March 27, 2007

The Honorable Alan Mollohan
Chairman
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, and Science
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Rodney Frelinghuysen
Ranking Minority Member
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, and Science
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Mollohan and Ranking Member Frelinghuysen:

We are writing to request your support and leadership to appropriate $96 million in Fiscal Year 2008 Appropriations to establish an Integrated Ocean Observing System (IOOS), as called for in the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy, the President’s U.S. Ocean Action Plan, and the Ocean Research Priorities Plan and Implementation Strategy. More than a century ago, the United States began creation of a comprehensive weather forecasting and warning system and today, daily weather reports are central to the nation’s social, economic, and environmental vitality. Similarly, the ocean research and education community must now partner with National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) to integrate private, state, and federal ocean observing assets to establish an integrated ocean observing system to monitor ocean environment, forecast changes in physical and ecological processes as well as marine populations, and to provide the scientific data needed to better manage and preserve our nation’s largest natural resource.

One of the top priorities for the Consortium for Oceanographic Research and Education (CORE) is support for the development of an IOOS. The U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy (USCOP) outlined a budget profile for integrating the various components of an ocean observing system that was refined through broad community and agency input. Based on Commission recommendations, $138 million is needed to operate an IOOS. For the first time, the President requested $16 million for IOOS in the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration FY 08 Budget. The undersigned members of CORE understand that in the current fiscal climate, the entire target amount of $138 million may not be achievable; therefore, we request $96 million in FY08 appropriations for IOOS. The request includes: (1) $10.0 million for Data Management and Communications (DMAC); (2) $50 million for Regional Ocean Observing Systems; (3) $30 million for the NOAA IOOS program for observing system enhancements and program management (an increase of $25.2 million over the Administration’s request); and (4) an increase of $6 million for the Global Ocean Observing System (GOOS) for enhancements to NOAA’s global ocean observing system.

Infrastructure and operational support are needed to establish regional coastal and ocean observing systems that manage and deliver region-specific data and information products to users. Of the $50 million requested, we recommend and support that a portion of the funds be awarded through a competitive, peer-reviewed process to guide the development and implementation of the system and the remaining portion...
be used to sustain the regional capacity to meet user needs and the needs of the national system. Over the last three years the Senate has appropriated between $25 to $30 million for regional systems in the form of earmarks. In the FY 07 mark the Senate proposed $25,700,000 for statewide ocean observing systems, and both the House of Representatives and the Senate directed NOAA to develop a competitive, peer-reviewed process for awarding Regional Ocean Observing System grants for fiscal year 2008 in anticipation of comparable regional funding for fiscal year 2008. The President’s request for $11.5 million for regional observing systems falls significantly short of past appropriations and the $50 million recommend by the USCOP.

CORE, representing the academic and private ocean research community and the undersigned CORE institutions: look forward to adequate stable funding (at a level of $50 million for regional ocean observing for FY08); commit to the elimination of earmarks for regional and local ocean observing systems with this ’08 budget and support a competitive, peer-reviewed process.

Finally, we strongly support NOAA’s leadership role in the IOOS effort and recommend that NOAA serve as federal lead for coordinating the implementation of IOOS as a critical component of the Global Earth Observing System of Systems (GEOSS), a program currently under NOAA leadership. We also support NOAA’s leadership in the Inter-agency Working Group on Ocean Observing (IWGOO). The IWGOO should be the coordinating body that brings together all of the agencies with ocean observing assets to define and establish an inter-agency program office (IPO) and to characterize an IOOS in terms of program structure, cost, schedule and performance. We respectfully request that you support the ocean community and NOAA and fund the IOOS at a level of $96 million in FY08 appropriations, including $10 million for DMAC; (2) $50 million for Regional ocean observing systems; (3) $30 million for the NOAA IOOS program; and (4) an increase of $6 million for GOOS enhancements.

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