National Estuary Program that Protects and Restores Critically Important Coastal Areas, Supports Fish and Wildlife and Provides Recreational Benefits to Millions at Serious Risk

Over one half of the U.S. population lives in coastal areas. As of 2012, these areas provided over 80 percent of all U.S. jobs and contributed $13 trillion to the U.S. economy. Between 1997 and 2012, nearly 80 percent of the growth in population, jobs and gross domestic product was in coastal states. Coastal states are home to numerous estuaries, including bays, sounds and lagoons, where freshwater from rivers and streams mixes with salt water from the sea. Estuaries are the most biologically productive ecosystems on earth and their bounty supports tourism, fisheries and recreation. Most commercially important fish species spend part of their life cycle in estuaries. In 2014, fisheries contributed $1.4 million full- and part-time jobs and generated $153 billion in sales, $42 billion in income and $64 billion in value-added impacts nationwide. Estuarine waters serve as harbors and ports for U.S. shipping and transportation. Estuarine wetlands protect habitat and property from storm damage by creating natural buffers between the land and the ocean that absorb flood waters and dissipate storm surges. The National Estuary Program, which guides the restoration of 28 of the most significant estuaries in the country, could be decimated.

What will be lost if the National Estuary Program is Slashed?

- Clean waters free of dangerous levels of nutrients, toxics and pathogens necessary for healthy swimming, fishing and other recreational activities
- Protection and restoration of millions of acres that provide habitats for coastal and marine species and support recreation and commercial fishing
- Control and eradication of non-native species that threaten native species
- Information and tools that help coastal communities threatened by severe storms and tidal flooding

How Does the National Estuary Program Achieve Results?

- The National Estuary Program was authorized by the 1987 Amendments to the federal Clean Water Act and reauthorized in 2016 to protect and restore water quality and ecosystems in 28 nationally significant estuarine watersheds along the Atlantic, Gulf and Pacific coasts and in Puerto Rico.
- Each National Estuary Program works with businesses, states, localities, and other partners to undertake non-regulatory projects that protect and improve coastal environments, communities and economies. For every dollar of congressional funding, estuary program partners provide $19 dollars in financial and in-kind resources.
- A small federal estuary program staff serves as fiduciaries of congressionally appropriated funds, conducts program reviews, provides technical assistance and measures environmental results.

Successes of the National Estuary Program

- **Tampa Bay Estuary - Florida:** One in every five jobs in the Tampa Bay watershed now depends on a healthy Tampa Bay. A clean bay contributes an impressive $22 billion, or 13%, of the total economic activity of the six-county Tampa Bay region. However, beginning in the 1950s, Tampa Bay experienced major declines in bait and food shrimp, spotted sea trout and red drum, scallop and oyster fisheries, due in large part to increased water pollution and the resulting significant decline in the acres of seagrass habitat. In a bay-wide effort, the Tampa Bay Estuary Program led ambitious regional actions that have restored Tampa Bay water quality and seagrass acreage back to 1950s levels. Most impressive, the estuary program accomplished its goals in the face of area population growth of more than one million residents over the last 15 years.

- **Barataria-Terrebonne - Louisiana:** The Barataria-Terrebonne estuary in southeast Louisiana is the fastest-disappearing landmass on earth. Major land loss resulting from natural geologic change and human activity has significantly reduced the ability of the coastal landscape to mitigate the impacts of storm surges; decreased the number of sport and commercial fin fish and shellfish, fur-bearing animals, waterfowl and migratory bird species, which attract tourists and birders and have significant commercial value; and decreased the acreage available to naturally filter and reduce excessive nutrients, pathogens and toxic chemicals in estuary waters. In one of many significant responses, the Barataria-Terrebone Estuary Program led a major effort to restore maritime forest ridges that greatly enhanced storm surge protection and added new habitat for key species. Also, in the aftermath of the 2010 BP oil spill, the program provided crucial information about oil spill impacts and mitigation efforts, and led public efforts to rescue birds and animals affected by the oil.

- **Buzzards Bay - Massachusetts**: This National Estuary Program coordinates the design and construction of stormwater treatment systems that reduce harmful bacteria in estuary waters. In one example, the program provided funding to eliminate discharges into local waters from combined sewer systems that transport rainwater runoff, household sewage and industrial wastewater in the same pipes. These and other efforts produced cleaner water that facilitated the reopening of 1,100 acres in the outer New Bedford, Massachusetts harbor that had been closed for decades. Over the life of this project, the Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries and municipalities in the watershed have reopened over 70 percent, or nearly 10,000 acres of previously and "permanently"-closed shellfish resource areas.

- **Albemarle-Pamlico Sound - North Carolina and Virginia:** Under the leadership of the Albemarle-Pamlico National Estuary Program, the agricultural community has implemented best management practices to reduce the amount of harmful nitrogen flowing into the estuary. Too much nitrogen causes overgrowth of algae and reduces the availability of oxygen that fish and other aquatic life need to survive. These improved practices, including buffer installation, contour planting, no-till planting and creek fencing, yielded a 42 percent decrease in nitrogen going into the Albemarle-Pamlico Sound estuary. This reduction exceeded the goal of a 30 percent reduction called for in a water quality permit.

- **The Puget Sound - Washington:** Puget Sound on the Pacific Northwest Coast is the second largest estuary in the U.S., extending inland to meet 19 different river basins. In Samish Bay, a sub-estuary of Puget Sound, the harvest of 4,000 acres of shellfish beds is valued at approximately $3 million. By 2010, high levels of bacteria in the bay had forced the closure of 80 percent of the shellfish beds. With funding from EPA, a broad coalition of government entities, businesses and non-profit organizations identified and eliminated sources of the bacteria polluting the bay. Between 2010 and 2015, their efforts reduced fecal contamination by 80 percent at the sampling location closest to the shellfish beds. By 2013, 50 percent of the shellfish beds were open, producing critical jobs and revenue. In the Nisqually Delta, another Puget Sound sub-estuary, tidal flow had been obstructed by the presence of dikes for a century. With support from the estuary program, the largest restoration project in the Pacific Northwest began in 1996. By 2015, the removal of dikes had resulted in a 42 percent increase in estuary habitat. With over 1,000 acres restored, the condition of the entire ecosystem is vastly improved, creating habitat for salmon, waterfowl, invertebrates and other native wildlife populations.

Baseline Budget FY 2016
$26.723 million, 43.6 FTE (Staff)

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