The Delaware Way could be the key to tackling climate change nationally

April is Earth Month and from the State House to the White House, it's good to see robust action on water, climate and infrastructure.

Constitutionally, Delaware is the First State and so is in water. Sitting on the Delmarva Peninsula at 60 feet above sea level, Delaware is the lowest state with a quarter of its land in floodplain and a 130-mile coast with the nation's cleanest ocean beaches. Twenty years ago, Delaware passed laws creating the Water Supply Coordinating Council after the 1995-2002 drought emergency and Nutrient Management Commission for farms to protect the Chesapeake and inland bays and in 2000 Bill Clinton signed the bipartisan White Clay Creek Wild and Scenic River Act sponsored by then-Sen. Joe Biden and Rep. Joe Pitts, a Pennsylvania Republican, to protect the interstate watershed that supplies drinking water to a fifth of the First State's residents. These cooperative water programs from a generation ago are good examples of the "Delaware Way" of getting along as a model for the nation.

Strategic U.S. water policy can tackle the four great challenges of humanity — climate change, the pandemic, racial injustice and the

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The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the U.S. Navy Seabees should work together to build climate defenses. The Interior Department should protect 10% of U.S. waters by 2030 and spend up off shore wind leases to power 50,000 homes by 2030. AmeriCorps funding should be quadrupled to put young people on the ground under the 1998 Community Service Trust Act. NASA should invest the 4% of neighborhoods disadvantaged by poverty and pollution, convert CCAW from racing to restore beaches to Tidal Wetlands and protect biodiversity streams that supply drinking water to 100 million Americans.

Climate change is real! Because institutions like Wall Street, the Fed and the U.S. military all take it seriously. The IRS is streamlining 40 green energy tax incentives to spur wind, solar and EV investment. In 2020 by 5-0 vote, the Fed joined the 75 central banks in the Network for Greening the Financial System to restrain economic risk from climate change. In 2009 the Pentagon warned Congress about national security and climate risks where two-thirds of U.S. military bases are exposed to flooding, drought and wildfire. Catastrophic stress caused a record $22 billion in damages in 2020 and without FEMA intervention could bankrupt the trillion-dollar floodplain mortgage market held by Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac.

Sound U.S. water policy relies on principles of law, economics, governance, science. Federal water policy peaked in the 1950s, 1960s and 1980s with the Wild & Scenic Rivers Act, NEPA, Clean Water Act and Safe Drinking Water Act and now a new environmental era is propped by the $900 million 2020 Land and Water Conservation Fund Act, which passed 73-25 in the U.S. Senate.

Watersheds are at risk and farms that support a $786 billion economy from brewing/baking, bird watching and after the 2008 recession the American Recovery Act (ARRA) funded 14.4 million jobs cutting unemployment by 1%. Since rivers cross state lines — resulting in hydro politics — EPA should restructure the watershed initiative targeted by former President George W. Bush that invested $8 billion to restore the Chesapeake Bay in Delaware and Pennsylvania. To train scientists at workhouse, the U.S. should tap the Congressionally-designated National Institute of Water and Technology authorized by President Lyndon B. Johnson's 1964 Water Resources Research Act at land grant universities including the University of Delaware and Delaware State University.

Under our federal system, U.S. water policy is applied by the White House, Congress and 20 federal water offices in 10 cabinet departments with a combined $30 billion budget — Defense, Interior, EPA, USDA, Energy, Commerce, USGS, Homeland Security, NOAA and State. Here are some ways those departments can leverage their resources in relation to water infrastructure:

- The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the U.S. Navy Seabees should work together to build climate defenses.
- The Interior Department should protect 10% of U.S. waters by 2030 and spend up off shore wind leases to power 50,000 homes by 2030.
- AmeriCorps funding should be quadrupled to put young people on the ground under the 1998 Community Service Trust Act.
- NASA should invest the 4% of neighborhoods disadvantaged by poverty and pollution, convert CCAW from racing to restore beaches to Tidal Wetlands and protect biodiversity streams that supply drinking water to 100 million Americans.
- USDA should use the farm bill and EPA's Community Quality Grant program to fund regenerative agriculture (organic soil and cover crops) on 20% of the U.S. to sequester 750 million tons of carbon.
- The U.S. Forest Service should restore 30% of the nation to store carbon with benefits of $400 billion/year.
- As the Federal climate center, NOAA in Commerce should be elevated to be on par with EPA and NASA.

Reorganized Homeland Security after 9/11, FEMA has proved more responsive — and should remain so.
- The U.S. Coast Guard is a ready coastal agency — as we saw in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina — and should lead climate response in this maritime nation.
- The DOE projects wind and solar will cause nuclear and coal to be replaced by 2035.
- AmeriCorps funding should be quadrupled to put young people on the ground under the 1998 Community Service Trust Act.
- NASA monitors the biosphere with a $2 billion satellite budget that should be ramped up.
- The State Department should reengage in 1991 UN Law of the Sea, 1997 Kyoto and 2017 Paris climate treaties negotiated as the air warmed 3 degrees F and CO2 emissions rose 200 trillion tons.
- To guide U.S. water policy, the Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) should appoint an Assistant Director of Water and Climate in the White House.
- U.S. infrastructure investment makes sense for the economy and ecology because clean water — and air — is neither red or blue, it's clear.
- Carol Stream McAloney, a former EPA assistant secretary, is director of the University of Delaware Water Resources Center.