

November 17, 2010

The Honorable Daniel K. Inouye  
Chairman  
U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations  
S 128, U.S. Capitol  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Thad Cochran  
Ranking Member  
U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations  
S 128, U.S. Capitol  
Washington, DC 20510

Re: Funding Request for NOAA's Coastal Habitat Restoration Programs

Dear Chairman Inouye and Ranking Member Cochran:

Thank you for your past support for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA's) coastal restoration efforts. As organizations with a history of protecting and restoring coastal habitat around the nation, we write in support of the President's requested funding level of \$32.192 million for NOAA Fisheries Habitat Restoration (Open Rivers & CRP), which includes \$23.8 million for CRP and \$6.0 million for ORI, in the final Commerce, Justice and Science Appropriations bill for Fiscal Year 2011. We believe this level of funding will begin to address the growing backlog of habitat restoration needs along the nation's coastal areas, while meeting numerous national priorities, such as protecting and restoring threatened and endangered species, improving water quality and public safety, and creating jobs.

#### **Community-based Restoration Program (CRP)**

NOAA's Community-based Restoration Program invests funding and technical expertise in high-priority, competitively-awarded projects that help local communities conduct meaningful habitat restoration, engage volunteers, and build partnerships to protect and conserve our Nation's coastal and marine resources. Technical expertise – including engineering, construction and monitoring – as well as funding is provided to regional and national partners, and directly to local communities to carry out projects such as small dam removals, hydrologic re-connections of tidal systems, and marsh or wetlands restoration. The CRP has a proven history of establishing effective partnerships with national and regional groups as well as local grass roots organizations to restore the diverse coastal, marine, and migratory fish habitats crucial to protecting a variety of threatened and/or endangered species, providing healthy outdoor recreational opportunities, and helping buffer coastal communities from the threats of erosion and storm damage. By working collaboratively with more than 1,500 industry, nonprofit organizations, and state and local governments, CRP has funded more than 1,800 projects - restoring over 60,000 acres of habitat and generating three to four times the federal investment in cash and in-kind contributions.

#### **Open Rivers Initiative (ORI)**

NOAA's Open Rivers Initiative provides critical technical expertise and financial assistance to remove dams and fish passage barriers in coastal watersheds and restore naturally functioning river ecosystems as well as revitalize communities, provide new recreational opportunities, improve populations of commercially and recreationally important fish and reduce the risk of floods. NOAA's strong hands-on expertise in engineering and design, environmental compliance, and scientific monitoring drives this high value restoration effort. Since its launch in 2006, ORI has opened 2,630 stream miles for fish passage, and has received 200 requests from communities across the country to support the removal of small, obsolete dams and fish passage barriers.

#### **Growing Backlog of Restoration Needs**

Support for habitat restoration as a local economic engine and jobs provider has never been greater. This became very apparent through NOAA's competitive process to provide stimulus funding to habitat restoration projects. Under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, Congress provided approximately \$167 million to NOAA for coastal habitat restoration projects, resulting in 814 project submissions totaling more than \$3 billion from 34 states, the District of Columbia, and five U.S. territories. Unfortunately, NOAA was forced to turn away the vast majority of these ecologically and economically significant habitat restoration projects that would benefit the nation in countless ways.

Further, CRP alone annually receives approximately \$60 million in requests from communities nationwide, nearly 5-6 times what is available. Similarly, ORI annually receives approximately \$25 million in requests, roughly 4 times what is available.

As our nation's coastal and estuarine habitats continue to decline – approaching 80 to 95 percent loss in some areas – and tens of thousands of large dams continue to block migratory fish access to 600,000 miles of U.S. rivers and streams, this backlog of work and widening gap in available funds vs. requested funds is not surprising.

## **National Significance**

Habitat degradation is evident in every region, state, and territory of our nation's coastline, where more than 55 million acres of estuary habitat have been destroyed over the past 100 years. Through efforts that cost-effectively restore damaged coasts and estuaries, we can meet numerous national goals. Habitat restoration greatly improves the ecological services of coasts and estuaries, such as providing vital habitat for fish and wildlife, filtering sediment and polluted runoff from watersheds, controlling floods, and stabilizing shorelines that buffer against erosion and protect coastal communities during extreme weather events. In addition, restoring coasts and estuaries provides new opportunities for people to recreate and to appreciate and learn about the natural environment, while boosting public safety. Further, habitat restoration projects have a solid track record of creating jobs and improving local economies, while doing so in a cost-effective manner by leveraging federal dollars with more than double the private dollars.

## **Next Steps**

We strongly believe that additional funding is needed for CRP and ORI to meet numerous national priorities and the growing backlog of habitat restoration projects. We, therefore, respectfully request your support for the President's requested funding level of \$32.192 million to ensure that NOAA continues to make a significant and meaningful impact on the nation. Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

Nancy Colleton  
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CC: Chairman Mikulski  
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