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Statement for the Record for the
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Oversight virtual hearing on Environmental Justice for Coastal Communities: Examining Inequities in Federal Grantmaking

Introduction

Chairman Huffman, Ranking Member McClintock, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to submit this statement for the record for your oversight hearing on “Environmental Justice for Coastal Communities: Examining Inequities in Federal Grantmaking.” This statement will describe the Department of Commerce’s National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)’s Federal grantmaking process, as well as NOAA’s ongoing challenges in addressing economic disparities in coastal communities. This statement will describe NOAA’s commitment to a fair and transparent Federal grantmaking process, as well as provide examples of the educational opportunities, technical assistance, capacity building, and planning expertise NOAA provides coastal communities to build and maintain a diverse workforce.

Overview

NOAA manages fisheries, coastal habitats and species, and protected areas across the Nation. NOAA also monitors and models the environment that helps the American people understand and plan for environmental change and develop adaptation strategies. The broad portfolio of environmental science, tools, and services NOAA provides governments, non-governmental partners, and communities helps assesses the potential for disproportionate and adverse environmental impacts on socioeconomically disadvantaged populations.

NOAA supports programs to build the capacity of underserved communities and provides easily accessible data and planning tools that empower communities to take action on environmental justice issues.

The NOAA Grants Management Division (GMD) manages a Financial Assistance portfolio of 3,457 active grants and cooperative agreements with an awarded amount of \$5,880,346,300 over the past five years. There are 51 programs spread across 6 Line and Staff Offices within NOAA. NOAA has issued awards to 49 states, 6 United States Territories, from Puerto Rico to American Samoa, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas (CNMI) and 14 foreign countries. The financial assistance awards managed by NOAA GMD are governed by the requirements in 2 C.F.R. § 200, Department of Commerce Standard Terms and Conditions, and requirements set forth in competitive funding announcements. The Financial Assistance portfolio supports NOAA's unique mission of science, service, and stewardship. NOAA's sustained commitment to strengthening diversity and enriching inclusion is critical to enable preeminent weather research and forecasting, promote sustainable economic uses of America's oceans and coasts, and support ecosystems that are resilient to potential change.

NOAA serves at the forefront of national efforts to improve coastal resilience. We offer a suite of unique tools, services, and financial and technical assistance programs that enable coastal communities to make wise investment choices, improve ecosystem health, prepare for impending changes and natural disasters, and drive economic growth. NOAA provides support to some of the Nation's most socioeconomically disadvantaged populations, which are increasingly vulnerable to rising coastal threats.

NOAA's Education Opportunities

In addition to providing core tools, data, and services, NOAA administers many educational opportunities, including granting, fellowship, and scholarship programs. We have highlighted some examples of these opportunities below.

Educational Partnership Program with Minority Serving Institutions

NOAA's Educational Partnership Program with Minority Serving Institutions (EPP/MSI) is a future workforce development program that supports the training and increased participation of students from traditionally underrepresented communities. Funded through NOAA's EPP/MSI program, NOAA's four educational Cooperative Science Centers (CSC) strive to educate and train a new generation of scientists, particularly from underserved and minority communities, in NOAA-relevant STEM disciplines and social sciences. CSC graduates are well-trained candidates for the NOAA workforce.

Environmental Literacy Program

NOAA's Environmental Literacy Program provides funding through competitive grants and in-kind support for programs that educate and inspire people to use Earth system science to improve ecosystem stewardship and increase resilience to environmental hazards. The goal of the most recent funding opportunity was to build environmental literacy of K-12 students and the public

so they are knowledgeable of the ways in which their community can become more resilient to extreme weather and/or other environmental hazards, and become involved in achieving that resilience.

Specific emphasis was placed on engaging members of the community who are disproportionately vulnerable to extreme weather. Underserved members of the community include low income, homeless, persons with disabilities, and rural, tribal, and indigenous populations. Project sponsors are strongly encouraged to develop meaningful partnerships with community-based organizations, particularly those from underserved communities. It was also recommended that adequate compensation be provided for community-based organization partners and community members for the efforts they are contributing to the project. Projects will be taking place in Anchorage, AK; Palm Beach Co., FL; Houma, LA; Houston, TX; Brooklyn, NY; Portland, ME; Kahului, HI; San Diego, CA; Boston, MA; and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Bay Watershed Education and Training Program

NOAA's Bay Watershed Education and Training (B-WET) Program funding is provided through competitive grants that support Meaningful Watershed Educational Experiences (MWEEs), multi-stage activities that include learning both outdoors and in the classroom and aim to increase the environmental literacy of all participants. The B-WET program currently serves K-12 students and teachers in coastal communities in the United States through seven regional grant programs. This regional implementation allows the program to respond to local education and environmental priorities. Regional programs also support grantee capacity building by providing training opportunities focused on grant writing and project evaluation. Place-based B-WET projects support investigations into local environmental issues leading to informed action and community engagement, a core part of the MWEE framework. An emphasis on systemic implementation, defined as MWEEs that are embedded across the entire grade level(s) or part of a broader systemic program in a school district, ensure that MWEEs can reach every student.

Office for Coastal Management

Through a NOAA Coral Reef Conservation Program award, American Samoa provides 30 Samoan undergraduate student interns with professional and real-world work experience through the Pacific Internship Programs for Exploring Science (PIPES) program. PIPES is committed to increasing the recruitment and retention of local students, especially in the Pacific Islands, into fields of study, and ultimately careers, related to the natural resources of the Pacific region. Similarly, NOAA's National Coral Reef Management Fellowship program targets qualified individuals from coral reef jurisdictions for fellowship training to address local capacity needs.

NOAA is committed to collaborating with Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs), Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), and tribal colleges to help students become aware of NOAA fellowships and navigate the fellowship application process. To increase participation in underrepresented groups and promote awareness and accessibility of the Margaret A. Davidson Fellowship that was established in 2019, NOAA's Office for Coastal Management purposefully engaged MSIs, HBCUs, tribal colleges, and professional associations supporting people of color. As a result of this effort, 24% of total funding in fiscal year (FY) 2020 was awarded to students from MSIs (7 fellows at 5 different MSIs).

Office of Ocean Exploration and Research

Through the NOAA-funded Ocean Exploration Cooperative Institute (OECI) and its members, the University of Southern Mississippi (USM) Marine Education Center (MEC) is implementing a paid internship program with Tuskegee University (TU). This internship program, supported by NOAA's Office of Ocean Exploration and Research, will increase access and inclusion of TU students in OECI research activities. TU students will go to sea to participate in ocean exploration internships aboard FY 2021 OECI research cruises and will also participate in a 10-week summer mentoring program coordinated by the MEC, USM and/or a participating OECI partner. TU student interns will participate in a program designed for them to engage in OECI exploration, discovery, and data utilization activities ranging from at-sea operations to assistance with engineering solutions, data exploration, and information dissemination.

NOAA's Technical Assistance and Capacity Building Efforts

NOAA delivers services and capacity-building opportunities that are transformational in helping the American people, including vulnerable populations, understand and plan for future change. Examples of capacity-building opportunities are highlighted below.

Office for Coastal Management- Digital Coast Tools

NOAA's National Ocean Service (NOS) provides several tools, trainings, and other technical assistance resources to increase the capacity of communities to prepare for, respond to, and mitigate the risk of growing coastal hazards. NOAA's Digital Coast program provides access to key data sets, innovative tools, and training opportunities that support coastal managers and communities in the decision-making process. Datasets like the Social Vulnerability Index are useful for identifying and assisting socioeconomically disadvantaged communities and are incorporated into Digital Coast tools. Similarly, the Sea Level Rise Viewer and Coastal County snapshot tools are aspects of the Digital Coast program that could be expanded to include additional national datasets on social and economic vulnerability. NOAA's Office for Coastal Management also provides technical assistance and training to help communities apply the data and tools on the Digital Coast and has partnered with Climate Central and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People to bring coastal resilience resources to socioeconomically disadvantaged communities.

National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science's Harmful Algal Bloom Research Programs

Additionally, the National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science's (NCCOS) harmful algal bloom (HABs) research programs enhance the capacity for communities to predict, detect, control, and respond to harmful algal blooms, and to mitigate their impacts on public health, the environment, and the economy in underserved populations. For example, these programs support technologies for forecasting HABs in the Pacific Northwest in partnership with the Makah Tribe and for algae and toxin detection in Alaska through the Southeast Alaska Tribal Ocean Research partnership. A new project funded in 2020 aims to model the impacts of HABs in Alaskan waters, where HAB toxins have been detected in commercially valuable shellfish and finfish, and subsistence-harvested marine mammals.

Marine Debris Program Engagement with Native Alaskans (NOS)

The marine debris problem is uniquely challenging in Alaska. With an extensive, rugged, and remote coastline, longer than the rest of the United States combined, addressing marine debris in Alaska requires innovative and creative approaches. Since 2006, the NOAA Marine Debris Program (MDP) has worked with partners to conduct debris research, removal, and prevention, directly funding more than 35 projects in Alaska that have removed over 900 metric tons of debris from shorelines.

Native communities have specific and nuanced understanding of the environment, from typical cycles of debris deposition and movement to best approaches for debris operations based on local seasonality and weather patterns. Alaska's rich habitats and diverse wildlife are culturally and economically significant to Native communities and sensitive to the negative impacts of the many kinds of marine debris. The NOAA MDP is proud to work with Alaskan Native organizations on marine debris projects. For example, The MDP has built strong partnerships with the Aleut Community of St. Paul Island and other local groups to address marine debris in the Pribilof Islands. Most recently, the MDP awarded a FY 2020 Prevention Grant to the Aleut Community of St. Paul Island to change behaviors around the use and disposal of packing bands to prevent marine debris that poses an entanglement threat to marine wildlife on St. Paul Island, Alaska, particularly northern fur seals.

National Sea Grant College Program

The National Sea Grant College Program provides technical assistance and capacity building primarily through its approximately 400 outreach and extension professionals. These specialists are highly skilled at helping individuals, businesses, and communities understand the state of the science around ocean, coastal, and Great Lakes issues, and then helping them determine how to use that information to make decisions that improve their ability to live, work, and recreate around the water. Recently, supported by \$3.4 million from the 2020 Sea Grant appropriation, Sea Grant programs around the country helped coastal communities become more resilient to the

impacts of COVID-19 in a range of ways. For example, Sea Grant provided technical assistance to seafood producers to find new markets for their product, to coastal tourism efforts to allow for safer beach activities and outdoor coastal dining, and to formal education partners to build innovative curricula, virtual summer camps, and other activities for remote learning on ocean, coastal, and Great Lakes science.

Lastly, coastal storms are among the most awe-inspiring and damaging events that strike our nation. Sea Grant builds the capacity of individuals, communities, and the agencies that work to protect them through a range of research, education, and technical assistance programs. Sea Grant programs help coastal residents understand the vulnerabilities of their homes and to build their capacity to effectively mitigate those vulnerabilities without creating new ones. Sea Grant-funded research and outreach has identified ways to use trusted messengers to encourage life-saving behaviors and more clearly communicate the impact of a storm to help communities make more informed decisions.

Since 2017, Sea Grant's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) community of practice has actively worked to engage and serve communities that are representative of the populations where Sea Grant programs operate. Notably, in 2020, Sea Grant provided funds through a competitive process to implement a new Community Engaged Internship program for undergraduate students from underrepresented and Indigenous communities. Additionally, individual Sea Grant programs continue to engage in DEI efforts to improve their program and the programming they offer to coastal and Great Lakes communities. Finally, the National Sea Grant Office has also established an internal DEI working group to review its administrative efforts, including writing of and recruitment to federal funding opportunities, to ensure we are reaching diverse audiences.

Pacific Coastal Salmon Recovery Fund

Pacific Coastal Salmon Recovery Fund (PCSRF) funds have been instrumental in allowing tribal participation in several local, state, and federal processes, including activities such as recovery plan development and implementation, harvest management plans, and hatchery genetic management plans that provide both treaty and non-treaty fishing opportunities. PCSRF funds have also supported tribal capacity to engage in dialogue with federal and state entities charged with overseeing policies that have direct impacts on salmonids and their tribal treaty fishing rights. Examples include engaging with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the State of Washington about floodplain policies and shoreline issues, respectively.

For example, in 2020 the Wiyot Tribe received funds to increase their tribal capacity to conduct fisheries research, monitoring, and restoration projects in the Eel River basin in Northern California. The Wiyot Tribe, with PCSRF funds, will continue to increase their capacity for fisheries management, restoration efforts, and provide educational and mentorship opportunities

for Tribal youth. PCSRF supports their work towards tribal self-sufficiency on multiple levels (increasing skills in independently conducting fieldwork, managing projects, quality-controlling data, and coordinating with important watershed stakeholders). Furthermore, research and monitoring work will help the Tribe advocate for better management of natural resources and help strengthen their partnerships by facilitating collaboration and data sharing amongst natural resource managers vested in salmon recovery in the Eel River Basin. In addition to contributing to numerous activities that have led to project implementation, the West Coast tribes are active practitioners of on-the-ground habitat protection and restoration projects.

The PCSRF Program also funds technical assistance through its grants to the following states: Washington, Oregon, Idaho, California, and Alaska. In one case, it may fund efforts to help local communities to enhance their understanding of the value of salmon as well as what individuals can do to conserve these important endangered species. In another case, it may help the agricultural community identify and acquire new technologies to conserve water and reduce impacts to salmon associated with water withdrawals.

Office of Habitat Conservation

NOAA's Office of Habitat Conservation (OHC) provides a diverse range of technical assistance at both the landscape and project levels to build partner capacity and maximize the impact of habitat restoration. Through our close collaboration with partners, we facilitate and support knowledge exchange, streamline environmental compliance and permitting, and provide technical assistance support through all phases of restoration planning and implementation. Our partners include non-governmental conservation organizations, academia, tribes, and federal, state, and local governments.

Large-scale habitat restoration requires a significant amount of collaboration, planning, and capacity-building. In the Pacific Islands, coral management has primarily focused on reducing local stressors to corals, however, to sufficiently restore the reefs, active restoration such as outplanting is needed. OHC and The Nature Conservancy have partnered to facilitate the development of coral restoration plans across the four Pacific Island jurisdictions of Hawaii, Guam, American Samoa, and the CMNI. Through this partnership, we are building local capacity and best practices across the Pacific Islands to plan and implement comprehensive coral reef restoration.

Our partners also rely on our restoration experts to help educate the public and increase community engagement for fisheries restoration projects. In Plymouth, Massachusetts, the Town Brook is an important migration path for river herring. We provided funding and technical assistance to the Town of Plymouth for environmental restoration of Town Brook and facilitated national and local outreach efforts. For example, World Fish Migration Day was a worldwide initiative to raise awareness about the importance of open rivers and migratory fish. For this event, we provided educational opportunities for local schools and communities.

Saltonstall-Kennedy Act

The Saltonstall-Kennedy Act established a fund (known as the S-K fund) used by the Secretary of Commerce to provide grants or cooperative agreements for fisheries research and development projects addressing aspects of U.S. fisheries, including, but not limited to, harvesting, processing, marketing, and associated business infrastructures. Under this authority, grants and cooperative agreements are made on a competitive basis (subject to availability of funding) to assist in carrying out projects to expand domestic and foreign markets related to U.S. commercial and recreational fisheries, supporting the working waterfront communities of the nation.

Grant Match Requirements

NOAA administers a number of grants with and without non-federal match requirements; however, the Department of Commerce, NOAA, and individual programs have discretion to waive matching requirements.

National Ocean Service

Within the NOS, both the Coral Reef Conservation Act (CRCA) and Section 306 of the Coastal Zone Management Act (CZMA) require a 1:1 non-federal match. However, the Department of Commerce waives the first \$200,000 for every award to the Insular territory governments under 48 U.S.C. 1469a, which includes the U.S. Virgin Islands, Guam, American Samoa, and CNMI, but not Puerto Rico. NOS has used this authority to waive the matching requirements under the CZMA entirely for applicants from the Insular territory government applicants. Under the CRCA, 16 U.S.C. § 6403(b)(2), NOAA has the authority to waive all or part of the matching requirements of any applicant who can demonstrate there is no reasonable means available to meet this requirement and that the benefit of the project outweighs the public interest in requiring the match. NOS's MDP has used similar authority in the Marine Debris Act, 33 U.S.C. § 1952(d)(2)(B) to waive matching requirements in the past.

NOS also provides special grants that do not have matching requirements. One example is the NCCOS Effects of Sea Level Rise (ESLR) program, which provides competitive research funding for a suite of science products and tools used to evaluate coastal vulnerability under multiple sea level rise, inundation, and coastal management scenarios. These tools enable coastal managers to prepare for or mitigate regional impacts of sea level rise in their specific region. ESLR projects also explore scenarios for reducing the vulnerability of ecosystems and communities by evaluating the potential for natural structures (e.g., barrier islands, wetlands, etc.) to reduce coastal inundation, and develop best practices for the inclusion of ecosystems in coastal protection strategies. For example, projects in the Gulf of Mexico have provided socioeconomically disadvantaged populations with access to science products that have allowed for strategic planning for sea level rise and enabled more efficient use of limited public resources.

Another example is through Section 309 of the CZMA, which provides the authority to competitively award approximately \$1.5M for “Projects of Special Merit” and does not require matching funds, greatly increasing the pool of applicants. NOAA’s Office for Coastal Management (OCM) is able to set priorities for this competition, and in FY 2020 added a priority focusing on public access strategies, specifically projects that broaden and enhance safe access for all, including socioeconomically disadvantaged communities, people with disabilities, and non-English speakers.

Starting in 2018, NOAA partnered with the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) to administer resilience grants through the new National Coastal Resilience Fund (NCRF) as directed under National Oceans and Coastal Security Act (NOCSA). NOAA and NFWF are working to identify and address challenges or barriers to applying, providing support for early design, and permitting work, and increasing support for initial capacity-building in communities where needed. The NCRF has supported resilience projects in several socioeconomically disadvantaged communities and the U.S. territories, as well as tribal organizations working to address storm surge, erosion, and fish habitat impacts in their communities.

Oceanic and Atmospheric Research

The National Sea Grant Program follows guidelines set forth in the National Sea Grant Act (33 U.S.C. § 1124(a)) when creating grants. This Act requires that most grants made by Sea Grant are matched by one non-federal dollar for every two federal dollars on the award. Under special circumstances, 33 U.S.C. § 1124(b) allows awarding of grants without the matching requirement. Currently, this authority is used for student fellowships and national projects for which no single entity can justifiably be responsible for match, such as the National Sea Grant Library.

Additionally, programs that qualify for Insular Area Match Waivers (48 U.S.C. §1469(d)) can, and do, invoke that authority to alleviate some of the match challenges that they face. Recipients derive this match from a range of sources, including university systems, direct state appropriations, local government levies, consortium dues, fee-based activities, and private donations. The precise mix varies with each partnership program, due to the unique nature of the establishing partnership.

Programs within NOAA Oceanic and Atmospheric Research (OAR) encourage Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) applicants to support the principles of diversity and inclusion, include diverse participants in research teams, and/or report on diversity actions in progress reports. For example, beginning in FY 2019, the NOAA Climate Program Office (CPO) requires a Diversity and Inclusion Statement for each proposal submitted to NOFOs, which enters the scoring of the proposal. Additionally, the Grants Management Division added an explicit encouragement of engaging with MSIs to NOAA Policy language (see below). However, this statement does not formally factor into the review of NOFO grant proposals.

National Marine Fisheries Service

Federally recognized tribes and tribal commissions/consortia are not required to provide match funds under the PCSRF Program. Throughout the history of the program, only the states have had a match requirement. The PCSRF Program began with a FY2000 Congressional appropriation of \$58 million for the states of Washington, Oregon, California, and Alaska (Idaho has since been added) and the Pacific coast and Columbia River basin tribes “for necessary expenses associated with the restoration of Pacific salmon populations and the implementation of the 1999 Pacific Salmon Treaty Agreement between the United States and Canada” (Public Law 106-113, enacted on November 29, 1999). Initially, states were required by the law to provide a 25% match. In 2009, Public Law 111-8 increased the required match amount to 33%.

The Office of Habitat Conservation’s Coastal and Marine Habitat Restoration Grants competition has no statutory match or cost-share requirement. Instead, NOAA typically leverages federal funding with available voluntary matching contributions and/or partnerships from a broad range of sources in the public and private sector to implement locally important coastal habitat restoration projects. Applicants are encouraged to demonstrate some degree of non-federal match or in-kind contribution to conduct the proposed habitat restoration project in partnership with NOAA. We work closely with applicants and grant award recipients who are unable to provide a non-federal match.

Saltonstall-Kennedy Grants competition has no statutory match or cost-share requirement. Additionally, matching funds cannot be used as an evaluation or selection criteria as part of the program.

Conclusion

In conclusion, NOAA values the opportunity to continue working with this Committee so we can continue to address our Nation’s coastal hazards in a responsible way. NOAA is committed to incorporating the principles of diversity as one of our core values. We effectively respond to the needs of our workforce and our mission by empowering a workforce that includes diversity of thought and diversity in its business practices by ensuring that our coastal communities have the tools they need to lead in the solutions. Thank you and your staff for your ongoing support for NOAA.