



February 15, 2019

The Honorable Richard Shelby  
Chairman, Appropriations Committee  
United States Senate  
113 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Nita Lowey  
Chairwoman, Appropriations Committee  
United States House of Representatives  
2306 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Patrick Leahy  
Vice Chairman, Appropriations Committee  
United States Senate  
437 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Kay Granger  
Ranking Member, Appropriations Committee  
United States House of Representatives  
2365 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Shelby, Chairwoman Lowey, Ranking Member Leahy, and Ranking Member Granger:

In recognition of Valentine's Day, the Association of National Estuary Programs (ANEP), the National Estuarine Research Reserve Association (NERRA), and Restore America's Estuaries (RAE) are asking for your strong support for key federal programs that benefit estuaries and the States. Over the course of three days that included Valentine's Day, hundreds of people and organizations sent a message of support for these programs using **#iheartestuaries**. In fact, almost **20,000 impressions** were recorded across Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, with **721 mentions of #iheartestuaries on Twitter online** over the three days. These constituents love their estuaries as special places in their communities. And, another reason to love these places is that our nation's coastal economy contributes more than **\$258 billion annually to GDP** through fisheries and seafood production, tourism, recreation, transportation, and construction.

Our organizations recognize four programs that are essential to estuary protection and restoration efforts: the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Coastal Program, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) National Estuary Program, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Community-Based Restoration Program, and the NOAA National Estuarine Research Reserve System (NERRS).

The **EPA's National Estuary Program** is an important place-based program to protect and restore the water quality and ecological integrity of estuaries of national significance. There are currently 28 NEP sites throughout the nation, all of which are working to implement long-term management plans that contain specific, targeted actions designed to address water quality, habitat, and living resources challenges in their watershed. Each plan reflects local environmental and economic priorities. More than 42 percent of the continental U.S. shoreline is included in the NEP, and 15 percent of all Americans live within NEP designated watersheds, with thousands of new residents arriving every year. EPA has historically recognized that the NEP is EPA's flagship watershed protection effort, providing inclusive, community-based planning and action at the watershed level and garnering an average of \$11 for every \$1 in federal investment.

**NOAA National Estuarine Research Reserve System** is comprised of 29 places of land and water where long-term research, education, training, and stewardship occur. The 29 Reserves and the public's

use of these places have significant local and national economic and societal benefits because the lands are publicly owned and the majority allow for fishing, boating, hunting and recreational uses. Sites function as living laboratories and classrooms that are used by scientists, decision makers, educators, and people of all ages. The Reserves provide critical assistance to coastal communities, industries, and resource managers in understanding impacts, preparing communities and protecting natural infrastructure from extreme weather, like hurricanes and climate related changes. More than 36,000 local volunteers and friends work to support the program in their local communities.

**USFWS's Coastal Program** is the Service's premier conservation and restoration program that brings together federal scientists, coastal communities, and conservation partners to protect and restore habitat in coastal regions. Their efforts are critical to improving the health of these ecosystems, which has declined nationally due to increasing coastal development, pollution, shoreline modification, and overfishing. Since the Program's inception, more than 2.5 million acres of coastal habitat has been protected or restored. The program also serves as a catalyst for economic investment; in 2014, the Coastal Program leveraged \$22 for every \$1 in federal funds. Additionally, for every \$1 that the Coastal Program spends on restoration, \$12.78 is generated in economic returns, helping to restore critical fish and wildlife habitat, all while creating jobs and stimulating local economies.

**NOAA Fisheries' Community-Based Restoration Program (CBRP)** is NOAA's only program explicitly focused on funding targeted, on-the-ground projects to restore the nation's coastal, marine, and migratory fish habitat. The CBRP is a non-regulatory tool that has resulted in positive partnerships with more than 1,500 organizations, from industry to nonprofits to local government, and helped to fund more than 2,000 projects to restore over 69,000 acres of habitat in every coastal state.

**Strong funding for key estuary programs means protecting our future.** We urge you to support these programs and make estuary protection, management, and restoration programs a top funding priority. Estuaries like the Gulf of Mexico, Chesapeake Bay, and Long Island Sound must be protected and restored to ensure continued benefits to the economy and to future generations.

On behalf of our nation's estuaries, we thank you for your consideration and your continued support for these critical programs throughout the appropriations process.

Sincerely,  
Restore America's Estuaries  
Association of National Estuary Programs  
National Estuarine Research Reserve Association

CC: House and Senate Appropriations Committees  
Office of Management and Budget  
Department of Commerce  
Department of Interior  
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration  
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency  
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service