

United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE,
AND TRANSPORTATION

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6125

May 1, 2009

The Honorable Barbara Mikulski
Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice,
and Science
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Richard C. Shelby
Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice,
and Science
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Mikulski and Ranking Member Shelby:

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) plays a vital role in our Nation's economic and environmental well-being. Through daily weather forecasts, climate and ocean monitoring, marine resource and fisheries management, and support for navigation and maritime commerce, NOAA's work directly impacts more than one third of our gross domestic product. NOAA has a daily impact on all Americans and is vital to the strength of our Nation's economy. We appreciate your past support for NOAA and request the Subcommittee provide NOAA with \$5 billion for FY 2010. Funding at this level will allow NOAA to sustain its existing programs and address the agency's unmet program needs that, if funded, would provide additional critical services to the nation.

Increasing the level of funding for NOAA is now more critical than ever. During the past several months, Congress has passed laws authorizing numerous programs within NOAA. The Public Lands Omnibus signed into law by President Obama on March 30, 2009 codified the Integrated Coastal and Ocean Observing System (ICOOS), the Ocean and Coastal Integration Mapping Program, the Federal Ocean Acidification Research and Monitoring Program, the Coastal and Estuarine Lands Conservation Program, the National Undersea Research Program, the Ocean Exploration Program. In addition, Congress reauthorized NOAA's National Sea Grant College Program and the Hydrographic Services Program in the 110th Congress. These programs cut across all five of NOAA's line offices and stand to benefit all of NOAA's core missions, including weather and climate forecasting, fisheries and living marine resource management, coastal and ocean habitat conservation, and fundamental oceanic and atmospheric research.

Our oceans, coasts, and marine resources are a source of untold wealth. America has 95,000 miles of shoreline and the world's largest Exclusive Economic Zone at 3.4 million square nautical miles; however, scarcely 5 percent of it has been mapped and inventoried for resources. NOAA's National Ocean Service (NOS) is responsible for the nation's coastal and ocean stewardship. To fulfill its mission, NOS observes, measures, assesses, maps, and manages coastal and ocean areas, and it undertakes response and restoration activities. NOS's data informs a multitude of industries nationwide. For example, the shipping industry uses NOS's information to facilitate safe, efficient, and environmentally sound transportation. Shipping accounts for more than 43 percent of U.S. overseas trade by value and the movement of waterborne cargo employs more than 13 million citizens. This industry is integrally supported by NOS activities including the newly authorized ICOOS and NOS's surveying and mapping programs. Unfortunately due to a lack of funding, our nation faces a

tremendous backlog in surveys. There are 10,000 square nautical miles (NM) of high priority navigational areas for NOAA to survey each year. Based on the current funding level, NOAA is able to survey less than 3,500 square NM per year, far less than is required to meet even the most urgent national needs and impairing safe navigation.

NOAA's ocean and coastal resource management programs span a broad array of resource and development issues, including coastal zone management, coral reef conservation, national marine sanctuaries, national estuarine research reserves, and coastal land conservation. Balancing ecosystem health with human use of ocean and coastal resources is a challenge met by NOAA's Coastal Zone Management Program (CZMP)—a federal-state partnership that supports states' efforts to conserve and responsibly develops our coastal communities and resources. The strength of this partnership, and our nation's ability to meet challenges in the coastal environment, is tied to adequate funding. Unfortunately, funding levels for the CZMP have declined since 2005, compromising our ability to achieve the program's purpose under the Coastal Zone Management Act. State and local governments lack sufficient tools and training to support resilient coastal communities and ecosystems, understand and plan for invasive species, take action to address the impacts of ocean and coastal pollution on human health, conduct research on and mitigate the effects of harmful algal blooms and hypoxia, or plan for traditional and alternative energy projects in the marine environment.

The NOS Office of Response and Restoration (OR&R) provides comprehensive mitigation efforts to environmental hazards caused by oil, chemicals, and marine debris. OR&R provides scientific support for oil and chemical spill response and damage assessments in coastal waters. During a major oil or chemical spill, OR&R provides the critical information that industry and government agencies need to launch a quick, successful response and cleanup. The program's scientists forecast the movement and behavior of the spilled oil or chemicals, evaluate the risks to natural resources, and make cleanup recommendations. Last year alone, OR&R responded to nearly 180 oil spill/hazmat incidents. Without the financial support to ensure this office can effectively carry out its responsibilities, our nation's ability to respond to such disasters would be greatly reduced. Based on current resources, NOAA cannot respond to two simultaneous oil spills and produce the scientific tools and products to improve our response to oil and chemical spills.

NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), working with regional fisheries management councils, is responsible for managing our marine fisheries. Fisheries are significant economic drivers, generating \$185 billion in sales and supporting over two million jobs in 2006. Sound stewardship of our marine fisheries is critical to maintaining these industries for today's fishermen and future generations of Americans as well as for providing seafood as part of a healthy diet. We must invest in improving the science that allows our fisheries managers to make decisions that can lead to sustainable management of these industries. NMFS manages 531 fish stocks and stock complexes; however, due to funding constraints, the agency has surveyed only 216 stocks in the last five years. The Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, reauthorized in 2007, mandates that NOAA end overfishing by 2011 and implement bycatch reduction initiatives, fishery management requirements, and research programs. The President's budget proposes fully funding the Act and we support this goal, but doing so will require increased funding in FY 2010 to improve fisheries research and management programs, including fishery management council operations, cooperative research programs that put fishermen and scientists together on the water, socio-economic research, development of new and experimental gear types to reduce bycatch, expanding stock assessments, and increasing enforcement and observer programs.

NMFS also oversees NOAA's Office of Protected Resources (OPR) which is responsible for research and conservation of sea turtles, marine mammals, and other protected species such as Atlantic salmon. Funding constraints are severely impacting OPR's ability to carry out its missions. For example, OPR is required by the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) to establish take reduction teams (TRT) that develop measures to reduce the incidental takes of marine mammals. According to the Government Accountability Office (GAO), for most stocks, OPR relies on incomplete, outdated, or imprecise data on stocks' population size or mortality to calculate the extent of incidental take. The GAO identified 30 marine mammal stocks that have met requirements for establishing a take reduction team, and OPR has established six teams that cover 16 of them. Despite their Federal mandate, OPR has not had the financial resources to convene TRTs for the other 14 stocks. Even when a TRT meets, it is forced to make decisions based on sub-optimal data regarding marine mammal behavior and habitat, which can potentially lead to imposition of overly burdensome regulations on economic activity. The OPR is also responsible for conducting Section 7 consultations under the Endangered Species Act. The agency is continually behind on Section 7 consultations, the development of recovery plans, and habitat conservation plans due to a lack of funding. This backlog will continue to increase as we expand existing, and explore new, uses in the marine environment, such as energy development.

NOAA's Office of Habitat Conservation, also housed within NMFS, is responsible for managing, protecting and restoring the nation's coastal, marine, and migratory fish habitats through programs such as Community-based Restoration, Open Rivers, and Damage Assessment, Remediation and Restoration. Funding for these programs create jobs in local communities while supporting innovative projects that protect and restore our environment.

Weather events affect our nation every day – from rainstorms, hurricanes, tornadoes, tsunamis and floods to droughts and heat waves. The National Weather Service (NWS) is on the frontlines, working with the public to understand weather and to protect communities. The NWS provides services for the United States, its territories, and our adjacent waters and ocean areas, to protect life and property and enhance the nation's economy. Airlines, for example, rely on forecasts to best position their aircraft and adjust flight plans and schedules for public safety. Long-term, seasonal climate forecasts help city managers better manage the purchase of resources such as salt and sand for roads and sidewalks. Farmers rely on short-term and long-term forecasts to time plantings. River forecasts help communities protect their property by preparing for floods. Emergency managers and the Federal Emergency Management Agency rely on NWS services during natural disasters and emergency situations. Television weathercasters and private meteorology companies prepare their forecasts using NWS information. Clearly, insufficient funding for these and all NWS activities has real impacts on the ground. Without sufficient support for the infrastructure, computing capability, and people to integrate the information, NOAA's ability to provide weather services to the nation will be significantly weakened.

NWS's activities are further supported by the National Environmental Satellite, Data, and Information Service (NESDIS), which manages the nation's environmental satellite systems for weather and climate forecasting and coastal and ocean monitoring. These systems also relay position information from emergency beacons to save lives. NOAA's next generation of environmental satellites will improve weather and climate forecast accuracy and understanding of climate variability and change, advance hurricane tracking/intensity forecasting, and improve lightning detection. Costs associated with the acquisition and management of these satellites will increase over the upcoming fiscal cycles. An increase in funding for NOAA will make sure that these critical satellite missions are successful and avoid shifting the cost burden to the agency's non-satellite programs.

Sound science is the basis of effective decision-making, and NOAA's Office of Oceanic and Atmospheric Research (OAR) provides the scientific foundation for understanding the complex systems that support our planet. OAR's work focuses on three major areas: weather and air quality, climate, and ocean and coastal resources. Oceans are critical to the regulation of the Earth's weather and climate, which affects the health of our fisheries, coasts, and oceans. OAR's funding is the basis for future advances in preparing for, and responding to, the effects of climate change as well as advancing technologies to improve understanding of our planet. Increased funding will also allow NOAA to expand important partnerships with the external research community and support important programs that take science out of the laboratory and into the community. One example is the National Sea Grant College Program, a partnership between NOAA, universities, coastal and Great Lakes states, industry, and over 300 partner institutions. Sea Grant produces a wide range of applied and basic marine scientific research, and provides education, training, and technical assistance programs that promote the understanding and management of ocean, coastal, and Great Lakes resources. Funding reductions are forcing Sea Grant programs across the country to reduce staff levels and research and outreach services. Another example is NOAA's Regional Integrated Sciences and Assessments Program, which supports research that addresses complex climate issues of concern to stakeholders and policy planners at a regional level and helps provide climate services to inform decision-making.

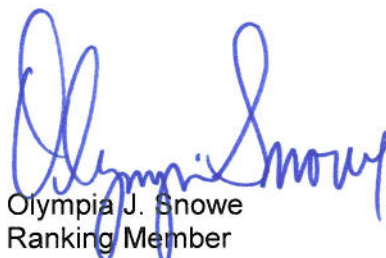
The \$5 billion requested for NOAA in FY 2010 will allow NOAA to sustain its existing missions and meet the emerging needs of the American people. NOAA's flat budget has eroded funding for core services and infrastructure that support key U.S. industries and resource management efforts. It has also prevented investment in research, monitoring, and management activities that would generate significant returns to America's economy. Increased funding for NOAA is needed to strengthen scientific research and exploration that underlie management and policy decisions, such as fisheries management and climate adaptation. Funding is also necessary to modernize infrastructure, including satellites; ships and aircraft; ocean, coastal, and atmospheric observation systems; and computer systems that integrate data and model changes in the climate and oceans. Lastly, funding increases are necessary to support programs that protect ocean and coastal resources and restore ecosystems if they are damaged.

We recognize the fiscal constraints facing the Subcommittee in crafting the FY 2010 budget. We appreciate the Subcommittee's past support of NOAA and look forward to working with you. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Maria Cantwell
Chairman
Subcommittee on Oceans, Atmosphere,
Fisheries and Coast Guard



Olympia J. Snowe
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Oceans, Atmosphere,
Fisheries and Coast Guard