



Sea Grant Association

Dr. Rebecca M. Blank
Acting Secretary of Commerce and Under Secretary for Economic Affairs
U.S. Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20230

Mr. Jacob J. Lew
Director, Office of Management and Budget
725 17th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20503

Dr. Jane Lubchenco
Under Secretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
1401 Constitution Avenue, NW, Room 5128
Washington, DC 20230

RE: The Role of NOAA's State Partners in Implementing National Priorities

Dear Dr. Blank, Mr. Lew and Dr. Lubchenco:

As the Administration addresses federal deficit reduction in FY12 and beyond, the Coastal States Organization, National Estuarine Research Reserve Association, and Sea Grant Association ask for your support in ensuring that funding for innovative and successful state-federal partnership programs such as the National Coastal Zone Management Program (CZM), National Estuarine Research Reserve System (NERRS), and National Sea Grant College Program (Sea Grant) is sustained at appropriate levels. We understand the need for federal reductions in discretionary spending, and we are not asking for the "high water marks" of past appropriations. However, any additional federal cuts to our programs, at the same time that we are experiencing significant cuts at the state levels, would significantly limit our ability to implement high priority ocean and coastal programs.

The CZM, NERRS, and Sea Grant programs are unique state partners that help NOAA serve a broad and diverse coastal and ocean constituency. We are gravely concerned about the impacts that potential federal funding cuts will have on our ability to address our nation's ocean and coastal priorities and implement effective programs at the local level. With few exceptions, the CZM, NERRS and Sea Grant programs have endured level funding and budget reductions over the last decade. Combined with increasing demands for our programs and services and the loss of jobs and capacity due to steep declines in state revenues, these critically important NOAA state partners will not have the capacity to implement the policies and activities that have been and are being advanced by NOAA and the Administration. Prospective cuts to these three programs will mean additional jobs lost, reduced support to coastal communities, and severely diminished capacity for implementation of the priorities of the Administration and NOAA, including many elements of the National Ocean Policy (NOP) and NOAA's Next Generation Strategic Plan (NGSP).

We have been encouraged by the increased focus of the Administration on ocean and coastal issues under the National Ocean Policy. And with our three on-the-ground programs, the Administration has at its disposal experienced state partners who directly provide services involving ocean and coastal data, research, information products, and management programs to our coastal communities and diverse stakeholders. In fact, we are among the few NOAA programs that can support local-scale, face-to-face implementation of the NOP and NGSP's identified priorities. We directly manage public trust resources and address national priorities at the state and local scales, including sea level change, ocean planning, beach and shoreline management, coastal restoration and protection, working waterfronts, and public access to coastal resources.

Federal ocean and coastal priorities are already being advanced by our programs through a modest number of managers, scientists, specialists, and trainers who are "on location," have established local trust and credibility, and operate under both federal and state authorities. For example, states that are undertaking Coastal and Marine Spatial Planning are doing so through existing authorities, plans, and processes under the Coastal Zone Management Act, using information gathered from the NERRS, and engaging stakeholders through Sea Grant programs. Our programs have also taken lead roles in the establishment and growth of the nation's Regional Ocean Partnerships, identifying regional priorities, and creating paths to successfully manage coastal ecosystems on a regional basis.

Over the past 40 years, our programs have developed a wealth of experience, local stakeholder relationships, and a host of success stories in ocean and coastal research and management. While we represent a very small fraction of NOAA's overall budget, the Administration will be hard pressed to move forward with its coastal and ocean agenda without adequately supporting our programs. Without sustained support for the CZM, NERRS, and Sea Grant, federal agencies will continue to improve our scientific understanding of coastal and ocean issues, but will not have the state and regional partners in place to address those issues.

We propose a different view of the future, where the federal government re-invests in state partnerships as fundamental to achieving national coastal and ocean objectives of Administration initiatives, and where federal agencies engage their state partners as strong advocates and intermediaries for local action through enhanced state capacities, training, and financial support. The Office of Management and Budget, the Department of Commerce, and NOAA can support the nation's coastal communities and their economies by advancing federal-state partnerships as key mechanisms for delivering effective coastal resource management on the ground. Our programs possess the necessary tools, experience, and infrastructure, but need federal support to continue to deliver sound ocean and coastal policies and science at the regional, state, and local levels.

At a time when the nation has resolved to re-focus on coastal and ocean issues through a variety of initiatives, including a national policy and interagency coordination framework, and at a time when budgets are extremely limited at the federal and state levels, it is more important than ever to recognize the key role that NOAA's state partners can play. Our programs leverage funds to be greater than the sum of our individual budgets, and we hope that the Administration will strongly engage NOAA's state partners in implementing ocean and coastal initiatives, including the National Ocean Policy.

The past successes of our federal-state partnerships are a result of the ability of our programs to work directly with communities to address state and national priorities and to gather, distill, and translate the necessary science for coastal stakeholders. The Coastal States Organization, National Estuarine Research Reserve Association, and Sea Grant Association ask for your support in aligning federal budget priorities with Administration policy priorities such that, minimally, current funding levels are maintained. We also request a meeting with you to discuss the role of our programs in advancing our shared ocean and coastal priorities.

Sincerely,

Braxton Davis
Chair
Coastal States Organization

Rebecca Ellin
President
National Estuarine Research
Reserve Association

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