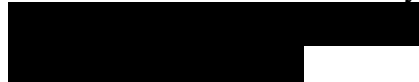




Testimony Submitted by Rich Innes

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Association of National Estuary Programs



To the House Appropriations Committee's Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies

January 28th, 2020

Dear Chairman McCollum and Ranking Member Joyce:

On behalf of the Association of National Estuary Programs, I am submitting testimony to thank you for your past support of the National Estuary Program, a program of the Environmental Protection Agency, and ask you to continue to invest directly in the stewardship of our nation's coasts by funding this program in FY 2021 at the authorized level of \$26.5 million, including \$750,000 per NEP, and \$4 million for the newly created competitive fund.

We greatly appreciate your longstanding support of NEP, and can assure you that these funds are being put to extremely good purpose in protecting and restoring estuaries and coastal communities.

Recent examples include:

- The Puget Sound Partnership is restoring forage fish spawning---which are critically important in the Puget Sound foodweb---back to 1500 feet of shoreline, and reducing the flow of stormwater containing toxic pollutants into Puget Sound.

- The NY-NJ Harbor & Estuary Program is working with the Bronx River Alliance and other community groups to track down sources of floatable trash in the River, including locations in upstream Westchester County.
- The Casco Bay Estuary Partnership and partners are monitoring nutrients around Casco Bay to provide real-time data on nutrient processes. CBEP's nutrient analyzer has been automatically collecting nitrate, nitrite and ammonium samples and working collaboratively to assure safe levels in the bay.
- The Center of the Inland Bays in Delaware is bringing the oyster back, with all its ecological and economic benefits, after it nearly disappeared in the last century. The Center is using living shorelines to stop erosion, protect property and restore habitat.

As you know important reforms were made to the National Estuary Program (NEP) in the reauthorization that was signed into law in the 114th Congress. These reforms created a competitive program to address urgent challenges and maximize funds received by our national estuaries, while streamlining the administrative costs of the program.

Also of note, HR 4044, which would increase funding for the NEP and assure that each estuary program receive at least \$1 million annually was approved unanimously by the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee in 2019. A similar measure, S.3171, has been introduced with bipartisan support in the Senate in January, 2020.

Of all federally funded coastal programs, only NEPs organize local stakeholders as partners in a unique decision-making framework to fund local priorities. NEPs provide technical, management, and communication assistance to develop priorities and implement comprehensive actions: storm water and infrastructure projects, seagrass and shellfish restoration which support fishing and tourist industries, science and monitoring to guide decision-making, and innovative education programs designed for the next generation of Americans.

NEPs engage industries, businesses, and other community members to develop solutions for tough problems. The NEP's public-private partnerships stretch federal dollars to provide successful on-the-ground results driven by diverse stakeholders. NEP partners include commercial agriculture and fisheries, energy and water utilities, local restaurants & tourist businesses, construction and landscaping professionals, engineering and mining companies, state and local governments, colleges and universities, and other community organizations.

Our national estuaries have never been more critical to maintaining the economic engines for our state and regional economy.

The value of our oceans, estuaries and coasts to our nation is immense and their full potential remains unrealized. Over half the US population lives in coastal watershed counties, many of these in estuaries of national significance. Roughly half the nation's gross domestic product is

generated in those counties and adjacent ocean waters. According to NOAA's 2019 report on the ocean economy, ocean industries contributed \$320 billion to U.S. economy, while employment in the ocean economy increased by 14.5 percent by 2016, compared to 4.8 percent in the U.S. economy as a whole.

The NEP consists of 28 unique, voluntary programs established by the Clean Water Act to protect and improve estuaries of national significance. Each NEP engages its local community in a non-regulatory, consensus-driven, and science-based process. For every dollar EPA provides, NEPs leverage \$19 in local funds to protect and improve coastal environments, communities and economies.

NEPs develop Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plans based on community consensus and the best available science to ensure the quality of life in coastal communities. These plans outline specific actions and on-the-ground projects that ensure local engagement and promote public support for states and communities working together to protect open space, update critical coastal infrastructure, and respond to dramatic changes along our coasts.

NEPs have collectively restored and protected more than 2,000,000 acres of vital habitats since 2000 alone. Consistent Congressional funding of the National Estuary Programs is essential – resulting in clean water, healthy estuaries, and strong coastal communities. This investment in our national estuaries will help strengthen America's economy and support thousands of jobs, and will secure the future of our coastal communities.

We would greatly appreciate the opportunity to work with you to ensure that as you undertake work on the FY 2021 appropriations measure, it reflects the recent reauthorization by allocating at least \$750,000 to each NEP, and funds the newly authorized competitive program at approximately \$4 million, consistent with Public Law 114-162.

Thank you for your strong support of this program over the years, and for considering our request.