

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

June 22, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Speaker Pelosi and Minority Leader McCarthy,

As members of the House Oceans Caucus, we recognize that our ocean is an economic force. According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), coastal communities contribute \$7.6 trillion to the U.S. economy annually, representing 46 percent of the nation's economic output. There are approximately 149,000 ocean-dependent businesses in our country that employ more than three million people. As our efforts continue to confront the economic and health consequences of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, Congress cannot neglect the needs of our coastal communities and the blue economy. We respectfully request that you work with the respective Committees to provide robust federal investments in coastal restoration and resilience, ocean data and monitoring, and research and extension efforts in any future recovery package to help rebuild our blue economy and create good-paying jobs.

Healthy coastal and marine habitats are important for our society and our economy. Unfortunately, even before the COVID-19 pandemic devastated the economies of our coastal communities, many were already struggling to survive. As unemployment rates continue to skyrocket at unprecedented rates, workers desperately need our help. Investing in the blue economy will support the creation of good-paying jobs to help more people get back to work as stay-at-home orders are slowly lifted across the country in the coming weeks and months. Until visitors can safely return to many of these communities, we need to provide a vital lifeline to create new and ongoing economic opportunities.

Coastal Restoration and Resilience

In 2009, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) provided NOAA's Office of Habitat Conservation with \$167 million to restore coastal habitats and stimulate economic growth. NOAA quickly executed a competitive solicitation and selection process for the ARRA funds, and received approximately \$3 billion in eligible proposals. Even with the limited funds available, NOAA supported 125 restoration projects across the country. According to a May 2017 NOAA Technical Memorandum, these projects restored more than 25,584 acres of coastal habitat, improved 677 miles of streams of fish habitat, removed more than 433,397 tons of debris from coastal habitats, and created more than 2,280 jobs. NOAA's coastal and marine restoration projects supported, on average, 15 jobs per million dollars spent, and up to 30 jobs per million dollars invested in labor intensive restoration projects, like building oyster reefs and removing invasive species. Restoration and resilience projects have the capability to rapidly provide direct, indirect, and induced economic benefits for coastal communities. We must not overlook the ecological and job benefits of restoration and resilience projects as we respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.

We urge you to provide no less than \$10 billion for coastal restoration and resilience programs in any recovery package. These funds should be used for projects that are either shovel-ready or in the

pipeline, that will provide ecological benefit to coastal and marine ecosystems, and that will create good-paying jobs. Specifically, we urge you to:

- Direct NOAA to establish a National Coastal Resilience Fund and Resiliency and Habitat Grant Program, led by the Office of Habitat Conservation, to distribute the majority of these funds within 60 days of enactment. NOAA should be provided administrative funds to provide technical assistance to interested applicants – including state, local, and Tribal governments, non-profits, and universities – that can begin work, including pre-feasibility assessments, within three months of receiving federal funds. The Office of Habitat Conservation should make applicant and geographical diversity a priority. NOAA should balance investments in shovel-ready, mid-term, and long-term projects and give adequate consideration to job creation potential. NOAA should give priority to applications that improve adaptation to climate change, including blue carbon sequestration potential, and natural infrastructure that can protect coastal communities from sea level rise, coastal storms, or flooding. Additionally, priority should be given to restoration of habitat to protect or recover threatened or endangered species and to the removal of marine debris.
- Allocate \$166.5 million for the National Estuarine Research Reserves (NERRS) to support coastal and estuarine projects across the country. NERRS is an established network of 29 sites dedicated to the effective, science-based management of coastal and estuarine environments. The NERRS system currently protects more than 1.3 million acres of coastal habitat. With an additional \$166.5 million, NERRS has identified projects that could generate approximately 2,388 jobs. Congress should also temporarily waive the matching requirements for NERRS through the length of the national emergency for the supplemental appropriations.
- Invest in NOAA Coastal Resilience Grants, a highly competitive and underfunded program that provides valuable support for our coastal communities. Grants can be used to help coastal communities respond to coastal erosion and sea level rise, better predict storm losses, undertake regional initiatives to manage shoreline resources, restore habitats essential to fisheries and marine wildlife, and make improvements to coastal infrastructure that will help protect against future hurricanes. Supplemental funding could further support jobs in restoration of coastal habitat and strengthen proactive planning initiatives.
- Strengthen support for NOAA Coastal Zone Management Grants. According to NOAA, over the last ten years, the National Coastal Zone Management Program has protected more than 64,000 acres of habitat and restored an additional 75,000 acres. Much of the funding is passed directly to local governments, universities, and non-governmental organizations to carry out projects that benefit coastal communities. Supplemental funding could better support states that have lost annual revenue during the pandemic, effectively mitigate coastal hazards, protect coastal water quality, restore habitat, and promote coastal economic development.
- Increase investments in the NOAA Coral Reef Conservation Program. Healthy coral reefs can serve as natural infrastructure that protects coastal communities from severe weather, shoreline erosion, and flooding. In recent years coral reefs have been destroyed as ocean acidification and warming temperatures result in mass bleaching events. Supplemental funding could support the restoration of coral reef habitat, improve the resilience of coral, and strengthen coral health and survival.

Ocean Data and Monitoring

The ocean covers more than 70 percent of the planet's surface, but despite our intrinsic connection to our ocean we know very little about what is beneath its surface. We have better maps of the Moon than we do of the ocean floor. According to NOAA, less than twenty percent of the global

ocean is currently mapped, and the ocean data that we do have is not always easily accessible. Additionally, coastal communities, including fisheries, rely on accurate ocean data and monitoring for information on ocean acidification, forecasting of harmful algal blooms and hypoxia, tsunami preparedness, navigation, and port security. Congress can strengthen ocean data collection and monitoring efforts, as well as improve the coordination of current federal and international programs by including the following priorities in legislation:

- Establish an Advanced Research Project Agency–Ocean (ARPA-O) to overcome the long-term and high-risk barriers in the development of ocean technologies. Congress has established precedent for similar bold, visionary leadership to advance other fields in previous recovery packages. In ARRA, Congress provided the first federal investment in the Advanced Research Projects Agency–Energy (ARPA-E). Today, we have the opportunity to advance provisions from H.R. 3548, the BLUE GLOBE Act to establish an ARPA-O to accelerate the collection, management, and dissemination of data on the ocean, Great Lakes, bays, estuaries, and coasts. Congress should direct the NOAA Administrator to enter into an agreement with the National Academy of Sciences to assess the potential for and feasibility of establishing an ARPA-O and provide sufficient funding for this assessment. Creating an ARPA-O could help protect and preserve one of our planet’s greatest natural resources, and support job creation as we rapidly accelerate ocean data collection and monitoring.
- Invest at least \$100 million in supplemental funding for the Integrated Ocean Observing System (IOOS). The eleven IOOS regional coastal observing networks use satellites, buoys, underwater gliders, and tide gauges to deliver accurate and continuous data on our ocean and coasts. The COVID-19 pandemic has limited the ability for IOOS to repair, maintain, and upgrade sensors and platforms, and service aging moorings and gliders that provide critical data, particularly on weather forecasting as we begin what is projected to be a challenging hurricane season. \$25 million in short-term supplemental funding would allow IOOS to restore, sustain, and improve the resiliency of observations for weather forecasting, marine operations, and search and rescue missions. An additional \$75 million in supplemental appropriations would support IOOS in achieving full resiliency, and support job creation through investments to address gaps and weaknesses in the system's infrastructure.

Research and Extension Efforts

As we continue to focus our efforts on responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, we cannot lose sight of other crises our planet is facing, including climate change. The health of our ocean reflects the health of our planet, and we need to continue to provide robust investments in our federal research enterprise to better understand the effects of climate change and relevant adaptation measures. Additionally, the partnerships between researchers and our fisheries could help provide economic relief to a sector that has been devastated by the pandemic and is lacking adequate support from Congress. In the short-term, this should include:

- An additional \$100 million for the National Sea Grant College Program, which supports coastal and Great Lakes communities through research, extension, and education efforts. According to NOAA, in 2018 the Sea Grant program generated an estimated \$624 million in economic benefits and created or supported approximately 7,621 jobs. An additional \$100 million in supplemental appropriations could help Sea Grant expand their partnerships with federal, state, and local agencies and the private sector to actively assist local and regional stakeholders in the economic recovery process through technical assistance, research, and other extension services. This would be a particularly useful partnership to leverage to support fisheries that will quickly run out of the \$300 million in

fisheries disaster funding included in the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act and lack access to other direct assistance. Congress should also temporarily waive the matching requirements for Sea Grant through the length of the national emergency for the supplemental appropriations.

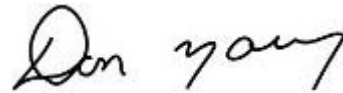
- Support for NOAA Research Laboratories to recognize the expenses that could be accrued in ramping down or suspending and eventually restarting federal research. Supplemental appropriations could support efforts to restart experiments that could not be completed because of the closure of research facilities, physical distancing limitations for researchers to conduct fieldwork, or missed seasonal opportunities. These funds could also help NOAA Research Laboratories advance their work in assessing the effects of COVID-19 on the environment.
- Robust investment in NOAA Cooperative Institutes, which facilitate and conduct multidisciplinary research. NOAA Cooperative Institutes are a collaborative effort between academic and non-profit research institutions. Supplemental funding would support innovative research, strengthen public education and outreach, and promote student and postdoctoral scientist involvement in NOAA-funded research to help train the next-generation of NOAA scientists.

By strengthening federal investments in coastal restoration and resilience, ocean data and monitoring, and research and extension efforts, we can protect our ocean and coastal ecosystems and support the creation of good-paying jobs in diverse sectors of our economy. We appreciate your consideration of our request and look forward to continuing to work with you to rebuild our blue economy and support our coastal communities in the economic recovery from COVID-19.

Sincerely,



Suzanne Bonamici
Member of Congress



Don Young
Member of Congress

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