

March 2, 2020

The Honorable Betty McCollum, 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  
1016 Longworth House Office Building  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chair McCollum 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. We are requesting a continuation of that strong support in Fiscal Year 2021.

Two-thirds of the 18 million people in the Chesapeake region get the water they drink directly from the rivers and streams that flow through the cities, towns, and farms throughout our six state, 64,000 square mile watershed. Protecting and restoring clean water is essential for human health and for a robust regional economy.

Over the past decade the states and the federal government have cooperated jointly and committed to a massive restoration program in the Bay watershed to restore the Bay and its tributaries by 2025. None of these goals can be met without the leadership, guidance, science, and funding support provided by various Federal agencies. A lot of progress has been made, and as we enter the final few years approaching the 2025 deadlines, this is not the time to slow down the premier estuarine restoration effort in the world.

To follow a shared path to maintain healthy local water and restore the Chesapeake Bay, which is critical for our regional economy, we request funding for the following programs in Fiscal Year 2021:

### **U.S. Environmental Protection Agency**

#### **Chesapeake Bay Program - \$90.5 million**

We request an increase in funding to \$90.5 million for the base budget of the Chesapeake Bay Program, which coordinates Chesapeake Bay watershed restoration and protection efforts. This request is in line with the Chesapeake Bay Program reauthorization bills currently moving through Congress. More than 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, and local government grants. We are advocating for an additional \$5.5 million to go to the states, local governments, and local entities to do on-the-ground restoration that will help the region move toward its clean up goals in 2025. We greatly appreciate the FY20 increase in funding to \$85 million – the first increase since FY15, but still need additional funding as the 2025 restoration deadlines approach.

Data released by the Chesapeake Bay Program and corroborated by the states confirmed an additional pollution load resulting from Conowingo Dam no longer trapping sediment and associated nutrient pollution. This “dynamic equilibrium” brings, on average, an additional 6 million pounds of nitrogen and 260,000 pounds of phosphorus into the Bay every year. This was not the case in 2010 when the Chesapeake Bay total maximum daily load (TMDL) was established. All six Chesapeake Bay watershed states and the District of Columbia will have to make up for this added load by 2025, and increased funding is necessary to help achieve this.

We recommend additional funding be split between two key grant programs and state-based implementation. We strongly support the highly successful and popular Chesapeake Small Watershed Grants and the Innovative Nutrient and Sediment Reduction Grants – and request \$10.375 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 Chesapeake Bay watershed. The demand for these grants far exceeds the current funding levels by nearly triple. These grants go directly to on-the-ground restoration efforts by local governments and communities, including to family farms, and are critical to addressing the new increased pollution from 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 \$8.75 million for “state-based implementation in the most effective basins” – an effort which began in FY20.

We urge you to fund the Chesapeake Bay Program at \$90.5 million in FY2021, and specify that \$10.375 million of that amount be provided for Small Watershed Grants (\$1.375 million more than in FY20) and \$10.375 million be provided for Innovative Nutrient and Sediment Reduction Grants (\$1.375 million more than in FY20). We also support additional funding of \$8.75 million for priority watersheds to address the additional pollution reductions that must be met over the next five years due to the Conowingo Dam. We also support \$8.75 million for “state-based implementation in the most effective basins”- an increase of \$2.75 million for the new effort outlined in House Report 116-100.

#### Clean Water State Revolving Fund (SRF) - \$2.4 billion

This program is critical to any national initiative to provide a Federal Infrastructure Spending Plan and it provides the lifeblood for the 1,779 local governments throughout the Chesapeake region to secure their water infrastructure. The funding level for the Clean Water SRF has eroded over the years as the clean water needs of local communities have increased dramatically. The Clean Water SRF is one of the funding components of the Clean Water Act to ensure that local governments have federal funding support for the Act’s mandates. The Choose Clean Water

Coalition supports efforts to enhance investments in key water infrastructure projects nationwide, and the Clean Water SRF is the single best mechanism to accomplish that goal. We urge Congress to authorize and fund the Clean Water SRF at \$2.4 billion in FY21. This will help to close the gap between federal infrastructure investment in clean water and the known need, and will improve water quality and protect human health in our region and across the nation.

These low interest loans are critical for clean water and for ratepayers in the Chesapeake region and nationwide. We urge you to support the \$2.4 billion funding level that would provide \$517.2 million in low interest loans to local governments in Delaware, Maryland, New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia, West Virginia and the District of Columbia – a 46% increase from the current level of funding. We also strongly support targeting 20 percent of the Clean Water SRF funds for green infrastructure and innovative projects including those to manage stormwater, which helps communities improve water quality while creating green space, mitigating flooding, and enhancing air quality. These funds should be accompanied by federal technical assistance 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 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 fully fund the Clean Water SRF at \$2.4 billion in FY21.

### **Department of the Interior**

#### **U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) - Chesapeake Ecosystem Science and Monitoring - \$14.85 million**

We support full funding (FY20 enacted level) for the USGS to continue its effort to provide the critical science necessary for restoration and conservation efforts for fish, wildlife and people in the Chesapeake Bay watershed. USGS monitoring and science is used by Chesapeake Bay Program partners, including the Department of the Interior, to achieve the goals of the Chesapeake Watershed Agreement and the Bay TMDL. The USGS is focused on improving fisheries and associated stream and water quality conditions, coastal habitats and waterfowl, maintaining healthy watersheds, and protecting vital lands that provide benefits to the 18 million people in the watershed.

In FY21, the USGS will continue to emphasize monitoring and science to assess the restoration efforts to improve stream habitat and associated water quality conditions important for recreational fisheries across the watershed's six states and the District of Columbia. The comprehensive approach will tie together Chesapeake Bay Program efforts to: (1) reduce nutrient and sediment pollution under the Bay TMDL; (2) mitigate the effects of toxic contaminants; and (3) improve stream and estuarine habitats for fish. The USGS works closely with the National

Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and other partners to tie together information on watershed and estuarine conditions important for commercial and recreational fisheries.

USGS provides the expertise to restore and conserve coastal habitats critical for waterfowl, and informs decisions to make coastal areas more resilient to sea-level rise. USGS is identifying and forecasting changes in coastal areas on their response to sea-level rise and development. The USGS will work with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, NOAA, and Maryland and Virginia state and local governments to conserve and restore coastal wetlands and associated habitats.

The USGS has expanded efforts on the vulnerability and resiliency of healthy watersheds to changes in land use to inform conservation efforts. The USGS is developing improved information on watershed characteristics and land use, and associated forecasts of potential future conditions. The USGS will work closely with the National Park Service, Chesapeake Conservancy, and state and local governments to apply the findings for conservation decisions.

The USGS, working with EPA, is leading the coordination of science efforts among federal, state, and academic partners to inform multiple goals of the Chesapeake Watershed Agreement. The monitoring and science are critical for state and federal partners to focus restoration and conservation actions where they provide the most benefit, and assess their effectiveness.

#### National Park Service - Chesapeake Regional Programs - \$4.302 million

The National Park Service Chesapeake Bay Office has led efforts on a number of small but very important programs that focus on increasing public access, outdoor recreation, and conservation of natural, cultural, and historic resources of the Chesapeake region. Expanding access and public awareness fosters stewardship and protection efforts.

We are requesting maintaining FY20 funding levels for the key program currently administered by the National Park Service Chesapeake Bay Office in the Chesapeake Bay watershed: Chesapeake Bay Gateways and Trails (\$3.0 million). Since authorized by Congress in 1998, the Gateways program has been the primary Federal program tool 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 over \$17 million in technical and financial assistance for more than 300 projects in the Bay watershed.

We also urge continued support for coordinating programs through the National Park Service Chesapeake Bay Office (\$495,000). In addition, as in the Further Consolidated Appropriations Act for the Department of the Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies for FY20, we urge you to extend the authorization for the Chesapeake Bay Gateways and Trails program.

We also support continued funding for the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail at \$806,000. We are, however, concerned with the administrative transfer of this Historic Trail program from the National Park Service Chesapeake Bay Office to the Colonial National Historic Park in Virginia. The John Smith Trail was created by Congress in 2006 and the authorizing language is clear that the intent was for this program to be integrated into other efforts under the Chesapeake Bay Program, including the Chesapeake Bay Gateways and Trails program, all of which is coordinated and administered by the Park Service Chesapeake Bay

Office in Maryland. We urge Congress to reassert your intent that the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail be administered by the National Park Service Chesapeake Bay Office in Annapolis, Maryland, as it has been since 2007.

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](mailto:peter@choosecleanwater.org) with any questions or concerns.