

January 16, 2009

Honorable Harry Reid
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Honorable David Obey
Chairman
House Appropriations
Committee
Washington, DC 20515

Majority Leader Reid, Speaker Pelosi, and Chairman Obey:

As Congress prepares to develop an economic recovery package, the American Shore & Beach Preservation Association is extremely concerned that the proposals being developed by the leadership reflect a lack of support for our nation's water resource system. Over the past two or more decades, this system has been starved of the funding it needs to keep pace with both the growth of our population and the increasing challenges of competing in the world economy. Equally tragic has been the failure to invest in those water resources whose primary purpose is to protect lives and reduce costs to taxpayers caused by coastal storms and inland floods.

Chairman Obey's January 15th press release states that the Corps of Engineers has a construction backlog of \$61 billion. We do not understand how the House leadership now proposes a mere \$4.5 billion to meet that need when it proposed \$5 billion for the same purpose in legislation that passed the House last fall. There are ports and waterways to be dredged so they can handle the ships that will otherwise be turned away as our economy recovers. There are dams and levees to be repaired and wetlands to be restored so that people, the communities they live in and the factories they work in are not wiped out by floods. There is critical infrastructure and environmental resources along every mile of America's coastline that is disappearing because of a national policy of neglect. What is needed to meet the most immediate and pressing of these needs is at least \$10 billion. We urge you to increase the funding for the Corps of Engineers to that level as Congress develops a final economy recovery package for the new President.

The United States is a world leader in the fields of coastal science and engineering. Nevertheless, our federal government invests only about \$100 million each year in caring for our 84,000 miles of coastline compared to over \$3 billion annually by the member countries of the European Union on far less coastline. Of greater concern is the comparison of what is spent on our coasts versus the \$1 billion that should be spent over the next two fiscal years.* Based on the important economic role that beaches and other coastal natural infrastructure play, **the American Shore & Beach Preservation Association urges that Congress and the new Administration include sufficient funding to meet the most pressing of our nation's coastal needs.**

* Estimate based on ASBPA survey of national coastal needs, excluding ports. See attached list.

Today, 53 percent of the U.S. population lives within 50 miles of the coast, with many more people moving *to* that region than *away* from it each day. America's beaches are the primary economic engine that drives coastal America. Each year, 180 million Americans make 2 billion visits to our nation's beaches. That is twice the number of visits made to all of the properties managed by the National Park Service combined. More than three-quarters of all U.S. domestic economic activity takes place in the coastal states, much of it the result of America's largest industry and employer – the Travel and Tourism Economy (TTE). TTE contributes \$1.4 trillion to America's GDP and employs nearly 1 of every 10 Americans. These are jobs that are unlikely to move offshore, unless we drive them away by our inattention to our fundamental coastal infrastructure needs.

The federal government, in partnership with state and local governments, has invested in less than one-fifth of the nation's critically eroded miles of coastline. As a result, we are losing sandy beach infrastructure that supports over 1 million jobs in addition to providing recreation, storm damage reduction and unique environmental habitat. The images from fierce hurricanes such as Katrina and Ike are still with us, as is their devastation. Yet there are storms hitting parts of coastal America this very day that are causing significant coastal damage that could have been prevented.

In a recent letter to President-elect Obama (copy enclosed), ASBPA called for a comprehensive national coastal policy. Achieving that goal requires federal leadership. Coastal sediment (sand) and wetlands do not respect political boundaries. It is the federal government alone that can provide the motivation and support that are needed. Most immediately, it is the federal government alone that can provide the level of funding that will take the patchwork quilt of coastal restoration projects and weave it into a fabric that is flexible enough to meet the needs of the states and yet strong enough to retain the recreational, storm damage reduction and environmental benefits that are so important to our economy and quality of life. Funding in the proposed stimulus bill would be a critical first step in that process.

ASBPA does not endorse specific projects. The list attached to this letter only demonstrates the magnitude and variety of coastal needs that are waiting to be met. Investing in America's coastal resources means jobs, reduced coastal damages, and the preservation of environmental resources.

Many of these projects are cost-shared with state and local governments. While Section 103(k) of the Water Resources Development Act of 1986 provides the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works the authority to defer the non-federal cost-share for up to 30 years (with interest), that authority has rarely been used. This is not an ability to pay issue. It is an issue of state and local government budget cycles. None of these cost-share partners has the fiscal resources to find significant amounts of money that have not already been budgeted. We call on Congress to include in the stimulus bill direction to the Assistant Secretary to either allow deferral of payment of the non-federal cost-share or to enable local payment of that share during a subsequent phase of the project. Without statutory direction, the existing authority will not be used. And without a cost-share deferral, the availability of unanticipated federal funds will be of no use to several non-federal sponsors of beach nourishment projects whose projects are ready to proceed but who lack only federal and local funding.

ASBPA recognizes that the attached list may have inadvertently omitted some projects that are as qualified to be included as those that made the list. In the coming days, we will refine this list and provide it to the Army Corps of Engineers. The list is limited to programs and projects under the jurisdiction of the Army Corps of Engineers. ASBPA has also supported additional funding for NOAA's Sea Grant program as well as other programs in NOAA, EPA, and MMS.

Many of the projects on our list are ready to be started as quickly as the Corps can bid them out. All of them will provide more economic benefits to the national economy than their cost to federal taxpayers. By funding them, you will truly be investing in America.

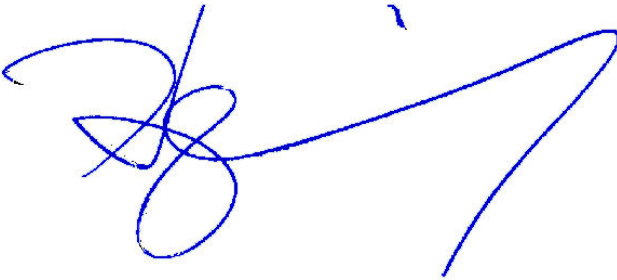
Following are the categories represented by the projects on the attached list:

1. Periodic Beach Nourishment: The key to the federal beach program is a commitment made by Congress to each non-federal sponsor of a project to periodically nourish the beach so that it generates the same level of national benefits (storm damage reduction, recreation, and/or environmental) that Congress approved when it originally authorized the project. This fiscal commitment is made for a period of 50 years and can be extended beyond that, with the concurrence of Congress. There are periodic nourishments that Congress has not funded and that are badly needed. If Congress does not keep its word, non-federal project sponsors will not be able to afford the double or triple levels of funding beyond which they are already committed. This will result in more storm damage to property and unfortunately, increased loss of lives. We cannot afford to lose the restored resources in which taxpayers have already invested.
2. Initial Beach Construction: It takes from eight to 15 years for a project to go through the rigorous study and evaluation process that leads to congressional authorization. During those many years, state and local governments share the multi-million dollar study costs equally. There are authorized beach restoration projects that are merely awaiting construction funds. While the funding process has stalled, the forces of erosion have not. In addition, there is for these projects and those summarized above a critical public safety factor. ASBPA scientists and engineers are confident, for example, that had a federal beach project been in place in areas struck by Hurricane Ike, property damage and the resulting taxpayer dollars spent to recover from that storm would have been considerably less.
3. Coastal Inlets: Federally-authorized inlets and other coastal navigation channels are not being maintained at the depths authorized by Congress. The same can be said of both the Atlantic and the Gulf Intracoastal Waterways. Each poorly maintained inlet or channel is a safety hazard that also causes lost jobs and lost federal tax revenues. In addition, when federal inlets are dredged, the sand should be placed on adjacent shorelines that are eroding. These "beneficial use" projects are sensible, cost-saving ways to make use of scarce sand.
4. Programmatic Needs: Our list includes funding for programs that map our coast, create a home for coastal data that can be available to all, help assess coastal risks so they can be avoided or minimized, plan coastal projects regionally rather than without thought about how they affect the infrastructure and natural resources of the area, improve beach water quality by

eliminating stormwater pipes that empty onto beaches, and test new technologies that may reduce the costs of beach restoration projects.

It is most disappointing that this nation, which understands its coastal processes so well, does not use that knowledge to better manage this tremendously valuable resource to meet the demands and expectations of a majority of the people. Maintenance of this important natural infrastructure, and the economic activity that stems from coastal resource consumption, must be on the list of all elected officials for protection and restoration. The coast of America is too valuable and provides too much net revenue to the nation as a whole not to be included in all plans for economic recovery.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of several loops and a long, sweeping tail that extends to the right.

Mayor Harry Simmons
President

Enclosures

cc: The Honorable Mitch McConnell
The Honorable John Boehner
The Honorable Jerry Lewis