



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
The Under Secretary of Commerce
for Oceans and Atmosphere
Washington, D.C. 20230

November 27, 2024

Ms. Amy Kenney
Chair
Marine and Coastal Area-based
Management Advisory Committee
1305 East-West Highway, 10th Floor
Silver Spring, MD 20910

Dear Ms. Kenney:

Thank you for the Marine and Coastal Area-based Management Advisory Committee's (Committee's) recommendations regarding NOAA activities related to the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) and Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) funding. Your recommendations are both timely and responsive as we issue awards through these historic investments – and as we continue to provide support to awardees to further the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) efforts in habitat restoration and coastal resilience.

I am pleased to report that NOAA has already begun to consider or implement some of the recommendations provided by the Committee, and NOAA intends to continue making progress throughout the duration of the award period and into the future as projects move forward.

Please see the responses below to the Committee's recommendations for more information about how we are implementing these recommendations. I also look forward to meeting with you and other Committee members in December.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Richard W. Spinrad".

Dr. Richard W. Spinrad
Under Secretary of Commerce
for Oceans and Atmosphere
and NOAA Administrator

Enclosure

THE ADMINISTRATOR



NOAA's Responses to the MCAM's Recommendations on NOAA Activities Related to the BIL and IRA Funding

Recommendation 1: NOAA should work to obligate funds promptly to states, territories, Tribal Nations, Indigenous communities, and other communities and entities so that projects can be quickly and effectively implemented.

NOAA Response: NOAA agrees with the need to obligate funds in a timely manner to ensure the success of these programs. We are pleased to share that as of the end of fiscal year (FY) 2024, NOAA has obligated \$2.6 billion of the \$3.3 billion we received under the IRA and \$1.7 billion of the \$1.9 billion we have received under the BIL. In addition to providing funding to partners, NOAA has prioritized and already increased capacity dedicated to effectively implement these programs. NOAA recognizes that our overall success is dependent on effective execution of these funds – and will continue to obligate funds as efficiently and accountably as possible.

Recommendation 2: NOAA should adequately staff and support compliance processes so that projects can be quickly and effectively implemented.

NOAA Response: NOAA acknowledges the importance of adequate staffing and efficient environmental compliance and review processes in successful implementation of BIL and IRA-funded projects. In addition to funding projects on-the-ground, NOAA has built new capacity to ensure effective grant support, technical assistance, and environmental compliance. NOAA has applied existing programmatic consultations under its environmental review mandates to both maximize efficiencies and conserve species and habitats.

Recommendation 3: BIL/IRA funding should not lead to a decrease in baseline funding for NOAA programs that support area-based management.

NOAA Response: As a result of discretionary spending limits set by the Fiscal Responsibility Act and competing Administration priorities, NOAA had to make difficult decisions in the latest President's Budget. Many of NOAA's programs are recipients of the BIL and IRA supplemental funding. As this funding will be available through FY 2026, NOAA will work to execute IRA and BIL funds in ways that will help alleviate the impacts of any base funding reductions.

Recommendation 4: NOAA should conduct meaningful outreach and engagement with local, Tribal and Indigenous communities on BIL/IRA implementation.

NOAA Response: NOAA agrees and is committed to meaningful engagement with local, Tribal, and Indigenous communities throughout our work, including our efforts under the BIL and IRA. We encourage Tribal nations, Indigenous peoples, and underserved communities to apply for our funding opportunities as well as encourage other applicants to propose projects that demonstrate strategies to achieve meaningful engagement with tribes and underserved communities. We also support, where possible, the inclusion of indigenous ideas, efforts and approaches. We continue to explore opportunities to increase Tribal and Indigenous

participation in our funding opportunities and we are working to address barriers to ensure that the scope of the funded activities is inclusive of community priorities and needs and that the benefits of these activities flow back to the communities. We are focused on continual learning and exploration of ideas as we work toward these goals.

Through this work, NOAA is committed to continuing our engagement with Tribal nations and Indigenous communities in a variety of ways including establishing grant competitions specifically for Tribal applicants and creating Tribal set-asides by reserving portions of funding in competitions for Tribes. For example, the NOAA National Marine Fisheries Service's (NMFS) Office of Habitat Conservation has awarded \$223 million of BIL and IRA funding to Tribal nations for restoration and fish passage projects. These projects will be led by Tribes or will directly involve Tribes and ensure the work is aligned with Tribal priorities. Across these projects, Tribes will play key roles in decision-making, build capacity to help recover tribally important migratory fish – and provide community and economic benefits such as jobs and training opportunities. Through a combination of competitive awards and support for Tribal engagement, NOAA's Office for Coastal Management awarded \$153 million directly to Tribal and Indigenous communities. In addition to awarding funding directly to these communities, many projects funded through the Climate Resilience Regional Challenge, Habitat Protection and Restoration Awards, and National Coastal Resilience Fund directly advance partnerships with Tribal and Indigenous communities and/or restore or repatriate Tribal and Indigenous lands.

Recommendation 5: BIL/IRA investments should advance biodiversity conservation, habitat restoration, coastal resilience, healthy coastal communities, and equitable public access.

NOAA Response: NOAA agrees. Through NOAA's BIL and IRA investments, NOAA is working with state, local, and Tribal governments, Tribal and Native organizations, NGOs, and the private sector in coastal and Great Lakes communities to develop and support durable, local capacity to adapt to climate change impacts, while growing economies, protecting fisheries, addressing environmental justice, and developing a climate-ready workforce. NOAA is helping coastal communities implement high-impact natural infrastructure projects that improve coastal resilience, restore habitat, create jobs, and store carbon.

In 2024 alone, the Climate Resilience Regional Challenge awarded \$575 million to 19 projects that support innovative coastal resilience and adaptation solutions, and Coastal Zone Management and National Estuarine Research Reserve Projects awarded a total of \$122.8 million across 29 projects to support coastal habitat restoration planning, engineering, and design projects, and implementation and land conservation projects to increase resilience of their coastal communities. The Office of Habitat Conservation has funded 214 awards totaling \$985 million focused on habitat restoration and fish passage.

Recommendation 6: BIL/IRA investments and projects across the U.S. should be captured in the Conservation & Stewardship Atlas.

NOAA Response: NOAA agrees that its BIL and IRA investments should be captured in an online interactive dashboard that would map the spatial distribution of projects nationwide and

also provide other key data points about these investments. To this end, NOAA has provided data to the Conservation and Stewardship Atlas and will continue to do so, as appropriate.

Recommendation 7: Metrics should be used and enhanced to measure progress and advance conservation and other management goals.

NOAA Response: NOAA agrees and has several common performance metrics to measure ecological, socioeconomic, and community benefits to ensure that we can describe our collective impact across all of the area-based management BIL/IRA programs. Many programs are tracking the **number of acres acquired or restored to support habitat restoration and conservation**. Some programs such as fish passage will be tracking **stream miles opened**. And others are tracking the **number of public access sites** created through acquisition or easement. NOAA is committed to expanding our outreach and engagement efforts in a range of communities. We plan to track the projects we fund that meaningfully engage underserved communities and Tribes as a starting point to evaluate whether projects and our program are achieving meaningful engagement of communities.