



Chair Cliff Bentz
Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife, and Fisheries
House Natural Resources Committee
409 Cannon House Office Building
Washington D.C. 20515

Ranking Member Jared Huffman
Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife, and Fisheries
House Natural Resources Committee
2445 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington D.C. 20515

March 6, 2024

Re: Coastal Resilience Funding Cuts in H.R. 7408, America's Wildlife Habitat Conservation Act

Dear Chair Bentz and Ranking Member Huffman:

We are writing to express our strong opposition to Congressman Bruce Westerman's [H.R. 7408](#), "America's Wildlife Habitat Conservation Act" with specific concern about the provision that would rescind critically needed funds for coastal resilience at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). This bill is posing as wildlife conservation legislation, when further inspection shows that this bill is instead working to revoke funding from critical programs for conservation.

In regard to the ocean specifically, Chair Westerman's bill would repeal \$700 million in funding allocated to the NOAA under Section 40001 of the Inflation Reduction Act ([Public Law 117-169](#)) (IRA). The IRA was the most significant investment in climate and clean energy in our nation's history. The funding to NOAA was essential to combating the climate crisis and readying our nation to be resilient against increasing climate impacts. Unfortunately, Chair Westerman's bill is hardly unique as we have seen Republican Members of Congress make numerous attempts to undo IRA provisions since it was passed in 2022.

We applauded the Inflation Reduction Act's historic investment of \$2.6 billion for NOAA to invest in coastal communities and climate resilience. This funding was intended to be used for conservation, restoration, and protection of coastal and marine habitats and resources, including

fisheries, to enable coastal communities to prepare for extreme storms and other changing climate conditions, and for projects that support natural resources that sustain coastal and marine resource dependent communities.¹

The ocean and coastal impacts of climate change are already impacting daily activities in communities across the US. Warming oceans, rising sea levels, shifting fish stocks, melting sea ice, ocean acidification, frequent and intense floods, severe storms, and droughts all require building resilience. Sea levels are expected to rise up to a foot along the U.S. coastlines in the next 30 years, with damaging flooding expected to occur more than 10 times as often as it does today. This will create a profound shift in coastal flooding, causing tide and storm surge heights to increase and reach further inland. Failing to curb future emissions could cause an additional 1.5 - 5 feet of rise. Flooding already exacerbates racial and social inequality, with a history of disproportionate harms for communities of color. Coastal flooding will become an increasingly severe environmental justice issue as sea levels rise.

The ocean and coasts are critical to all Americans as ports of commerce, food sources, carbon sinks, and more. Resilience investments create a multitude of co-benefits such as creating jobs, reducing disaster losses, protecting critical habitat, and supporting US innovation. An investment in coastal resilience is an investment in America's future.

Coastal resilience funding at NOAA is already making its way into communities and regions around the country that need it most. The Climate Resilience Regional Challenge and Climate-Ready Workforce funding opportunities will build historic workforce capacity and implement adaptation actions which will protect communities, military bases, and ecosystems.² The Climate Resilience Accelerator is funding critical private sector solutions, demonstrating the power of public-private partnerships and creating jobs for Americans. Climate-Ready Fisheries investments are currently protecting and managing America's iconic fish populations. The \$2.6 billion invested in the US coastal regions by Congress is already making a difference by building more resilient economies, ecosystems, and communities.

These projects will create new jobs in a wide variety of sectors, from construction to fishermen to planners to engineers, for coastal restoration requires specialized skills that cannot be mechanized or exported. The surrounding coastal environments also benefit from restored natural infrastructure like salt marshes, mangroves, and seagrass beds, which remove carbon from the atmosphere, reduce storm impacts, and provide habitat for fish and wildlife. Trying to

¹ CleanEnergy.gov. Building a Clean Energy Economy: A Guidebook to the Inflation Reduction Act's Investments in Clean Energy and Climate Action <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Inflation-Reduction-Act-Guidebook.pdf>

² National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Inflation Reduction Act: Climate-Ready Coasts and Communities <https://www.noaa.gov/inflation-reduction-act/inflation-reduction-act-climate-ready-coasts-and-communities>

reverse this funding now would be a detriment to constituents, districts, and states around the country.

The bill's funding cut to NOAA will have severe ocean and environmental justice implications, with Indigenous communities facing a particularly acute impact. Within the \$2.6 billion to NOAA from the IRA, NOAA has stated they will provide approximately \$390 million for tribal priorities that incorporate comments received during the IRA tribal consultation. Without this funding, technical assistance and capacity building will be reduced, perpetuating environmental injustices. Tribes and Tribal communities have stewarded the ocean since time immemorial and must continue to rely on it for subsistence, food security, and traditional ways of life and culture.

Clawing back \$700 million of Inflation Reduction Act funds designated for coastal resilience funding at NOAA, as Rep. Westerman's bill attempts to do, would move us in the wrong direction toward preparing our coastal communities for climate impacts and advancing environmental justice. In fact, grant applications for NOAA show that this program is dramatically underfunded, with a recent request for proposals generating 869 eligible letters of intent requesting approximately \$16 billion in funding. It is clear that ocean, coastal, and Great Lakes communities across the nation urgently need this funding and they are ready to implement it now.

We urge you to consider the severe implications of this bill in the Water, Wildlife, and Fisheries Subcommittee hearing, ensure this bill does not move forward to a markup, halt the bill from being reported out of committee, and vote no on H.R. 7408, America's Wildlife Habitat Conservation Act, if it reaches the House floor.

Sincerely,

Alaska Wilderness League
Animal Welfare Institute
Azul
California Environmental Voters
Californians for Western Wilderness
Center for Biological Diversity
Center for the Blue Economy
Cetacean Society International
Chispa Texas
Clean Water Action
Climate Law & Policy Project
Coastal Quest
Coastal States Organization

Cooperative Energy Futures
Creation Justice Ministries
EarthEcho International
Earthjustice
Endangered Species Coalition
Florida Wildlife Federation
FOUR PAWS USA
Friends of the Earth U.S.
Friends of the Mariana Trench
Georgia Interfaith Power and Light
Gotham Whale
GreenLatinos
Healthy Ocean Coalition
Inland Ocean Coalition
Interfaith Power & Light
League of Conservation Voters
Marine Conservation Institute
Marine Mammal Alliance Nantucket
Milwaukee Riverkeeper
Mystic Aquarium
National Marine Sanctuary Foundation
National Ocean Protection Coalition
Natural Resources Defense Council
New York League of Conservation Voters
Ocean Conservancy
Ocean Conservation Research
Ocean Defense Initiative
Oceana
Oceanic Preservation Society
Pacific Environment
Patagonia
Rachel Carson Council
Restore America's Estuaries
Sachamama
Save the Manatee Club
Seattle Aquarium
Shedd Aquarium
Sierra Club
Sustainable Ocean Alliance
Southern Environmental Law Center

Surfrider Foundation
Sustain Cities
The #RelistWolves Campaign
The Ocean Project
Union of Concerned Scientists
Urban Ocean Lab
Waterfront Alliance
Waterkeeper Alliance

CC: Chair Westerman and Ranking Member Grijalva, House Natural Resources Committee