



Testimony of Tom Ford
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Also Representing the Association of National Estuary Programs

Provided to the

**US House of Representatives Committee on Transportation and
Infrastructure**

Subcommittee on Water Resources and Environment

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Dear Chairwoman Napolitano and Ranking Member Westerman:

Thank you for holding this important and timely hearing. The Committee's attention to sustaining inter-governmental efforts to preserve and improve the health of our iconic coastal waters is of great value to the nation.

My name is Tom Ford, and I am the Executive Director of the Santa Monica Bay National Estuary Program and The Bay Foundation (TBF), part of the SMBNEP. TBF is the non-profit partner of the Santa Monica Bay Restoration Authority, and is focused on research, planning, cleanup efforts, and other priorities identified in the SMBNEP's Bay Restoration Plan, a publicly adopted, federally approved comprehensive plan of action for protecting and restoring Santa Monica Bay. Each NEP has adopted a similar plan specific to their estuary.

I am also representing the Association of National Estuary Programs (ANEP). We are comprised of the Directors of the 28 NEPs and dedicated to promoting responsible stewardship of our nation's bays, lagoons, and harbors. We share

lessons learned by NEPs with others who might benefit from a similar consensus-based, stakeholder-driven process in resource management.

Before describing the National Estuary Program's role in this work, I would like to especially thank one of the Committee's newest members, Representative Harley Rouda from my home state, for inviting me today. Congressman Rouda has already established a record in providing much-needed assistance to California coastal communities struggling with the very real impacts of a changing climate, including extreme weather events.

Our estuaries and bays represent immense value to our nation's economy. Fishing and shipping, tourism and recreation, minerals and energy are important contributions. These places – where more than 40% of the U.S. population lives and works – are treasured by all of the American people because of the opportunities for recreation and connection to nature they offer.

While we as a nation treasure these water resources, however, we also change their chemistry with pollution, drive salmon and whales to the edge of extinction, and reduce the ability of coastal habitat to protect us from storms and flooding.

The Santa Monica Bay National Estuary Program is one of 28 National Estuary Programs created by Congress in 1987 as Section 320 of the Clean Water Act to restore and protect some of our most threatened bays, rivers and watersheds. These include places like San Francisco Bay, Tampa Bay, New York/New Jersey Harbor, my own Santa Monica Bay, and as you have just heard from Laura Blackmore, the iconic Puget Sound. Our job, as set out by statute, is to assess and reduce human impacts on coastal habitats.

In the 32 years since its establishment, the community-based, non-regulatory National Estuary Program has gained a reputation for effective engagement of all manner of stakeholders for decisionmaking. Each site-based National Estuary Program convenes multi-sector advisory committees to develop their yearly workplans, building consensus to direct local, state, and federal actions to improve the health of our estuaries.

As a non-regulatory program, the National Estuary Program can build the trust necessary to drive toward a consensus on actions to restore estuaries. We provide consistent assistance to all types of partners, with a friendly “hello, how are you” that is truly a case of “we’re here to help.”

The National Estuary Programs have continued to meet Congress' challenge to document the State of the Bays as well. As part of those efforts we conduct research, compile and analyze data, and provide technical advice to state and local agencies.

The National Estuary Program is also expert at marshalling resources from all levels of government, foundations, and the corporate sector for on-the-ground actions. Collectively, and on average over the last 14 years, the Program has tallied up leveraged resources of \$19 for every \$1 invested by Congress. The Santa Monica Bay NEP that I direct leveraged \$29 for every \$1 over the past 5 years.

Congress' vision of a community- and incentive-driven program, supported by scientific data and significant investment from partners, has proven to be an ideal way to prompt local action through local buy-in. Because our consensus-based planning processes are supported by the community, informed by local data, and broadly funded, when we're ready to put the shovels into the ground our communities are engaged, our leaders involved, and our programs and projects successful.

This level of success is the same whether I am at a National Estuary Program in the Gulf of Mexico, in Puerto Rico, or on the West Coast or the Atlantic seaboard. And I should add that we share our good ideas and best practices with our colleagues who are not designated Estuaries of National Significance. You can see our fingerprints on every coast.

If Congress sees fit to reauthorize the NEP, the National Estuary Programs are ready to continue the work you set in motion 32 years ago. With additional funding, each program would be able to increase its ability to have a significant local impact; with the competitive grant in place we can direct resources to address particularly vexing problems afflicting our coastal waters, including algal bloom, ocean acidification, and lack of preparedness for major storm events. These approaches can serve as model for the country.

Thank you for your attention to the challenges we are confronting in protecting our iconic waters. I am glad to provide any additional information or answer any questions you may have.