



**Official Written Testimony for Fiscal Year 2011  
Submitted to the Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science and Related Agencies  
Committee on Appropriations  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC**

**Submitted By  
National Estuarine Research Reserve Association  
Matthew E. Menashes, Executive Director**

On behalf of the National Estuarine Research Reserve Association (NERRA), thank you for the opportunity to provide recommendations for the Fiscal Year 2011 budget for the National Estuarine Research Reserve System (NERRS or reserve system) and related programs at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). The NERRS plays a significant role in a number of high priority initiatives that provide critical information to coastal decision-makers at the local and regional levels to protect our nation's estuaries and coasts.

For Fiscal Year 2011, NERRA strongly recommends the following reserve system programs and funding levels within NOAA:

NERRS Operations	\$33 million
<i>Local, Regional, National Implementation</i>	\$27.7 million
<i>Science Collaborative</i>	\$5.3 million
NERRS Construction and Acquisition	\$15.6 million

In addition, we also support within NOAA:

Coastal Zone Management Grants	\$88 million
Coastal Zone Management and Stewardship	\$12.5 million
Coastal and Estuarine Land Conservation Program	\$60 million
Coastal Services Center	\$56 million

We very much appreciate the support the Subcommittee provided for reserve system operations in Fiscal Year 2010. Thanks to your work, the House of Representatives led the way in allowing us to make new investments in protecting our nation's estuaries. In anticipation of the designation of the 28<sup>th</sup> reserve, the proposed Lake Superior National Estuarine Research Reserve in Wisconsin, your committee provided funding that will allow the new reserve to begin operating when it is formally designated later this year. You also provided funding for the reserve system to make partial new investments in K-12 education programming and biological monitoring. These investments are important to our member reserves, the state and community

partners they serve, and to the sustainability of estuaries and coasts. We greatly appreciate the Subcommittee recognizing their value.

### **About the National Estuarine Research Reserve Association**

As you know, the NERRA is a not-for-profit scientific and educational organization dedicated to the protection, understanding, and science-based management of our nation's estuaries and coasts. Established in 1987, NERRA's mission is to inspire protection of our nation's estuaries and to promote conservation-based research, education, and stewardship through the reserves. Our members are the 27 reserves (soon to be 28) that make up the NERRS.

### **About the National Estuarine Research Reserve System**

Since 1974, with the designation of the South Slough National Estuarine Research Reserve in Oregon, the coastal states and the federal government have collaborated to create a unique network of estuarine areas protected for long-term research and education. The National Estuarine Research Reserves, unlike the National Marine Sanctuaries or National Wildlife Refuges for example, are managed and staffed by state government and state universities. The priorities of the reserve system are developed through a collaborative approach between the states and NOAA to address both national and local concerns. The reserves have a mandate to support the coastal states through research and education as the states address today's most pressing coastal issues such as impacts from changes in sea and lake levels, or increased nutrient loading.

There are now 27 reserves throughout the country that collectively protect over one million acres of habitat in 22 states and territories. As we mentioned above, we are particularly pleased that the Lake Superior National Estuarine Research Reserve in northern Wisconsin will be designated later this year. The University of Wisconsin is the state's lead agency for the Lake Superior reserve and we look forward to the university becoming part of the reserve system network and our association.

### **2009 Accomplishments**

Over the past year, our members and NOAA have collaborated on several key accomplishments to move the reserve system forward.

- *Understanding the Impacts of Changes in Sea and Lake Levels* - The reserves are establishing a sentinel sites program to measure localized impacts from changes in sea and lake levels. This long-term monitoring effort requires us to establish a network of elevation benchmarks at each reserve. In 2009, staffers from eleven reserves were trained to deploy these benchmarks and integrate them into the National Spatial Reference System.
- *Creating a New Collaborative Research Program* - The reserves and NOAA worked with the University of New Hampshire, selected through a competitive process, to develop a new multi-disciplinary research program to competitively fund research at the reserves. NERRS Science Collaborative-funded research projects - conducted at the reserves - will bring together scientists, intended users of the science, and stakeholders to directly address management questions and applications.
- *Adding to the Science of Habitat Restoration* - The reserves are helping NOAA improve

its restoration science abilities. Five reserves were funded to serve as reference sites for habitats restored by NOAA, other federal agencies, and the states.

- *Educating Students with Satellite Broadcast Field Trips* – The reserves, NOAA, and NERRA collaborated in May 2009 to broadcast live field trips from three estuaries around the country to hundreds of classrooms. By using satellite technology, we offered children a chance to learn science through the wonderful living classrooms that estuaries provide.

### **NERRS Operations Funds**

While we are making great strides, we believe the reserve system remains constrained in what it can accomplish. As we wrote last year, each reserve has been creative in securing external funding to cover operating costs as the value of the federal investment fell from Fiscal Year 2003 through Fiscal Year 2009. External funding is insufficient, however, to prevent reductions in some programs at a time when reserve programs should be increasing to address pressing coastal issues such as impacts from changes in sea and lake levels.

### **Local, Regional, and National Implementation**

We support funding for reserve operations, including the research, monitoring, education, and stewardship programs run by the states, at \$27.7 million. Operations funds allow for continued real-time water quality and weather monitoring at each of the reserves. These funds also support the Graduate Research Fellowship program which has allowed hundreds of young researchers to gain significant experience in estuarine ecology, biology, oceanography, and other fields. Operations funds allow us to take the scientific findings developed at reserves and use that information in workshops and other training programs to help local officials make better decisions about how to manage their estuaries. These funds also allow us to provide education for thousands of school-age children using science-based curricula that meet local and national standards. Federal funds received by the reserves are matched with state funds.

The funding you provided last year allowed us to make partial progress on our education and biological monitoring goals. While eleven reserves were funded to conduct assessments for new K-12 education programming, no reserves have been funded to implement new K-12 education programs. At a time when science and math education is a challenge for our nation, the reserve system's education programs should be fully funded. We believe this is essential to creating a new generation of coastal and estuarine scientists and stewards. With the addition of a reserve in Wisconsin, more than half of the reserves still need to conduct K-12 assessments; by the end of 2011, 28 reserves will need funding to implement new education programs based on these assessments.

In 2010, only 13 reserves were funded to begin biological monitoring leaving a gap in the knowledge base for more than half of the reserve system. Biological monitoring is one component of the NERRS sentinel sites initiative to measure localized impacts from changes in sea and lake levels, providing critical data to coastal managers to understand the effects of change along the coast. In addition, only 51 of 54 available Graduate Research Fellowships were funded; in FY11 there will be 56 available fellowships, increasing that gap.

Our request for \$27.7 million for NERRS operations will address these gaps in programming so that the reserve system's network of research, monitoring, education, and stewardship programs will be fully implemented, better protecting the nation's estuaries and coasts.

#### NERRS Science Collaborative

We also support funding the Science Collaborative at \$5.3 million. The Science Collaborative provides competitive funding for research projects at reserves, taking advantage of the living laboratories of the reserves and the extensive expertise of reserve staff. These projects increase our ability to transfer science on issues such as land use, nutrient loading, sea level change, and habitat restoration to state and local coastal managers.

We continue to point out that from Fiscal Years 1997 through 2008 this funding was a separate line in NOAA's budget that went to the Cooperative Institute for Coastal and Estuarine Environmental Technology, a cooperative institute located at the University of New Hampshire (UNH). UNH ran a competitive process to award funding for innovative projects to researchers throughout the country. There was a change in the treatment of these funds in the Fiscal Year 2009 appropriations bill. That year, funding for this program was lumped together with reserve operations funds. We believe that lumping these two programs together left the impression that the reserves secured an increase in funding that year. In fact, Fiscal Year 2009 funding was \$474,000 less than the total for these two programs in Fiscal Year 2008. We remain concerned that lumping these programs together is confusing and ask the committee to fund each program at the level we are requesting.

In FY09, NOAA invited proposals from institutions to establish a new research center that would operate a multi-year competitive research program, the NERRS Science Collaborative. NOAA chose UNH to run the new program. We support NOAA's efforts to ensure that operation of this program is competed on a multi-year cycle and that the program continues to require strong ties to the reserve system and prioritize the use of reserves for the research conducted under the program.

#### NERRS Construction and Acquisition Funds

We also seek \$15.6 million for construction and acquisition to maintain, upgrade, and construct reserve facilities and acquire priority lands. Federal funds received by the reserves are matched with state funds. Our recent assessment of construction and acquisition needs at the reserves shows we have needs for more than \$60 million for Fiscal Years 2011 through 2015. With NOAA's administrative costs added on top of our needs, total funding needed for that period exceeds \$66 million. These figures do not include anticipated construction funding needs for the proposed Lake Superior reserve.

#### Other Programs NERRA Supports

The Coastal Zone Management Act provides a distinct role for the reserves in providing research and information needed by federal, state, and local coastal managers and the public. While the reserve system is an integral component of our nation's efforts to effectively manage our coasts, several other programs run by our federal and state partners are equally important. NERRA supports funding for these programs as well.

### Coastal Zone Management Grants

The reserves work closely with the Coastal Zone Management agencies in their state. Reserves provide research and partner on outreach to support the agencies' management of issues such as habitat conservation, public access, erosion control and hazard mitigation. NERRA seeks \$88 million in funding for Coastal Zone Management grants.

### Coastal Zone Management and Stewardship

NOAA's Office of Ocean and Coastal Resource Management (OCRM) assists in coordinating the NERRS network, in addition to many other partnerships and programs. Staff help promote transfer between and coordination among the reserves. OCRM helps the reserves build capacity by sharing information, research methods and results, collaborative processes, and evaluation tools. NERRA requests \$12.5 million for OCRM. We cannot do our work without the strong support of OCRM.

### Coastal and Estuarine Land Conservation Program (CELCP)

CELCP provides vital support for securing the long-term protection of lands from willing sellers in coastal communities. Protected lands near the reserves can serve as demonstration areas for stewardship efforts, and provide additional reference areas when studying development impacts. Full funding for the CELCP program at \$60 million is needed to meet demand, protect sensitive coastal areas, and respond to the mounting development pressures on our coasts. Fifteen percent of CELCP funding is used to support projects that benefit our reserves.

### Coastal Services Center

The NOAA Coastal Services Center supports the reserves through projects and training to address management issues including coastal resilience, regional governance, community impacts from coastal storms, and more. Partnerships with the Coastal Services Center result in local initiatives based on national priorities. NERRA requests \$56 million for the CSC. CSC is a key partner in our ability to develop new products and services, and to provide information to coastal managers.

We greatly appreciate the Subcommittee considering our funding request for Fiscal Year 2011. If we can provide any additional information, please contact me at (202) 431-4309 or [matt@nerra.org](mailto:matt@nerra.org), or NERRA President Rebecca Ellin, manager of the North Carolina National Estuarine Research Reserve, at (252) 838-0880 or [rebecca.ellin@ncdenr.gov](mailto:rebecca.ellin@ncdenr.gov).