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Continuing Authorities Programs (CAPs) of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) can study and construct certain water resources projects of limited size, cost, scope, and complexity without project-specific congressional authorization, subject to the availability of appropriations. USACE performs this work under its programmatic authorities, known as *continuing authorities programs* (CAPs). There are CAPs for various purposes, as shown in **Table 1**. CAPs typically are referred to by the section number of the law authorizing the CAP. For most CAP authorities, Congress has limited CAP projects' federal cost (although at times it has authorized project-

specific exceptions). In some cases, Congress has provided for certain CAP project costs to be undertaken at a higher federal cost share (e.g., 33 U.S.C. §2310 for territories and tribes, and 33 U.S.C. §2267b for post-disaster watersheds). In addition, Congress authorized a Community Revitalization Program for USACE to carry out projects at 100% federal cost under various CAPs for economically disadvantaged communities (§165(a) of WRDA 2020, as amended, 33 U.S.C. §2281c); USACE assigned the program supplemental funding in 2023, solicited project proposals, and announced selection of 12 projects in 2024.

Table 1. CAPs Funded by FY2026 Enacted Annual Appropriations (P.L. 119-74) in Millions of Dollars

CAP	Project Types	Nonfederal Construction Cost Share	Federal Limit per Project	Annual Federal Program Limit	FY2026 Annual Approp.
§14	Emergency streambank erosion and shoreline protection of public works and nonprofit services (33 U.S.C. §701r)	35%	\$15.0	\$50.0	\$1.0
§103	Shore protection/beach erosion control (33 U.S.C. §426g)	35%	\$15.0	\$62.5	\$0.0
§107	Navigation improvement (33 U.S.C. §577)	Varies ^a	\$15.0	\$62.5	\$6.5
§111	Mitigation (and prevention) of shore damage by federal navigation projects (33 U.S.C. §426i)	Same as the project causing the damage	\$15.0	No limit specified	\$3.1
§204	Beneficial use of dredged material (33 U.S.C. §2326) ^b	35% ^b	\$15.0 ^b	\$62.5	\$18.0
§205	Flood control projects, including ice jam prevention (33 U.S.C. §701s)	35% for nonstructural; 35%-50% for structural	\$15.0	\$90.0	\$1.0
§206	Aquatic ecosystem restoration and drought resilience through wetlands restoration or invasive species removal (33 U.S.C. §2330)	35%, except 15% for anadromous fish projects	\$15.0	\$75.0	\$0.5
§208	Removal of obstructions and clearing channels for flood control (33 U.S.C. §701g)	35%	\$1.0 ^c	\$15.0	\$0.0
§1135	Project modifications for improvement of the environment and drought resiliency (33 U.S.C. §2309a)	25%	\$15.0	\$62.0	\$3.0
Total FY2026 CAP appropriation in P.L. 119-74					\$33.1

Sources: CRS, based on statutes; U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, "Planning: Continuing Authorities Program," Engineer Pamphlet 1105-2-58; explanatory statement accompanying P.L. 119-74, and Water Resources Development Act of 2024 (P.L. 118-272, Division A).

Notes: CAP = continuing authorities program.

- Cost share varies based on depth: at the time of construction, 10% for improvements less than 20 ft. deep, 25% between 20 ft. and 55 ft., and 50% for more than 55 ft., plus an additional 10% over a period not to exceed 30 years. Cost share is 50% for recreational navigation.
- Projects consist of regional sediment management to reduce storm damage, protect aquatic ecosystems, and improve environmental conditions (§204) and beneficial use of dredged material from federal water resources projects (§204(d)). Limit of 35% nonfederal cost share for costs beyond the base disposal plan costs (which is 100% federal cost of the least costly typical disposal), \$15.0 million federal limit per construction activity, and \$15.0 million per beneficial use/placement under §204(d). Multiple placements allowed under §204(d).
- \$1.0 million limit for any tributary in a fiscal year.

Appropriations for CAPs

As part of the annual Energy and Water Development appropriations process, each CAP is typically funded by a line item in the USACE Construction account. USACE often has discretion regarding which CAP projects to fund using the appropriations provided to each program. At times, Congress has specified project-level funding through community project funding/congressionally directed spending (CPF/CDS) items (e.g., in FY2022-FY2024 and FY2026 annual appropriations). Of the \$33.1 million that CAPs received in FY2026 annual appropriations, Congress directed a total of \$9.17 million to nine specific CAP projects. Under the FY2025 full-year continuing resolution (P.L. 119-4), the Trump Administration funded one CAP project. As directed by P.L. 118-158, the Administration used USACE FY2025 supplemental funds to assign almost \$100 million to projects under flood-related CAPs (§14, §205). For FY2027, President Trump's request included CAP funding for Section 204 alone, while H.Rept. 119-667 accompanying H.R. 9022 recommended some funding for all the CAPs in **Table 1**.

Initiating a CAP Project

To initiate a CAP project, USACE typically requires a nonfederal sponsor (e.g., local government or nonprofit entity with local government consent) to send a letter to the local USACE district describing the water resources problem and requesting assistance with a project. (Many USACE district websites include letter templates.) USACE determines whether there is federal interest in a project, if the project fits under a CAP authority, and whether funding is available. Although USACE does not need any additional authorization to perform projects under CAPs, Congress has referenced specific CAP projects in some omnibus USACE water resources authorization bills.

Project Process: Study and Construction

Once funded, CAP projects generally take two to three years for the study phase. The construction phase often takes two to five years. During the study phase, USACE identifies various approaches to address the problem and develops initial cost estimates, environmental impact analyses, and a real estate evaluation, among other project formulation actions. The study phase typically consists of developing a *feasibility report* as the decision document, in which USACE identifies the preferred project plan. For CAP projects, project design and construction can immediately follow the study phase (i.e., without project-specific congressional authorization), subject to the availability of appropriations. Design and construction include final project design and specifications, real estate acquisition, project contracting, and physical construction.

Nonfederal Responsibilities

The CAP authorities require the nonfederal sponsor to share project study and construction costs and to assume other responsibilities, including obtaining real estate interests. The CAP study phase is initially federally funded up to \$100,000. Thereafter, the remaining study cost share for most CAPs is 50% nonfederal, with some exceptions. For example, studies under the Section 204 CAP require no nonfederal cost share. For studies under Section 111, after the first \$100,000 in costs (which are federally funded),

costs are shared at the same ratio as construction of the navigation project requiring the mitigation or prevention of shoreline damage.

Before construction begins, the nonfederal sponsor and USACE sign a *project partnership agreement*. Construction cost sharing varies by CAP authority (**Table 1**). Nonfederal sponsors often may fulfill cost-share contributions with cash; work-in-kind credit; and/or lands, easements, rights-of-way, relocations, and disposal areas. Upon construction completion, USACE transfers the project to the sponsor, which is responsible for operations, maintenance, and most repairs and rehabilitation (except for the general navigation feature improvements under the §107 CAP).

Alternative Delivery Pilot

In Section 1107 of P.L. 118-272, Congress authorized a 10-year pilot program for “alternative delivery” of 25 CAP projects for FY2025 through FY2032. Alternative delivery may include the nonfederal sponsor leading the project and being paid the federal share of project costs at the start of construction. The authority also allows alternative processes for real estate crediting/auditing, contracting options for design and construction, and use of return on federal investment for the project's economic justification.

Other Small Project Authorities

Apart from the recently funded CAPs, Congress has established, but not funded or not funded recently, additional CAPs and CAP-related authorities, and authorities with characteristics similar to CAPs for small projects. For example, Section 1108 of WRDA 2024 authorized a new CAP for projects with federal costs up to \$10 million to control, retain, and reuse stormwater associated with flood control; it has not been funded. For a discussion of these, see CRS Report R47946, *Process for U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) Projects*.

Policy Considerations and Legislation

CAP-related oversight and policy considerations include how efficiently and effectively USACE is implementing CAP projects with available federal funds. There is little publicly available data on how long CAP projects take from initiation to completion, what is being accomplished with appropriated funds, and how many nonfederal sponsors request CAP projects. Two Water Resources Development Act of 2026 bills address CAPs. For example, H.R. 9497 would authorize a new CAP for improving certain flood control projects (e.g., USACE-constructed levees), and would modify a small water storage authority (33 U.S.C. §2347c) to create a drought resiliency CAP. Division A of S. 4949 would establish “simplified evaluation procedures” for CAP projects and require that CAP projects be categorically excluded from documentation requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (42 U.S.C. §4321 et seq.), among other CAP authority amendments.

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