

June 15, 2022

The Honorable Raul Grijalva
Chairman
House Committee on Natural Resources
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Bruce Westerman
Ranking Member
House Committee on Natural Resources
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Jared Huffman
Subcommittee Chairman
House Committee on Natural Resources
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Cliff Bentz
Subcommittee Ranking Member
House Committee on Natural Resources
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Grijalva, Ranking Member Westerman, Subcommittee Chairman Huffman, Subcommittee Ranking Member Bentz, and all Members of the House Natural Resources Subcommittee on Water, Oceans, and Wildlife:

On behalf of 30 National Estuarine Research Reserves and more than 36,000 community friend and foundation members and volunteers around the country, the National Estuarine Research Reserve Association (NERRA) writes to express its support for H.R. 7801, the Resilient Coasts and Estuaries Act, being heard before the House Natural Resources Subcommittee on Water, Oceans, and Wildlife on June 16, 2022.

NERRA supports H.R. 7801 for its proposal to increase coastal and Great Lakes resilience by strengthening the Coastal Zone Management Act (CZMA), the nation's first and only national land use planning law. Enacted in 1972, this landmark legislation provides a framework for federal state partnerships that allow states to maintain their rights to manage their coasts, while receiving much needed support from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). The spirit of the CZMA is embodied by the National Estuarine Research System (NERRS)—a network of Reserves that protect more than 1.4 million acres of cherished estuarine lands and waters in 24 states and Puerto Rico. Nationally significant and locally relevant, the NERRS has a proven track record of delivering the science, education, and training these communities need to address the impacts of climate change, improve ecosystem condition and health, and while improving local and state economies, in concert with addressing national science and policy priorities.

As the challenges facing communities intensify, we need a stronger CZMA—one that enhances successful programs to deliver effective coastal management, improves community resilience in a changing climate, and benefits communities and economic sectors dependent on healthy natural resources. The Resilient Coasts and Estuaries Act seeks to do just that by codifying NERRS national programs that monitor weather and water, offer training for local decision makers and businesses, provide learning opportunities for graduate students and teachers, conduct collaborative research in response to community needs, and manage and restore habitats that provide numerous, irreplaceable benefits.

Each NERRS program is a proven winner for coastal communities. Some 295 NERRS monitoring stations regularly track local water quality and weather, providing critical information to help communities address hazardous spills, shellfish industry operations, storm damage, and more. The 1.4+ million acres of public lands and waters that Reserves protect include 4,500 miles of waterfront and draw more than 600,000 visitors each year. Ninety-five percent of Reserves allow recreational fishing and 85% allow hunting; valued by the public and often rooted in family legacy, these activities underscore a sense of stewardship. Every year, Reserves provide training and science to more than 13,400 people from 2,500 communities and 570 businesses, sustaining more than 10,000 jobs. Through the congressionally-directed the new NERRS Graduate Research Fellowship Program, the next generation of coastal scientists are learning to address community needs. The Teachers on the Estuary program has helped some 4,700 teachers enrich their capacity to teach coastal science using local data. Every Reserve has a demonstrated unmet community demand for their programming that exceeds their capacity.

H.R. 7801 would definitively establish these programs in statute, direct their execution as a matter of national policy, and ensure their benefits for future generations. In addition, the bill's direction to establish five additional Reserves and authorize the NERRS funding levels at \$47 million would further empower the protection and enhancement of our coasts and Great Lakes. These new Reserves will improve the national System's ability to deliver essential science, education, and technical assistance to support coastal industries—including fisheries, seafood, and eco-tourism—and help protect people and infrastructure from habitat degradation, sea level rise and flooding. Additional federal funding for the NERRS, matched by state funds, would increase our nation's capacity to educate and train a new generation of coastal professionals, add to our net conservation of estuary habitats, contribute to the protection of water quality and the other vital services estuaries provide to communities.

H.R. 7801 also proposes to amend the CZMA to include the Coastal and Estuarine Resilience and Restoration Program, which will advance much needed land protection. The inclusion of an authorized \$60 million would increase habitat connectivity and community resilience by increasing habitat, providing for greater protection of lands that safeguard water resources, mitigate flooding, and reduce erosion. NERRA is pleased to see this and that the bill specifies that NERRS Procurement, Acquisition, and Construction funds can be spent to repair and renovate older structures in addition to new construction, as doing so will further job creation and land protection in local communities and their states.

For all the reasons explained above, NERRA strongly supports the proposed amendments to this unique and visionary law as proposed by the Resilient Coasts and Estuaries Act bill, and we urge the Committee to advance this legislation. Thank you for considering our views.

Respectfully,



Keith Laakkonen
President, NERRA
Manager, Rookery Bay



Michael P. De Luca
Govt Affairs Chair, NERRA
Manager, Jacques Cousteau Reserve



Rebecca K. Roth
Executive Director, NERRA