

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 31, 2021

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
President of the United States of America
1600 Pennsylvania Ave NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Biden:

We appreciate your continued commitment to protecting the health of our ocean. Healthy coastal and marine ecosystems are important for our planet and our economy. According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), coastal communities contribute \$7.6 trillion to the U.S. economy annually. But many of our coastal communities are struggling through the coronavirus pandemic. As your Administration crafts a recovery package to build back better, we strongly urge you to include \$10 billion for coastal restoration and resilience projects to help revitalize our coastal communities and create good-paying jobs. We also urge you to support policies that strengthen our nation's ocean research efforts.

Thanks to your leadership during the Obama-Biden Administration, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) appropriated \$167 million for the NOAA Office of Habitat Conservation 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.

Restoration and resilience projects can rapidly provide economic benefits for coastal communities. According to a May 2017 NOAA Technical Memorandum, the projects funded using ARRA dollars 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 good-paying 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. More than a decade later, we must build on this success by investing in coastal restoration projects as we build back better from the COVID-19 pandemic.

We applaud your calls for conserving and restoring wetlands, developing green infrastructure, and advancing natural climate solutions. Healthy coastal ecosystems can remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and store it for centuries to millennia. According to the High Level Panel for a Sustainable Ocean Economy, the protection and restoration of coastal blue carbon ecosystems could prevent approximately one gigaton of carbon dioxide from entering the atmosphere by 2050. These ecosystems also provide

habitat for fisheries, improve biodiversity, protect shorelines from storms and sea level rise, and improve water quality.

By providing no less than \$10 billion for coastal restoration and resilience projects in the recovery package to build back better, we can support good-paying jobs in our coastal communities and advance natural climate solutions to protect our planet. These funds should be used for projects like blue carbon sequestration that improve adaptation to climate change; natural infrastructure to protect coastal communities from sea level rise, coastal storms, and flooding; the restoration of habitat to protect or recover threatened or endangered species, including fisheries; and efforts to remove marine debris. In distributing the funds, NOAA should balance investments in shovel-ready, mid-term, and long-term projects and give significant consideration to job creation potential. We would also encourage NOAA to make applicant and geographical diversity a priority.

These funds could also be used to support existing programs like the National Estuarine Research Reserve System, Coastal Resilience Grants, Coastal Zone Management Grants, and the Coral Reef Conservation Program. Many of these programs directly pass funds to local governments, universities, and non-governmental organizations to carry out projects that benefit coastal communities. Supplemental funding could be used to help efforts to respond to coastal erosion, restore habitats essential to fisheries and marine wildlife, and promote coastal economic development.

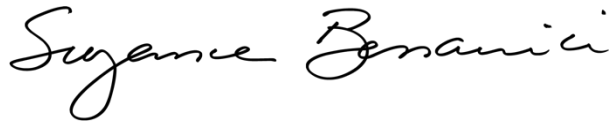
Additionally, as we begin the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development, we have a tremendous opportunity to scale up investments in ocean data and monitoring. According to NOAA, less than twenty percent of the global ocean is currently mapped, and the ocean data that we do have is not always publicly available, in a consistent format, or easily accessible. 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.

We encourage you to establish an Advanced Research Project Agency–Ocean (ARPA-O) to overcome the long-term and high-risk barriers in the development of ocean technologies as part of the recovery package. Congress has established precedent for similar bold, visionary leadership to advance other fields in previous recovery packages, including the first federal investment in the ARRA to create the Advanced Research Projects Agency–Energy (ARPA-E). An ARPA-O would complement existing efforts that would benefit from supplemental funding, including the eleven Integrated Ocean Observing System (IOOS) regional coastal observing networks, which deliver accurate and continuous data on our ocean and coasts. We can also leverage existing research and outreach efforts from the National Sea Grant College Program and the Cooperative Institutes to truly advance ocean science throughout the UN Decade.

By investing in coastal restoration and resilience projects and scaling up ocean data and monitoring, we can help the ocean and our communities recover from the crises at hand and support the creation of good-paying jobs in diverse sectors of our economy. Thank you

for your consideration of our request, and we look forward to our continued collaboration as we protect the health of our ocean and planet and build back better.

Sincerely,



Suzanne Bonamici
Member of Congress



Bill Posey
Member of Congress

CC:

Gina Raimondo, Secretary of Commerce

Gina McCarthy, National Climate Advisor

John Kerry, Special Presidential Envoy for Climate

Jane Lubchenco, Deputy Director for Climate and Environment, White House Office of Science and Technology Policy

