On behalf of the Consortium for Ocean Leadership (COL), which represents our nation’s leading ocean science, research, and technology organizations from academia, industry, and the larger nonprofit sector, I appreciate the opportunity to submit for the record a few of COL’s fiscal year (FY) 2022 funding priorities for the Department of the Interior and the Smithsonian Institution appropriations.

In the last few years, there has been bipartisan interest from Congress, federal agencies, the administration, private partners, philanthropists, academia, and more in growing our nation’s efforts related to ocean mapping, exploration, and characterization. These efforts include increased funding for NOAA Ocean Exploration and Research (OER); legislation reauthorizing the National Oceanographic Partnership Program; presidential memorandums establishing ocean mapping, exploration, and characterization as a national priority; and the creation of a National Ocean Mapping, Exploration, and Characterization (NOMEC) Council to coordinate federal policy and actions and to support collaboration with non-federal and non-governmental partners related to mapping, exploring, and characterizing our ocean.

With this increased interest and activity around ocean exploration will come increased data and sample collection through NOAA OER and the NOAA Ship *Okeanos Explorer*, the Ocean Exploration Cooperative Institute, and other academic, private, and philanthropic partners, particularly as ship operations pick up following cancellations and delays due to COVID-19 health and safety protocols. As an advocate for increased funding for NOAA mapping and exploration activities, COL would also like to ensure sustained and adequate funding to support academic, private, and philanthropic partners; enhanced support for interagency partnership efforts; and augmented support for the management of the collected data and geological and biological samples.

Given the important role the Department of the Interior plays in mapping, exploring, and characterizing waters within the United States Exclusive Economic Zone (U.S. EEZ), I support the President’s requested increases of $37.0 million for the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) and $29 million for the United States Geological Survey (USGS) Natural Hazards programs. The proposed $227.8 million BOEM budget includes $45.8 million for renewable energy, $15.0 million for marine minerals, and $86.8 million for environmental programs. The proposed $207.7 million USGS Natural Hazards budget includes important increases for subduction zone science within the Earthquake Hazards Program (+$2.0 million) and enhanced research, observations, and forecasting within the Coastal/Marine Hazards and Resources Program (+$10 million). Together, these activities are essential to advancing ocean understanding, promoting the blue economy, and using sound science to support balanced ocean use.
I respectfully request an additional $1 million to BOEM’s Marine Minerals program, $2 million to BOEM’s Environmental Studies Program, and $2 million to USGS’s Coastal/Marine Hazards and Resources Program to support continued efforts to map, explore, and characterize the critical mineral and offshore renewable energy potential of California and Oregon, the Aleutian Island Arc, and the central and Western Pacific Ocean in partnership with other agencies, academia, and the private sector. Given increasing demand for critical minerals, including those needed to support the Administration’s renewable energy goals, and continuing concerns regarding critical mineral supply chains, there remains an urgent need to catalogue the strategic reserves of ocean-based critical minerals within the U.S. EEZ, support continued development of BOEM’s National Offshore Critical Mineral Inventory, advance interagency NOMEC efforts, and ensure the best available data and scientific analyses are available to support sustainable offshore energy development.

I also support the president’s requested increase of $1.3 million for the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History (NMNH). The proposed $53.4 million includes $567,000 for collections support, and I respectfully request an additional $1 million to NMNH collections to support the museum’s work as the biological sample repository for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)’s ocean exploration efforts. Currently, biological specimens collected during expeditions of NOAA’s Okeanos Explorer, the only federal vessel dedicated to exploring the ocean, are catalogued, curated, archived, and made publicly accessible by the NMNH. This $1 million would support sustained curatorial staff to curate and analyze biological samples, make them available to the scientific community, and allow for the timely analysis to document the many new species discovered each year, which will help improve our understanding of marine life and ocean biodiversity and inform important ocean stewardship and management decisions.

I also respectfully request $2 million to ensure adequate support for the Smithsonian’s leadership of the Marine Life 2030 program, which was endorsed by the Executive Secretary of the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of UNESCO (IOC). Marine Life 2030, which is led by the Smithsonian Institution and includes more than 30 NGO and nearly 40 academic partners around the world, seeks to establish a globally coordinated system over the next decade to deliver information on ocean life, which will promote human well-being, sustainable development, and ocean conservation. A better understanding of marine biodiversity through increased biological observations will help in decision-making on issues ranging from fisheries management to climate change. These resources will allow for increased staffing needed within NMNH to lead Marine Life 2030 efforts both domestically and internationally, in partnership with academic, private, philanthropic, not-for-profit, and other non-governmental organizations.

I appreciate the subcommittee’s consideration of these requests. I look forward to engaging more on these and other topics related to using science to support sound and sustainable use of ocean resources, which is increasingly important as ocean use continues to grow. Finding ways to sustain and grow interagency and cross-sectoral work on overlapping ocean issues (e.g., offshore
renewable wind and ocean mapping, exploration, and characterization activities) will be critical to effective management that ensures sustainable use for decades to come.

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