



July 20, 2021

The Honorable Jeanne Shaheen  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice,  
Science, and Related Agencies  
Committee on Appropriations  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Shaheen,

We are writing to express our strong support for the Coastal and Estuarine Land Conservation Program (CELCP) and to request funding be restored to this important program. CELCP supports flood protection, water quality improvement, wildlife habitat, coastal economies, and climate resilience by conserving coastal and estuarine lands. Administered by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the program has protected more than 110,000 acres of coastal land in 29 states, including numerous projects in New Hampshire.

As the climate crisis threatens our coastline in New Hampshire and across the country, investment in CELCP is a much-needed investment to safeguard our coastal communities from sea level rise and extreme weather, as well as vital ecosystems that protect our water quality and local wildlife. CELCP preserves coastal wetlands, reefs, barrier islands, and sand dunes that are severely threatened. In addition, the program prioritizes public recreation access and protection of cultural and historic sites.

In New Hampshire, CELCP has been a key tool the state's conservation community has used to protect the unique ecosystem and habitats at Great Bay, an estuary of national significance. The program has supported other important projects including the Southeast Land Trust of NH's Piscassic Greenway in Newfields; The Trust for Public Land's Winnicut River Headwaters in North Hampton, the Isinglass River Corridor in Strafford, and Sagamore Creek Headlands; the Awcomin Marsh Restoration and Massacre Marsh in Rye; and the Forest Society's Moose Mountain Reservation in Middleton.

This summer, The Nature Conservancy, the Society for the Protection of NH Forests, and the Southeast Land Trust of NH, along with many state, federal and non-profit partners, completed an update to *New Hampshire's Coastal Watershed Conservation Plan*. This plan synthesizes a

broad array of conservation plans and studies from the last 15 years into a prioritized set of conservation focus areas. These priorities include wildlife habitats and corridors that connect them, lands that support water quality protection, conservation opportunities for climate adaptation such as flood protection and public water supply protection, and lands that support local agriculture and food production.

This plan represents a turning point for coastal watershed conservation. While reflecting on the tremendous conservation progress made over the last 15 years, it recognizes that considerably more conservation work still needs to be done to protect the integrity of natural systems and the natural infrastructure that supports human communities. This report recommends that the land protection community collectively sets a goal to protect 4,000 acres per year across the coastal watershed. This will reverse declining land protection rates tracked since 2007. Based on 2021 values, we expect 4,000 acres to require an investment of approximately \$15,000,000 annually.

CELCP provides funding to states and local governments to acquire coastal and estuarine areas or to purchase conservation easements, with a 1:1 non-federal matching requirement that has successfully leveraged 16,000 acres of in-kind contributions. From 2002 to 2011, the program received robust appropriations and in 2009 was authorized for up to \$60 million each year through Omnibus Public Land Management Act of 2009. The last funding competition for the program was in 2017 for a few select projects around the Great Lakes.

As you know, CELCP's origins were in New Hampshire with the protection efforts at Great Bay and since then has supported very successful projects in the state. However, the lapse in funding has resulted in a growing backlog of coastal conservation projects that lack a dedicated funding source. Conservation through CELCP has a proven track record of protecting coastal communities and important ecology that are threatened by the changing climate. We urge you to restore robust funding to the program to address the many unmet needs in New Hampshire and beyond.

We appreciate your work to protect New Hampshire's coast and hope to work with you to ensure we grow these investments in coastal conservation.

Sincerely,

Jim O'Brien  
Director of External Affairs  
The Nature Conservancy in New Hampshire

Matt Leahy  
Public Policy Director  
Society for the Protection of NH Forests

Brian Hart  
Executive Director  
Southeast Land Trust of New Hampshire

Shelby Semmes  
Northern New England Area Director  
The Trust for Public Land

Susan Arnold  
Vice President for Conservation  
Appalachian Mountain Club