May 24, 2017

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski
Chairman
Subcommittee on the Interior,
Environment, and Related Agencies
Senate Committee on Appropriations
131 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Tom Udall
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on the Interior,
Environment, and Related Agencies
Senate Committee on Appropriations
125 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Murkowski and Ranking Member Udall:

We are writing to thank you for your past support of the National Estuary Program (NEP), and ask you to continue to invest directly in the stewardship of our nation’s coasts by providing robust funding for the National Estuary Program and ensuring that the funding formula for the NEP reauthorization enacted into law last year is applied. As you know, important reforms were made to the NEP in the recent reauthorization (S. 1523) that was signed into law last year. These reforms would create a competitive program to address urgent challenges and maximize funds received by our national estuaries, while streamlining the administrative costs of the program.

The NEP consists of 28 voluntary programs established by the Clean Water Act to protect and improve estuaries of national significance. Each NEP engages its local community in a non-regulatory, consensus-driven, and science-based process. For every dollar EPA provides, NEPs leverage $19 in local funds to protect and improve coastal environments, communities, and economies.

NEPs organize local stakeholders as partners in a unique decision-making framework to fund local priorities. NEPs provide technical, management, and communications assistance to develop priorities and implement comprehensive actions: stormwater and infrastructure projects; seagrass and shellfish restoration which support fishing and tourist industries; science and monitoring to guide decision-making; and innovative education programs designed for the next generation of Americans.

NEPs engage businesses, states, localities and other community members to develop solutions for tough problems. NEP partners include commercial agriculture and fisheries, energy and water utilities, local restaurants & tourist businesses, construction and landscaping professionals, engineering and mining companies, state and local governments, colleges and universities, and other community organizations. Public-private partnerships coordinated by NEPs further stretch federal dollars to provide successful on-the-ground results driven by diverse stakeholders.

We would greatly appreciate the opportunity to work with you to ensure that as you complete work on the FY 2018 appropriations measure, it reflects the recent reauthorization by allocating at least $700,000 to each NEP, funding the newly authorized competitive program at
approximately $4 million, and leaving more than five percent of authorized amounts for administration of the program, consistent with Public Law 114-162.

Thank you for your strong support of this program over the years, and for considering our request.

Sincerely,

Sheldon Whitehouse
United States Senator

Bill Nelson
United States Senator

Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator

Thomas R. Carper
United States Senator

Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator

Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator

Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator

Maria Cantwell
United States Senator

Christopher A. Coons
United States Senator

Angus S. King, Jr.
United States Senator

Jack Reed
United States Senator

Cory A. Booker
United States Senator