



March 2, 2020

The Honorable José Serrano, Chairman
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science and Related Agencies
H-310 The Capitol
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Robert Aderholt, Ranking Minority Member
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science and Related Agencies
1016 Longworth House Office Building
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Serrano and Ranking Member Aderholt:

The undersigned members of the Choose Clean Water Coalition request continued support for programs that are essential to maintaining a healthy and vibrant Chesapeake Bay and a strong regional economy that is dependent on the Bay's resources. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) has a strong and long-term presence in the Chesapeake Bay area, and its Chesapeake Bay Office coordinates their efforts with other federal agencies, state and local partners, and users of the resource.

The programs that are run and/or coordinated by NOAA's Chesapeake Bay Office (NCBO) are critical for the Chesapeake Bay ecosystem and for its users and residents. These programs provide the science and management assistance necessary for those whose livelihood is to ply the Bay's waters for fish, crabs, and oysters and to the hundreds of thousands of people who fish recreationally in the Bay every year and to the millions who boat, kayak, and/or view wildlife in the region.

NCBO is also critical for others, from students learning about science with hands-on experiences to local governments and residents along the shore to have the latest information to prepare for coastal flooding and hurricane emergencies.

Utilizing sound science in the management of Chesapeake Bay resources is critical for our regional economy. We request the following funding levels in Fiscal Year 2021:

Department of Commerce

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration - National Marine Fisheries Service –
Habitat Conservation and Restoration – Chesapeake Bay Office (NCBO) - \$9.7 million

Chesapeake Bay Office (NCBO) - \$9.7 million

The NCBO was established by Congress in 1992 to provide resources, technical assistance and coordination through two branches: 1) Ecosystem Science and Synthesis Program - applied research and monitoring in fisheries and aquatic habitats; synthesis,

and analysis to describe and predict Bay ecosystem processes; and technical assistance to Chesapeake Bay decision makers; and 2) Environmental Literacy and Partnerships Program - development of K-12 and higher education environmental science education programs; strategic partnerships with the Chesapeake Bay Program and other government, university, and nonprofit partners; and delivering NOAA products, services, and programs to targeted audiences.

The NCBO's programs play a key role in implementing the Chesapeake Bay Agreement among the states and is critical to ensuring that commitments are met to:

- restore native oyster habitat and populations in 10 tributaries by the year 2025;
- ensure students graduate with the knowledge and skills to protect and restore their local watershed;
- sustain a healthy blue crab and striped bass (rockfish) population;
- maintain a coordinated watershed-wide monitoring and research program; and
- adapt to climate change, including sea level rise and flooding.

The specific breakdown of our request for \$9.7 million for the NCBO is as follows:

Oyster Restoration - \$4 million

The Chesapeake Bay oyster population is less than 1 percent of historic levels and the ecosystem functions associated with oyster reefs, including fish habitat and nitrogen removal, are similarly diminished. NCBO continues to restore entire tributaries with self-sustaining oyster populations and to measure the resulting ecosystem benefits. NCBO works with federal, state, and private partners to plan and implement this tributary-scale restoration in both Maryland and Virginia.

Studies by Morgan State University found that the economic multipliers associated with commercial and recreational fishing in three restored tributaries of the Choptank River are valued at \$13 million annually for newly restored reefs and \$26 million annually once those reefs mature. In addition, research conducted in one of these tributaries, Harris Creek, by the University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science and the Virginia Institute of Marine Science found the reefs there are removing nitrogen and phosphorous from the water, providing a service valued at over \$3 million annually. Preliminary research by NOAA has also found correlations between clearer water and increased submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV) growth in areas where large-scale restoration has occurred when compared to similar unrestored areas. Protecting the existing restoration sites will allow these benefits to accrue and new restoration will enhance these benefits in more tributaries.

Funding for oyster restoration in the Chesapeake is critical to the overall ecosystem health of the Bay. We urge you to provide \$4 million to help restore this keystone species so important to the Bay and the region.

Environmental Education and Literacy - \$3.5 million

NCBO encourages and supports efforts in K-12 and higher education to develop and implement comprehensive environmental literacy programs. NCBO runs the nationally

recognized Bay Watershed Education and Training Program (B-WET) - a competitive grant program for hands-on watershed education for students and teacher training to foster stewardship of the Chesapeake Bay. B-WET's national funding level had steadily eroded over a decade until FY20. Our requested \$3.5 million would be a part of the larger national B-WET funding and we encourage you to continue restoring funding to this successful and popular program. The current funding level for B-WET in the Chesapeake is \$2.7 million.

Fisheries Science - \$1 million

Chesapeake fisheries contribute significantly to the economy and culture of the region. In 2019, blue crab abundance increased to 594 million crabs, though harvest numbers were down. Striped bass (rockfish) have had a noticeable decline in recent years and Maryland, Virginia, and the Potomac River Fisheries Commission are all looking at additional harvest restrictions in 2020. Rockfish remain the most popular commercial and recreational finfish in the Bay, generating roughly \$500 million in economic activity related to fishing expenditures, travel, lodging, and so on each year – but the future is uncertain. NCBO works with top academic institutions to provide science used to sustainably manage commercially and recreationally valuable species. These efforts have been hampered by slowly eroding budgets, leaving NCBO without a single fishery biologist on staff. These efforts are funded at \$240,000 in FY20.

Chesapeake Bay Interpretive Buoy System (CBIBS) – \$1 million

Weather and water conditions on the Chesapeake Bay are constantly changing. It is imperative that monitoring systems are in place to provide high quality data to understand, forecast, and develop decision support applications that aid maritime commerce, safety, and fishing activities. CBIBS is maintained by NCBO and relays near real time weather and water information to the National Weather Service, boaters, pilots, and researchers. This is the only system monitoring wind and waves together in the mainstem of the Bay. In addition, CBIBS plays a crucial role monitoring key aspects of the Bay's health. Data from the buoys are used to track sediment plumes spilling into the Bay following storms, measure oxygen levels important to fish throughout the year and to forecast the distribution and severity of dangerous bacteria – information that is critical to successful aquaculture operations. CBIBS is funded at approximately \$800,000 in FY20.

Climate and Resiliency - \$200,000

NOAA and the U.S. Geological Survey lead implementing the climate resiliency goal for the Chesapeake Bay Program partnership. The NOAA Chesapeake Bay Office maintains a full-time climate resiliency specialist to coordinate all climate activities across the Chesapeake Bay Program, including activities such as monitoring for the impacts of sea level rise, coastal flooding, increased storm intensity and their effects on living resources and coastal communities.

Thank you for your consideration of these very important requests to maintain funding for programs that are critical to the health of the Chesapeake Bay and its natural resources. Please contact Peter J. Marx at 410-905-2515 or Peter@ChooseCleanWater.org with any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,