



February XX, 2022

The Honorable Chellie Pingree, Chair
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and Related Agencies
2007 Rayburn House Office Building
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable David Joyce, Ranking Minority Member
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and Related Agencies
1036 Longworth House Office Building
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chair Pingree and Ranking Member Joyce:

The undersigned members of the Choose Clean Water Coalition thank you for your strong support for programs that are essential to maintaining and restoring clean water to the rivers and streams throughout the Chesapeake Bay region and to the Bay itself.

Over the past two years, the 116th and 117th Congress recognized this critical time in Chesapeake Bay watershed restoration and delivered the America's Conservation Enhancement (ACE) Act (P.L. 116-188), which passed unanimously in both the House and Senate in 2020, and last year's bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (P.L. 117-58). ACE contained three specific Chesapeake programs that are critical to achieving progress in the Chesapeake region and with 2025 restoration targets fast approaching we request the 117th Congress to appropriate these new levels in FY23, as well as fully funding other critical support programs.

Over the past twelve years the states and the federal government have cooperated jointly and committed to a massive restoration program in the Chesapeake watershed to restore the Bay and its tributaries by 2025. Unfortunately, the pandemic has hindered progress and severely impacted state and local government budgets. Impacts from climate change have also slowed progress. We will not meet the restoration goals without the leadership, guidance, science, and accelerated funding support provided by various Federal agencies. Much of this restoration work creates or maintains jobs and local and regional economies.

To maintain healthy local water and restore Chesapeake Bay, which is critical for our regional economy, we request funding for the following programs in Fiscal Year 2023:

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

Chesapeake Bay Program - \$91.0 million

We request an increase in funding to \$91 million for the Chesapeake Bay Program, which coordinates Chesapeake Bay watershed restoration and protection efforts. This modest increase in funding is what is called for in P.L. 116-188. The ACE Act reauthorized this Program at \$90.5 million for FY22 and \$91 million in FY23. Nearly two-thirds of the program's funds are passed through to the states and local communities for on-the-ground restoration work through the Small Watershed Grants, Innovative Nutrient and Sediment Reduction Grants, State Implementation Grants, Chesapeake Bay Regulatory and Accountability Program grants, local government grants and the state-based implementation grants for the most effective basins. We are advocating for the additional \$500,000 to go to the states, local governments and local entities to implement on-the-ground restoration projects that will help the region move toward its 2025 clean up goals. We greatly appreciate the FY21 increase in funding to \$87.5 million, and the \$90.5 million in the House-passed and Senate-released Interior appropriations bill. We are requesting the authorized amount of \$91 million for FY23, which is critical as the 2025 restoration deadlines approach.

Over the past couple of years, data released by the Chesapeake Bay Program and the states, confirmed two previously unaccounted pollution loads. Conowingo Dam is no longer trapping sediment and associated pollution and adds six million pounds of nitrogen to the Bay every year. In addition, the impacts from climate change, such as increased flooding and erosion has led to an increase of five million pounds of nitrogen annually into the Bay. We must reduce this 11 million pounds of nitrogen pollution, in addition to sources identified in 2010.

We recommend splitting additional funding between two key local grant programs and one state-based implementation grant program. We strongly support the highly successful and popular Chesapeake Small Watershed Grants and the Innovative Nutrient and Sediment Reduction Grants, and request \$10.5 million for each of these critical grant programs. These are two well-run, competitive grant programs that have contributed significantly to water quality improvements throughout the region. The demand for these grants far exceeds the current funding levels by nearly 300 percent. These grants go directly to on-the-ground restoration efforts by local governments and communities, for a diverse array of stakeholders, including family farms, and are critical to addressing the new increased pollution from climate change and Conowingo Dam. Without specific Congressional direction, EPA has, in the past, reallocated this grant money for purposes other than local restoration. We recognize the high priority that Congress has placed on these two grant programs for years and support the effort to get more federal funds on the ground at the local level. We also support \$9.0 million for "state-based implementation in the most effective basins" – an effort which began in FY20. This targets resources to focus on getting conservation practices on the ground in rural areas which provides the greatest pollution reductions per dollar spent.

Clean Water State Revolving Fund (SRF) - \$8.1 billion

This program provides the lifeblood for the 1,779 local governments throughout the Chesapeake region to modernize and upgrade their water infrastructure, which manages wastewater, stormwater, and other pollution sources. The annual funding level for the Clean Water SRF has eroded over the years and then stabilized as the clean water needs of local communities have

increased dramatically. The Clean Water SRF is the key component of the Clean Water Act to ensure that local governments have federal funding to carry out the Act's mandates.

The Choose Clean Water Coalition supports enhanced investments in key water infrastructure projects nationwide, and the Clean Water SRF is the single best mechanism to accomplish that goal. We recommend that Congress fund the Clean Water SRF at \$8.1 billion in FY23, and to direct that 40 percent of annual the capitalization grant for each state be used for additional subsidization – specifically for grants for disadvantaged, underserved and environmental justice communities. Grants are the most direct and efficient mechanism to provide critical funding support to disadvantaged communities in both rural and urban areas.

This bold infusion of spending is a critical need to improve our federal clean water infrastructure and will improve water quality and protect human health in our region and across the nation. Increased Clean Water SRF funding and especially the ability to offer 40 percent of the support in grants, is key to helping the Bay watershed states meet their 2025 clean up goals. This investment will also stimulate local economies as they recover from the current financial and public health crisis by putting more people to work.

Funding support from the Clean Water SRF is critical for clean water and for ratepayers in the Chesapeake region and nationwide. We urge you to support the \$8.1 billion funding level for FY23 that would provide \$1.75 billion in low interest loans and grants to local governments in Delaware, Maryland, New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia, West Virginia and the District of Columbia. We also strongly support targeting 20 percent of the Clean Water SRF funds for green infrastructure and innovative projects including those that manage stormwater. These projects help communities improve water quality while creating green space, mitigating flooding, and enhancing air quality. Federal technical assistance should accompany these funds to help states raise awareness of green infrastructure's benefits and build demand for green projects.

The Clean Water SRF allocates money to the states based on a set formula, which is then used for low interest loans and grants to local governments for critical capital construction improvement projects to reduce nutrient and sediment pollution from wastewater treatment and stormwater facilities; nonpoint sources of pollution, such as farms and development; and other sources. In addition to the use of these funds on farms and for nonpoint source pollution, it provides assistance for other pollution reduction and prevention activities in rural areas, such as reforestation, forest protection and stream stabilization and restoration. The Clean Water SRF enables local governments in the Chesapeake watershed to take actions to keep their rivers and streams clean. As the list of clean water infrastructure needs in the Chesapeake region continues to expand, we request that Congress fund the Clean Water SRF at \$8.1 billion in FY23.

Department of the Interior

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service - Chesapeake Watershed Investments for Landscape Defense (Chesapeake WILD) - \$15.0 million

This new non-regulatory program, created by ACE on October 30, 2020, is authorized at \$15 million annually through FY25, but has yet to receive any funding. The Fish and Wildlife

Service has put all of the pieces in place to begin implementation of the Program, but is powerless to begin on-the-ground projects until money is appropriated. Especially with the long delay in getting funding to this Program, now nearly a year and a half after it was created, we strongly urge you to fund this Program in FY23 at the full authorized level of \$15 million. The Act authorized funding for FY21, but the late passage of the authorizing legislation came too late to obtain appropriated funds, and the Continuing Resolution for FY22 has also contained zero dollars for the Program.

This new non-regulatory program will focus not just on fish and wildlife habitat in the Bay proper, but everywhere in the six-state 64,000 square mile watershed. Chesapeake WILD is intended to assist local partners with on-the-ground work to enhance progress toward Bay watershed-wide goals on some of the following: riparian forest buffer restoration; improving stream health; tidal and non-tidal wetland restoration; improving fish habitat; expanding populations of black ducks; restoring and protecting eastern brook trout and their habitat; and removing barriers to fish migration in freshwater systems

U.S. Geological Survey (USGS): Chesapeake Science and Monitoring- \$17.15 million

We support a funding increase to \$17.15 million in FY23 for USGS Chesapeake science and monitoring which is supported by multiple national programs that contributed \$14.85 million in FY21. An increase through its Land Management Research Program under the Ecosystems Mission Area would allow USGS to meet new needs of the Chesapeake Bay Program partnership. These new needs, such as Chesapeake WILD and increased funds for EPA, NOAA, other federal agencies and state and local governments from the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, calls for the expansion of USGS science to help federal, state and local partners conduct cost-effective targeting of these additional resources.

The majority of non-USGS Chesapeake funding is rightly focused on water-quality improvements, but often ignores potential additional benefits to habitat restoration and land protection that the same investment can be accelerate at little additional cost. The USGS is a leader in the non-tidal monitoring and analysis efforts throughout the Chesapeake watershed and can help to bridge that gap. A modest increase in funding will allow the USGS to expand the science needed for federal and state agencies to target and maximize implementation of water quality practices through 2025, and accelerate habitat restoration critical for freshwater fisheries, including smallmouth bass, brook trout, and mussels throughout the entire six-state 64,000 square mile watershed.

The USGS would expand scientific analysis and monitoring for three broad priorities important to the Chesapeake Bay Program partnership:

- Target and Accelerate Water Quality Improvements – USGS would expand its interpretation of water quality changes on agricultural lands and identify opportunities to improve climate resiliency, such as flood mitigation, throughout the Chesapeake Bay watershed. Expanding monitoring will also allow USGS to better detect water quality response to these restoration efforts. This new science will allow USGS to better assist EPA, the states and USDA/NRCS to identify locations and practices which are likely to have the most effective benefits, particularly in agricultural areas.

- Address Multiple Restoration Outcomes – USGS will lead development of a new science-based approach that will collectively benefit multiple habitat-related outcomes and make wildlife habitats and human population centers more resilient and protected from flooding caused by climate change. Increased funding will enable USGS to develop improved watershed-wide data and forecast changes in the conditions of wetlands, tree canopy, riparian buffers, and streams that affect freshwater fisheries (including habitat and fish passage) that are needed by the states, Fish and Wildlife Service, and NOAA.
- Expand Land Conservation – Increased funding will enable USGS to support the Chesapeake Conservation Partnership to expand land conservation and protection. The USGS will use innovative applications of high-resolution data to enhance land conservation decision-making and priority setting for all Federal, state, local and non-profit partners. The USGS will contribute to an updated Conservation Atlas that includes additional healthy watershed data, and new automated tracking of land protection.

National Park Service - Chesapeake Regional Programs - \$4.802 million

Since 2003, the National Park Service Chesapeake Bay Office has led efforts on several important programs that focus on increasing public access, outdoor recreation, and conservation of natural, cultural and historic resources of the Chesapeake region. The operational responsibilities of the Office have increased five-fold without any corresponding increases to Operations of the National Park System (ONPS) funds.

We request funding of \$996,000 in FY23 for the National Park Service Chesapeake Bay Office ONPS funds. The Bay Office administers a number of programs in the region and the funding level remained stagnant since 2010, when the Office was funded at \$496,000. The funding has fluctuated for over a decade, but through FY21 it has never exceeded \$496,000. This funding shortfall led to significant staff shortages which threatened to impede the ability of the Bay Office to meet Congressionally directed activities of various programs, which is why we request are requesting \$996,000 for FY23, as we did for FY22.

We request maintaining funding levels for the Chesapeake Bay Gateways and Watertrails Program (\$3.0 million), which was recently reauthorized in the ACE Act in October 2020. Since first authorized by Congress in 1998, the Gateways Program has been the primary Federal program to provide and enhance access to public lands within the Chesapeake Bay watershed. Gateways helps to preserve critical landscapes and natural resources in the region and has contributed more than \$30 million in technical and financial assistance for more than 350 sites in the Bay watershed. Recent studies show that tourists spend \$25.7 billion annually in the Chesapeake Gateways Network alone, and indications are that use of these facilities has increased during the pandemic. We also support continued funding for the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail at \$806,000.

Thank you for your consideration of these very important requests to maintain funding for these programs which are critical to clean water throughout the mid-Atlantic region. Please contact Peter J. Marx at 410-905-2515 or peter@choosecleanwater.org with any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

