

Testimony from Congressman Bill Posey (Florida-08)

For the House Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations Subcommittee

Member Hearing Day on March 27, 2019

In support of the National Estuary Program and the Competitive Grants Program

Submitted March 20, 2019

Thank you, Ms. Chairwoman and Ranking Member, for the opportunity to testify today to support fully funding the National Estuary Program.

My request is for a national priority, but it is also very close to home. I live with my family on the Atlantic Coast of Florida. My District is bounded on the east by the Indian River Lagoon. The Indian River Lagoon is North America's most biodiverse estuary. The Lagoon is home to over 4000 animal and plant species, including manatees, dolphins, sea turtles, and several species of sea grass.

As the name implies, our estuary is a lagoon – meaning that it's an estuary separated from the ocean by barrier islands. Inlets from the ocean provide an exchange of waters between the lagoon and the sea. Our lagoon needs tides and storm rain to avoid stagnation. We know that this flushing is limited, especially in the northern end of the lagoon in my district. While the lagoon is 156 miles long, it's only a half mile to five miles in width and averages just three feet in depth. Our lagoon is a wonderful nursery for sea life, but its physical features make it especially vulnerable to environmental threats.

We depend on all the help we can get to protect and restore the functions of our lagoon. This objective is not merely aesthetic. My home has a vibrant tourism and fishing industry that depends on the lagoon. When the lagoon suffers so do my constituents. The struggle to preserve the Indian River Lagoon is a fight for our economic well-being.

More is at stake. Preserving the natural functions of our lagoon is an ethical matter. The great naturalist, Aldo Leopold, wrote about a land ethic by which he meant a conservation ethic. He said, “All ethics so far evolved rest upon a single premise: that the individual is a member of a community of interdependent parts. The land ethic simply enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants and animals, or collectively the land.” Our community includes the lagoon, and we are part of the lagoon community. Taking care of the lagoon not only takes care of us, but it’s the right thing to do.

The story of my District and the Indian River Lagoon plays out along our entire national coastline. The entire U.S. coast depends on the health of estuaries. More than half of the U.S. population lives in coastal areas, with coastal watershed counties providing an estimated 69 million U.S. jobs and contributing an estimated \$7.9 trillion to the GDP annually. That’s why I partnered with Congresswoman Suzanne Bonamaci to co-found the Congressional Estuary Caucus to work to advance policies that preserve and restore our estuaries, to support sustained authorization and funding of the National Estuary Program, and to help support other efforts like research and development that contribute to healthy estuaries.

I'm pleased to be here today as Co-chair of the Congressional Estuary Caucus and to submit to you my request for funding for the National Estuary Program.

This great program is truly a national response regionally deployed. The NEP is really 28 unique, voluntary programs under the Clean Water Act that seeks to protect, restore, and improve estuaries of national significance. Each individual designated estuary mobilizes its own local community in a collaborative, non-regulatory investment strategy that meets local needs while contributing to national objectives. For every federal dollar, the designated regional estuary programs leverage the federal participation with \$19 in local funds to protect and improve coastal environments, communities, assets of national significance, and economies. That's great performance for the way we should pursue national programs – federal support with local delivery.

I respectfully ask that as you develop the FY2020 Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, the Committee fully fund the NEP at the authorized level of \$750,000 for each of the 28 estuaries, and fund the competitive grants program at \$4 million.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to support the health of our precious national estuary resources.