

Date

To: Gulf Coast Delegation

Dear [insert senator/rep name],

On behalf of our members and supporters across the Gulf and around the nation, we are writing to thank you for your leadership in maintaining strong funding levels this fiscal year for programs that support the continued protection and restoration of the Gulf Coast environment and the communities that depend on it.

As you know, the Gulf of Mexico and its vibrant natural resources are national treasures. These natural resources make the Gulf an important economic driver for the entire nation. For example, its abundance of fish and wildlife generates almost \$20 billion each year from wildlife tourism and provides more than one-third of the nation's seafood. The Gulf also hosts more than 90% of the nation's offshore oil and gas production.

In particular, we are pleased to see that the below critical coastal programs received equal or increased funding from fiscal year 2016:

- **Coastal Zone Management Grants:** These important grants, which directly fund state and territory coastal zone management programs, enable states to perform coastal planning responsibilities, and facilitate on the ground management and science.
- **Sea Grant:** The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Sea Grant Program, with four offices around the Gulf, promotes practical use and conservation of coastal and marine resources to help foster a sustainable economy and environment. This program works in and with coastal communities, providing research, extension, legal, and education services.
- **National Estuarine Research Reserves:** The National Estuarine Research Reserves, managed by lead state agencies or universities with input from local partners in five locations around the Gulf, promote stewardship and research in coastal estuaries, while offering opportunities for community training and education programs.
- **Gulf of Mexico Program:** This Environmental Protection Agency program works through voluntary, non-regulatory actions, including research and partnership-building, to improve the health, productivity, and resilience of the Gulf of Mexico and the communities that rely on it.
- **National Estuary Program:** The National Estuary Program is a place-based program to restore the water quality and ecological integrity of estuaries of national significance, including many throughout the Gulf region.

It is critical to note these are cooperative programs that work with states and local communities to improve the quality of life and environmental health of the Gulf coast. These programs utilize federal dollars as a leveraging tool and provide services far beyond the federal dollars that are provided.

Thank you for recognizing the importance of these critical programs that help keep the Gulf Coast resilient and healthy for coastal communities. As Fiscal Year 2018 appropriations bills are developed, we respectfully urge you to maintain robust funding for programs that support important work to restore and protect the Gulf of Mexico.

Sincerely,

(Group names pending)