the importance of developing community resilience to natural disasters and the impacts of climate change. Federal support for local and regional involvement in resilience efforts as well as funding for these efforts is critical. Climate Change and climate related disasters have already had significant detrimental effects on the U.S. A 2017 report released by the United States Government Accountability Office on potential economic effects to the country from climate change, indicates that climate

change has cost U.S. taxpayers more than \$350 billion² over the past decade. The 2018 National Climate Assessment developed by the Department of Commerce and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration identifies more than a dozen human welfare, societal, and environmental domains in which climate change impacts are expected, ranging from water, to agriculture, ecosystems, and air quality.³

RECOMMENDATIONS

The federal government should:

- Increase coordination between the multiple federal agencies conducting resilience work, including the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the Economic Development Administration (EDA), and other agencies whose involvement can improve community resilience.
- Develop more pro-active approaches to mitigation for future disasters.
- Increase flexibility for mitigation funding from HUD, particularly to update hazard mitigation plans that smaller communities may not have otherwise had the resources to complete.
- Reform the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) to better address the demands placed upon it by the increasing frequency of flood events, particularly through policies that would reduce unsustainable development in high-risk flood areas and improve resiliency requirements for land uses, buildings, and infrastructure systems built or rebuilt after flood-related catastrophes.
- Support regional resilience data collection and analysis, modelling, and mapping projects.
- Increase funding for regional planning to address inland and coastal area flooding, including flood mapping, data collection, risk assessment and future rainfall analyses.
- Identify performance standards governing increased and consistent frequency for comprehensive flood map revisions or updates based on magnitudes of flood risk, changing weather patterns, and/or urban development growth rates.
- Authorize and increase funding of the Community Development Block Grant Disaster Recovery Program (CDBG-DR) and Community Development Block Grant Mitigation Program (CDBG-MIT)
- Include flexibility and opportunities in Federal funds to allow proactive approaches to mitigate stormwater runoff and minimize flood risk, including allowing for purchase of open space, implementation of green infrastructure, and conducting comprehensive planning approaches and updates to maps upstream of urbanizing areas and within urban areas.
- Provide funding and resources to regional councils to engage in preventative floodplain management through effective control measures.
- Provide funding and resources to regional councils to assist their member cities and counties to adopt higher standards for watershed management for new development

² U.S. Government Accountability Office. “Climate Change: Information on Potential Economic Effects Could Help Guide Federal Efforts to Reduce Fiscal Exposure.” September 2017 Report. Highlights.

³ USGCRP, 2018: Impacts, Risks, and Adaptation in the United States: Fourth National Climate Assessment, Volume II

- Create a State Flood Mitigation Revolving Fund program to use federal funding to capitalize state revolving funds that would support local and regional efforts to reduce flood risk.

SOLID WASTE MANAGEMENT

The National Association of Regional Councils (NARC) recognizes that waste management is a serious national issue with significant environmental and public health effects. Local and regional governments play an integral role in waste management, particularly regarding waste reduction, recycling, and education.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The federal government should:

- Support regional involvement in solid waste planning and management to ensure adequate landfill capacity for growing regions and encourage sustainable materials management into the future.
- Fund local and regional public education programs that promote participation in activities that lower the volume of household hazardous waste and reduce illegal dumping.
- Fund local and regional public education programs to facilitate long-term increases in source reduction, reuse, and recycling and reduce the volume of contaminated recycling materials.
- Fund local and regional programs to expand reuse and recycling of construction and demolition materials.
- Address recycling market challenges and support local and regional governments facing the financial impacts of market challenges.
- Promote innovative approaches to establish new product markets through development of technologies and processes that maximize waste value and create economic opportunity
- Support innovative reuse of landfill and waste disposal sites including energy recovery, renewable energy, renewable natural gas, and redevelopment opportunities.

BROWNFIELDS

The National Association of Regional Councils (NARC) supports federal funding to redevelop abandoned and under-utilized sites which have been contaminated or are believed to have been contaminated through previous industrial or commercial activities. Regional councils often play a key role in the development of brownfields projects, particularly as members and coordinators of brownfields coalitions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The federal government should:

- Authorize and increase funding of the Brownfields Redevelopment program, encouraging regional participation in the program.
- Increase flexibility for local and regional governments so that they can adapt the use of awarded brownfields funding to respond to marketplace developments.
- Encourage the EPA and USDA to collaborate to increase the redevelopment of brownfields in rural areas.

PARKS & NATURAL AREAS

The National Association of Regional Councils (NARC) supports local and regional programs to plan for and develop parks, recreation areas, and recreation and activity programs. Through planning, programming, and the development of local public and private partnerships, regional organizations can help create and improve spaces and programs that increase the livability of areas the health and wellness of residents and the resilience of communities to natural disasters and climate-related impacts.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The federal government should:

- Support regional planning projects to develop quality parks, open spaces, and recreational and education programs.
- Fully fund the U.S. Forest Service’s Urban and Community Forestry Program.
- Provide surplus federal property to local governments for parks and recreational purposes at no cost or reduced costs.
- Maintain “State Side” funding through the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) for matching grants to states and local governments for the acquisition of park lands and other open space to be developed into public outdoor recreation areas and facilities.
- Provide funding for regional forestry initiatives including the development of urban forest master plans and the planting and maintenance of trees.
- Support local flexibility to create conservation corridors, develop conservation planning ordinances, and use funds to purchase land to use as open space.
- Support regional efforts to combat invasive species and increase coordination between agencies working on invasive species management.

CLIMATE CHANGE

The National Association of Regional Councils (NARC) recognizes the wide range of impacts that changes in the global climate may have on human health, air quality, water quality, and natural ecosystems. The impacts of climate change are experienced at the regional scale and do not adhere to jurisdictional boundaries. Consequently, NARC believes that solutions for climate change mitigation and adaption must be developed at the regional scale.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The federal government should:

- Fund local and regional initiatives to mitigate the impacts of climate change and adapt to climate impacts including flooding, drought, fire, and other extreme weather events.
- Fund the use of GIS and regional scenario planning tools for climate mitigation and adaptation activities.
- Support local and regional efforts to measure greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) such as the development of GHG Inventories.
- Support climate data collection and sharing, such that the data can be used at the regional scale.

- Direct funding to regional councils to evaluate, plan, and prepare for the impacts of sea-level rise, rising water levels and flooding across inland areas -including the Great Lakes region.
- Direct funding to regional councils to evaluate, plan, and prepare for the impacts of urban heat island effects.
- Support continued research into the effects of climate change.
- Provide resources to support regions that absorb persons displaced by natural disasters.
- Ensure that climate efforts are focused on equity and direct resources to areas that have been, or will be, hit hardest by the effects of climate change.

ENERGY

The National Association of Regional Councils (NARC) supports local and regional programs to plan for and implement a diverse, clean, and secure energy future. These regional programs should inform a coordinated and integrated national energy policy vision. Regional councils and MPOs play a key role in implementing national energy policies and technologies across the country. Through long-range planning, public-private partnerships, and the development of locally-grown solutions, regional councils can help transform the market and set the nation on a course for a clean energy future.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The federal government should:

- Promote a balanced commitment to conserving energy, protecting the environment, developing new technologies, and strengthening the economy.
- Encourage conservation and increased energy efficiency.
- Authorize the Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant (EECBG) Program to provide funding to cities, counties, and states to develop energy efficiency and renewable energy projects.
- Support the use of alternative, renewable, and diverse energy sources, including wind, solar, wave, biofuels, geothermal and natural gas, and ensure that financial incentives for renewable energy production are structured to best encourage the development of such industries.
- Support enhanced energy transmission and “smart” grid technologies and programs.
- Encourage the integration of energy into plans that build livable/sustainable communities.
- Support local and regional efforts to develop plans and strategies to mitigate potential negative consequences of new energy resource facility development.
- Urge the expansion of green jobs through workforce training in emerging energy and environmental skills.
- Support state, regional and local programs aimed at reducing high energy costs.
- Promote efforts that improve energy efficiency and conservation in the transportation and building sectors, and provide funding directly to local and regional governments.
- Support local and regional involvement in the development of energy efficient building standards.
- Promote the use of lower pollution vehicles, such as alternative fuel vehicles, hybrids, and high efficiency vehicles and support the development of fueling infrastructure for alternative fuel vehicles.



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- Increase finance opportunities for energy efficiency upgrades, including green banks and PACE financing.
- Support the incorporation of grid resilience in resilience planning.