



Albemarle-Pamlico Sound • Apalachicola-Chattahoochee-Flint River Basin • Chesapeake Bay
Coastal Louisiana • Colorado River • Delaware River • Everglades • Galveston Bay • Great Lakes
Gulf of Maine • Lake Champlain • Long Island Sound • Mississippi River • Missouri River
Narragansett Bay • New York/New Jersey Harbor and Hudson Estuary • Ohio River
Puget Sound • Rio Grande • San Francisco Bay • St. Johns River

March 23, 2015

The Honorable Robert Aderholt, Chairman
Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural
Development, Food and Drug Administration
U.S. House of Representatives
2362-A Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Sam Farr, Ranking Member
Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural
Development, Food and Drug Administration
U.S. House of Representatives
1016 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515-3509

Dear Chairman Aderholt and Ranking Member Farr:

We express our strong support for the Committee's dedication to the restoration of America's Great Waters. As the Fiscal Year 2016 appropriations bills are developed, we respectfully urge you to maintain strong funding for programs that enable important work to restore landscapes like those in and around the America's 21 Great Waters¹. Places like these are not only valuable ecological resources, but are also significant economic drivers for large swaths of the nation, providing much-needed jobs and opportunities for untold numbers of Americans. As you make difficult decisions regarding funding, we want to highlight the solid return on taxpayer investments in Great Waters restoration.

Specifically, we encourage you to oppose cuts to mandatory agricultural conservation programs in the FY 2016 budget. Unfortunately, the President's FY16 budget proposes steep cuts to mandatory funding for critical conservation programs that provide assistance to farmers and ranchers to help them implement voluntary conservation practices on their lands. Specifically, the budget proposes direct cuts to the Conservation Stewardship Program and the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, two programs that provide vital benefits for America's Great Waters. Moreover, the proposed cuts to these programs would result in a decrease of tens of millions of dollars of funding (around \$60 million) for the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) over the next five years, and would affect the baseline funding available for conservation programs in future Farm Bills. RCPP is an innovative new conservation program created in the 2014 Farm Bill with much support from the America's Great Waters Coalition and creates a competitive, merit-based process to target conservation funding in areas of greatest conservation need, bringing resources to help reduce pollution in many of America's Great Waters.

After decades of neglect, America's Great Waters need your continued support. With adequate funding, we can sustain progress toward restoration goals including promoting human health, a cleaner environment and a stronger economy. Restoration of our coasts and estuaries involves on-the-ground work, requiring skills and machinery available in the local workforce that provide many benefits to local economies. According to Restore America's Estuaries, restoring our coasts can create more than 30 jobs for every million dollars invested, which is more than twice as many jobs as the oil and gas and road construction industries combined.

¹ America's Great Waters Coalition recognizes 21 Great Waters based on specific criteria. These waters are the Albemarle-Pamlico Sound, Apalachicola-Chattahoochee-Flint River Basin, Chesapeake Bay, Coastal Louisiana, Colorado River, Delaware River, Everglades, Galveston Bay, Great Lakes, Gulf of Maine, Lake Champlain, Long Island Sound, Mississippi River, Missouri River, Narragansett Bay, New York/New Jersey Harbor and Hudson Estuary, Ohio River, Puget Sound, Rio Grande, San Francisco Bay, and St. Johns River.

Along the Mississippi River, estimates show that more than 50 habitat restoration projects contribute approximately \$16.5 million to small businesses and employ more than 300 people in rural counties where, so often, unemployment is the highest following the closure of factories and other industries along the river. A recent report by the Chesapeake Bay Foundation found that economic benefits provided by nature in the Chesapeake watershed will total \$130 billion annually, an increase of \$22 billion annually, when the Chesapeake Clean Water Blueprint is fully implemented. A study conducted by Mather Economics found that for every \$1 invested in restoring the Everglades, there is at least a \$4 return in economic benefits, and that over the next 50 years, the incremental impact of Everglades restoration is expected to produce more than 440,000 jobs. A study of the Delaware River Watershed found that it contributes \$25 billion in annual economic activity and \$21 billion in ecosystem goods and services.

At a time when federal lawmakers need to make smart spending choices, restoration offers one of the best returns on investment in the federal budget; restored watersheds improve our quality of life, increase property values, provide clean water, support fish and wildlife and enhance outdoor recreation for our families. Agricultural conservation programs took a large cut in the 2014 Farm Bill and in previous budget cycles; now is the time to protect the mandatory funding for agriculture conservation programs that was authorized in the 2014 Farm Bill, not to continue to disproportionately cut these popular and effective voluntary programs.

The America's Great Waters Coalition represents diverse national, regional, state and local organizations working to protect, preserve and restore our nation's waters. The Coalition is a result of years of work by national and local organizations to bring the broader restoration community together to "lift all boats." Together, we urge you to continue to provide the highest level of funding possible for federal programs critical for effective Great Waters restoration.

Sincerely,

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