



Official Written Testimony for programs under the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) for Fiscal Year 2012

**Submitted To
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
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The National Estuarine Research Reserve Association (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. Our members are the 28 reserves that make up the National Estuarine Research Reserve System (NERRS). Established in 1987, NERRA facilitates its members' mission to protect our nation's estuaries and to promote conservation-based research, education, and stewardship through the reserves. For Fiscal Year 2012, NERRA strongly recommends the following reserve system programs and funding levels within the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA):

NERRS Operations	\$28 million
NERRS Land Conservation and Facilities (PAC)	\$7 million

In 28 beautiful coastal locations around our country, 22 states and Puerto Rico have protected in perpetuity over 1.3 million acres of land for education, long-term research, science-based stewardship, recreation and sustainability of the coastal economy. The states have been entrusted to operate and manage NOAA's program as created by Congress in the Coastal Zone Management Act (CZMA) nearly 40 years ago. What sets this program apart from other place-based federal programs, like the National Marine Sanctuaries or National Wildlife Refuges for example, is that the reserves manage a federal partnership program, implemented locally by states or universities.

The reserves have a tremendous positive impact on our economy including work to maintain clean water, keep the seafood and fishing industry viable, and provide communities with practical help and science-based information to address coastal hazards and maintain the area's tourism. Estuaries, where rivers meet the sea, provide nursery ground for many species of

marine life, including more than 75% of the commercial seafood catch. The work at each reserve goes beyond its property boundaries and creates a number of environmental and economic benefits for the communities and regions where they exist. For example, the Mission-Aransas National Estuarine Research Reserve is based in Port Aransas, Texas—an area that generates over \$2.8 billion a year from tourism. In South Carolina, a state that has two reserves, economic impact from healthy natural resources supports one-third of the state’s GDP, generating \$30 billion and sustaining 236,000 jobs annually. In the broader scheme, the National Ocean Economics Program found that the 22 coastal States that have reserves employed 40 million people in coastal-related jobs and contributed more than \$2.57 trillion to the national GDP in 2007 (June, 2009).

About the National Estuarine Research Reserve System

Since 1974, beginning 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 NERRS added its 28th reserve on Lake Superior, Wisconsin in October 2010.

Pursuant to the CZMA, each reserve is chosen because it is a representative estuarine ecosystem able to contribute to the biogeographical and typological balance of the NERRS and because the area within the reserve is protected in perpetuity and is available for suitable public purposes such as education and interpretive use. The reserves are a network of protected areas established for long-term research, education, training, and stewardship.

The NERRS’s priorities are developed through a collaborative approach between the states and NOAA to address both national and local concerns. The reserves have a mandate pursuant to Section 315 of the CZMA 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 and increased nutrient loading. The reserves conduct research, monitoring, restoration, education, and training designed to improve our understanding and management of coasts and estuaries. The reserves are public places that have significant local, regional, and national benefits because the lands are publicly owned and function as living laboratories and classrooms that are used by scientists, decision makers, educators, and people of all ages. They are located in pristine coastal areas that serve as “sentinel sites,” places where early indicators of environmental change are scientifically measured to provide up-to-date information to local officials and the public to support environmental decision-making.

National Estuarine Research Reserve System (NERRS) Operations

NERRA requests that program operations be funded at a level of \$28 million, an amount \$4.5 million above fiscal year 2010 enacted levels. This funding will be shared by the 28 programs to enable the NERRS to provide science-based practical help to coastal communities and the public to attain clean water, insure resilient coastlines, and create economically and environmentally sound communities. Achievement of these goals will have an enormous economic impact to our National, State, and local economies. This was most recently evidenced in the Deep Water Horizon Oil Spill of 2010, a coastal area that is home to five reserves. We know that the billion dollar tourism and seafood industries depend upon on clean water and during the Deep Water

Horizon Oil Spill crisis the communities and industries along the gulf coast relied on disaster support efforts supplied by some of the five Gulf Coast National Estuarine Research Reserves.

Each reserve receives operation funds from NOAA that are matched by the states and that are used to leverage significantly more private and local investments. While NERRS have made countless contributions to their local communities and the economy, the following are stories from three reserves that demonstrate the breadth of the program's impact.

Jacques Cousteau, New Jersey

Barnegat Bay and the Mullica River-Great Bay system are extraordinary economic and natural resources for New Jersey. They create more than \$4 billion dollars in economic benefits annually, and provide many environmental benefits including a vital nursery area for fish and shellfish, a natural storm buffer that protects communities from storm damage, and a sediment filter for runoff from land thereby maintaining wetlands, marshes and water quality. Coastal training programs at the reserve help communities protect these resources with science-based information and strategies to improve stormwater management, reduce erosion, and mitigate risks associated with coastal hazards. This information was key in a recent \$10 million dollar investment to retool parts of the Bay's stormwater retention system.

Chesapeake Bay, Virginia

In Chesapeake Bay, over 3,000 local seventh grade students have had a hands-on approach to learning for the past five years. The educational programs give them a deeper understanding of the Bay while connecting field trips to work they are doing in the classroom throughout the year. As with all the reserves, Chesapeake Bay uses research and good science (such as monitoring protocols, infrastructure, and local vertical control networks) to play a key role in responding to large-scale storms, droughts, sea level rise and salt intrusion.

Weeks Bay, Alabama

Water Quality Monitoring, as part of the NERRS national System-wide Monitoring Program (SWMP), provides very important continuous monitoring data to researchers. This data was used extensively by the State of Alabama to document the impacts of the Deep Water Horizon Oil Spill. The non-profit Land Acquisition for Conservation has utilized federal funds to help acquire 820 acres of coastal wetlands. This acquisition is known locally as the Meadows and was the largest land acquisition in the 25-year history of the Weeks Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve.

NERRS Land Conservation and Facilities (PAC)

NERRA requests \$7 million for land conservation and facilities to maintain, upgrade, and construct reserve facilities and acquire priority lands. This competitive funding program is matched by state funds and has resulted in not only the preservation of critical coastal lands as described above, but also in the increase of construction jobs. For example in Texas, the construction of the Mission-Aransas Headquarters has provided a job for approximately 536

people to date. A recent assessment of construction and acquisition priorities at the reserves shows that the NERRS have needs for more than \$60 million for Fiscal Years 2011 through 2015.

NERRA greatly appreciates the support the Subcommittee has provided in the past. This support has been critical to sustain and increase the economic viability of the coast and estuary-based industries. We urge you to give every consideration to these requests as you move forward in the FY 2012 appropriations process. If we can provide any additional information, please contact me at (202) 236-4819 or roth@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.