March 4, 2019

The Honorable Jerry Moran, Chairman
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science and Related Agencies
Room S-128, Capitol
U.S Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Jeanne Shaheen, Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science and Related Agencies
Room S-128, Capitol
U.S Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Moran and Ranking Member Shaheen:

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 2020:

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

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The NCBO was established by Congress in 1992 to provide resources, technical assistance and coordination through its two branches: the Ecosystem Science and Synthesis Program, which focuses on 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.

The second branch is Environmental Literacy and Partnerships Program, which focuses on the 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 voluntary 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:

<u>Oyster Restoration - $4 million</u>
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.

Recent 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 currently valued at $13 million annually for newly restored reefs and $26 million annually once the restored reefs are allowed to 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 was also done through the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, but they have not received funding in a number of years. Funding for this key program has eroded sharply since FY2010, and without Army Corps funds, NOAA is the only Federal agency left to continue this key restoration program.

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-WETs funding has steadily eroded since 2010 and should be restored to at least that level. This $3.5 million would be a part of the larger national B-WET funding.

Fisheries Science - $1 million

Chesapeake fisheries contribute significantly to the economy and culture of the region. In 2018 Maryland harvested just over 33 million pounds of blue crab with a dockside value of more than $53.7 million. Striped bass (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. 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, and this at a time when climate change is altering ecosystem conditions in ways that may impact commercial and recreational species and their prey in unknown ways.

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.

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,

Action Together Northeastern Pennsylvania
Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay
Alliance for the Shenandoah Valley
American Chestnut Land Trust

American Rivers
Anacostia Riverkeeper
Anacostia Watershed Society
Annapolis Green
Arundel Rivers Federation
Audubon Maryland/DC
Audubon Naturalist Society
Audubon Society of Northern Virginia
Back Creek Conservancy
Baltimore Tree Trust
Blue Heron Environmental Network
Blue Ridge Watershed Coalition
Blue Water Baltimore
Butternut Valley Alliance
Cacapon Institute
Capital Region Land Conservancy
Catskill Mountainkeeper
Center for Progressive Reform
Chapman Forest Foundation
Chemung River Friends
Chesapeake Bay Foundation
Chesapeake Climate Action Network
Chesapeake Conservancy
Chesapeake Legal Alliance
Chesapeake Wildlife Heritage
Clean Fairfax
Clean Water Action
Clean Water Linganore
Coalition for Smarter Growth
Conservation Voters of Pennsylvania
DC Environmental Network
Delaware Nature Society
Ducks Unlimited
Earth Conservation Corps
Earthworks
Earth Forum of Howard County
Eastern Pennsylvania Coalition for Abandoned Mine Reclamation
Eastern Shore Land Conservancy
Elizabeth River Project
Environmental Integrity Project
Environmental Justice Center of Chestnut Hill United Church
Environmental Working Group
Experience Learning
Float Fishermen of Virginia
Friends of Accotink Creek
Friends of Frederick County
Friends of Herring Run Park
Friends of Little Hunting Creek
Friends of Lower Beaverdam Creek
Friends of Quincy Run
Friends of Sligo Creek
Friends of the Bohemia
Friends of the Cacapon River
Friends of Dyke Marsh
Friends of the Middle River
Friends of the Nanticoke River
Friends of the North Fork of the Shenandoah River
Friends of the Rappahannock
Friends of St. Clements Bay
Goose Creek Association
Interfaith Partners for the Chesapeake
James River Association
Lackawanna River Conservation Association
Lancaster Farmland Trust
Little Falls Watershed Alliance
Lower Shore Land Trust
Lower Susquehanna Riverkeeper
Lynnhaven River NOW
Maryland Conservation Council
Maryland Environmental Health Network
Maryland League of Conservation Voters
Maryland Native Plant Society
Maryland Nonprofits
Maryland Science Center
Mattawoman Watershed Society
Mid-Atlantic Council Trout Unlimited
Middle Susquehanna Riverkeeper
Muddy Branch Alliance
National Aquarium
National Parks Conservation Association
National Wildlife Federation
Natural Resources Defense Council
Nature Abounds
NeighborSpace of Baltimore County
New York League of Conservation Voters
New York State Council of Trout Unlimited
Neighbors of the Northwest Branch
Otsego County Conservation Association
Otsego Land Trust
Partnership for Smarter Growth
Patapsco Heritage Greenway
Patuxent Tidewater Land Trust
PennEnvironment
PennFuture
Pennsylvania Council of Churches

Pennsylvania Council of Trout Unlimited
Piedmont Environmental Council
Potomac Conservancy
Potomac Riverkeeper
Potomac Riverkeeper Network
Potomac Valley Audubon Society
Queen Anne's Conservation Association
Preservation Maryland
Rachel Carson Council
Restore America's Estuaries
Rappahannock League for Environmental Protection
Richmond Audubon Society
Rivanna Conservation Alliance
Rock Creek Conservancy
St. Mary's River Watershed Association
Savage River Watershed Association
Severn River Association
Shenandoah Riverkeeper Shenandoah Valley Network
ShoreRivers
Sidney Center Improvement Group
Sierra Club – Maryland Chapter
Sleepy Creek Watershed Association
Southeast Rural Community Assistance Project
Southern Maryland Audubon Society
SouthWings
Susquehanna Heritage
Talbot Preservation Alliance
The Downstream Project
Transition Howard County
Trash Free Maryland
Trout Unlimited
Upper Potomac Riverkeeper
Upper Susquehanna Coalition
Virginia Association of Biological Farming
Virginia Conservation Network
Virginia League of Conservation Voters
Warm Springs Watershed Association
Waterfront Partnership of Baltimore, Inc.
Waterkeepers Chesapeake
West Virginia Citizen Action Group
West Virginia Environmental Council
West Virginia Highlands Conservancy
West Virginia Rivers Coalition
Wetlands Watch
Wicomico Environmental Trust