



SOUTH JERSEY
BAYSHORE COALITION

December 2, 2011

The Honorable Frank LoBiondo
5914 Main Street Suite 103
Mays Landing, NJ 08330-1746

RE: Request support for NJDEP Coastal Zone Management Program and Partners to remediate coastal wetlands loss at the Maurice and Cohansey Rivers

Dear Congressman LoBiondo:

Thank you again for meeting with members of the South Jersey Bayshore Coalition (SJBC) for an environmental summit on September 6th. During our discussion, you expressed interest in hearing our ideas for possible projects that could address some of the serious coastal erosion, flooding and wetlands loss issues affecting the Delaware Bayshore coastline, its outstanding wildlife resource, communities, and people.

As Hurricane Irene illustrated, coastal flooding is not just a projected outcome of sea-level rise decades down the road, but is a reality many communities already face. Indeed, in the near future, there will undoubtedly be instances where more voluntary buyouts will be necessary in getting people out of harm's way. However, it is also true that some communities will be worth defending for years to come and there are numerous examples in New Jersey and elsewhere where shore protection and wetlands restoration efforts have been implemented to the benefit of both people and wildlife.

The American Littoral Society has identified areas of tidal marsh vulnerable to sea level rise's associated risks and where "retreat zones" can be established to retain the storm buffer functions of these areas. Proven work by the Partnership for the Delaware Estuary and The Jacques Cousteau National Estuarine Reserve is advancing techniques to reverse salt marsh inundation through their "Living Shorelines" projects, as is the major shoreline and habitat restoration project at Cape May Point carried out 2002. Further, the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection has developed a methodology for assessing community vulnerability and approaches to develop adaptation and mitigation strategies; this project has already been piloted along the Bayshore in partnership with several municipalities.

The SJBC believes it urgent that more such projects be implemented along the Delaware Bay and its tributaries, and at a much greater scale and pace. Clearly there are already numerous examples of projects within the Bayshore and across the country, which show us how to protect viable beach and riverfront communities in a manner that enhances and avoids adverse impacts to listed species and their critical habitat. Moreover, such projects can provide meaningful employment and stimulate local economies in a distressed region of the state, while also helping protect and revitalize historic bayshore communities, which are important to watermen, residents and a growing tourism industry that is based around fishing and nature-based recreation.

The NJDEP Coastal Zone Management Program (CZM) is the most appropriate state agency to administer leadership and grants necessary to bring various federal (Army Corps of Engineers), state, local, and non-profit partners together. In recent years, the CZM has received \$536,000 annually in federal 309 grants from the National Ocean and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), which enable it to carry out its important work. The 309 grants are discretionary within an approved framework of nine pre-determined issue areas approved by NOAA. In New Jersey, the Bayshore region is already a focal area, and issues such as marsh migration, wetlands restoration, living shorelines, coastal hazards and strategic planning for environmental and social adaptation, all represent applicable issues, which the CZM has addressed through various projects, which have already greatly benefited the region.

The SJBC believes a critical next step is for the CZM to secure funding for projects to protect the most vulnerable bayshore communities along the Delaware Bay and its tributaries from storm surges and sea level rise in a manner that protects and enhancing habitat for important living resources. For example, there is ample evidence that the loss of tidal wetlands at the mouths of the Maurice and Cohansey Rivers is increasing risks to such upstream communities as Port Norris, Bivalve, Shell Pile, Heislerville, Greenwich, and Fairton. Wetlands inundation in the area referred to as Basket Flats, at the mouth of the Maurice, has been significant enough that many believe the river may soon breach remaining wetlands and establish a new, shortened river channel which would leave Port Norris without a waterfront and inundate Matt's Landing and Heislerville. If this happens, these communities and many businesses associated with the fishing industry would be subjected to increased flooding and potentially devastating damage.

For these reasons, the SJBC would like the CZM to be funded sufficiently to support restoration designed to make both tidal wetlands and upstream communities more resilient to sea-level rise and storm surges. The SJBC strongly recommends that an emphasis be placed on restoring, protecting and enhancing tidal wetlands where such measures can best protect those communities vulnerable to coastal hazards. We understand that such efforts to bolster the resiliency of the living shoreline may require some structural treatments necessary to attenuate wave energy or reinforce an existing river channel necessary to protect certain communities. However, we believe there are many examples of living shoreline techniques which integrate structural treatments, and by design, create habitat that could be successfully employed along the Delaware Bayshore.

Finally, the NJDEP coastal management program has been a leader in developing tools to assist local communities respond to these issues. As you know, the Congress has before it various initiatives which would significantly reduce the National Oceanographic and

Atmospheric Administration's coastal program budgets. The consequence of this would obviously be felt in the state's ability to continue to develop needed programs and strategies for the Bayshore. We urge you to work to protect these programs.

Thank you again for meeting with the SJBC and seeking our input on possible wetlands restoration projects which could benefit both the residents of the region, as well as its outstanding natural, cultural and historic resources, which both define and underlie its quality of life and economy.. Please don't hesitate to contact us to further discuss this and other interests relating to the Bayshore Region. We greatly appreciate your steadfast commitment to protecting its livability, culture and environmental integrity, and stand prepared to assist you in any way possible.

Sincerely,