

SRBC Urges Congress To Restore Funding For Susquehanna System

NORTH EAST, Md. —The Susquehanna River Basin Commission (SRBC) recently approved a resolution calling on the U.S. Congress to restore funding for the Susquehanna Flood Forecasting and Warning System (System).

The U.S. House of Representatives Nov. 25 unexpectedly eliminated the \$1.3 million appropriation for the System, while instructing the National Weather Service (NWS) to fund the Susquehanna System out of the agency's budget.

The SRBC commissioners — representing the federal govern-

ment and the states of New York, Pennsylvania, and Maryland — cited the risks of consolidating the Susquehanna System's funding into the NWS budget. The SRBC resolution (No. 2003 — 12) states, "This action by the U.S. House forces the System to compete with the nationwide demands placed on the NWS budget and is therefore likely to result in a reduction in the level of funding for the System, further compromising its already tenuous finances."

SRBC Executive Director Paul Swartz noted that the Sus-

quehanna River Basin is one of the most flood-prone watersheds in the entire country, with average annual flood damages totaling nearly \$150 million.

The Susquehanna River Basin Flood Forecasting and Warning System, which has been in operation for 17 years, is a technological system that uses radar and a network of stream and rain gages to provide the data that are used to forecast river levels and issue more accurate early flood warnings.

"We can not stress enough the importance of this System to the Susquehanna basin," said

Swartz. "In 2003, alone, six people have lost their lives to flooding. Early warnings give people and businesses the time they need to secure their property and then get themselves out of harm's way."

Swartz said, "The Susquehanna System is an extremely cost-effective flood protection measure, reducing the average annual flood damages in the Susquehanna basin by \$32 million. That represents a 20-to-1 benefit-cost ratio. For every dollar invested by the federal government, the System saves \$20 through reduced flood dam-

ages and reduced payouts through the federal flood insurance program."

While the SRBC resolution calls for the line-item appropriation to be restored as the first course of action, if that proves unsuccessful for FY-04, SRBC is calling on: (1) the National Weather Service to fully fund the \$1.3 million for the Susquehanna System from the agency's FY-04 budget, as directed in the House Consolidated Appropriations Act; and (2) the federal government to restore the appropriation for the Susquehanna System in FY-05 and subsequent fiscal years.

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