

**STATEMENT OF  
JAMES L. CONNAUGHTON, CHAIRMAN  
COUNCIL ON ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY  
FOR THE HEARING BEFORE THE  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON FISHERIES CONSERVATION, WILDLIFE  
AND OCEANS  
COMMITTEE ON RESOURCES  
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
ON  
COASTAL AMERICA**

**OCTOBER 3, 2002**

Mr. Chairman, Mr. Underwood and Members of the Subcommittee:

I am Jim Connaughton, Chairman of the Council on Environmental Quality. I am also Chairman of the Coastal America Principals Group, the governance body for the Coastal America Partnership.

I appreciate the opportunity to appear before the Subcommittee today to discuss Coastal America. Coastal America can provide useful insights for the Subcommittee as it contemplates how to increase the effectiveness of programs that involve multiple agencies. I am pleased to share this panel with Mr. Scott Gudes from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

I have taken an active interest in the Coastal America Partnership during my tenure as Chairman of the

Council on Environmental Quality and the Coastal America Principals Group. Last December, I had the opportunity to present partnership awards to the Maine Coastal Wetlands Team and the Maine Corporate Wetlands Restoration Partnership (CWRP) which had restored 300 acres of wetlands at 11 sites, and I personally helped them break the ground at their next project site, Scarborough Marsh. Last May, I had the opportunity to participate in a fish release ceremony celebrating the completion of a series of fishways on the Cooper River which flows through Camden New Jersey. I have seen how Coastal America partners combine their resources, expertise and authorities. For example, one of the most valuable military contributions to the partnership has been the use of military training exercises to accomplish environmental restoration objectives.

Last week, Coastal America presented an award to an Army Reserve unit that removed a dam in Plymouth, Massachusetts, thereby restoring anadromous fish spawning habitat while receiving important mission-critical training experience.

Coastal America began in 1992 as key executive branch officials decided how best to implement President Bush's wetlands policies. The core responsible agencies – NOAA, EPA, Corps of Engineers, and Fish and Wildlife Service – recognized the need for a coordinating mechanism among Federal agencies working on wetlands issues.

Ten years later, Coastal America has established a successful track record and is distinguished by:

- National MOU with shared goals and objectives
- Nine Regional teams supported by a national structure
- Flexible regional approach to meet local needs
- Effective leveraging of resources
- Combined existing program authorities
- Inclusive process (Federal/State/local/Tribal/private)
- Voluntary involvement
- Action focus with on-the-ground projects
- Well-established awards program
- Coastal Ecosystem Learning Centers network
- Corporate Wetlands Restoration Partnership

The Administration is emphasizing five basic themes in carrying out our environmental management responsibilities:

1. Stewardship - ensuring that responsibility of caring for the resources is vested in those interests that are close to the resources
2. Innovation – identifying new management and regulatory solutions to existing environmental challenges
3. Science-based decision-making – ensuring that policy and management decisions are based on the best available science
4. Federalism – focus on partnerships and collaboration with State and local interests
5. Compliance - assuring that environmental compliance is integrated into decisions

The Coastal America track record establishes it as a model for success on each of these themes.

This Administration has focused on fish, wetlands, water and watersheds. Fish protection is a difficult

interagency policy issue and an Administration priority. Wetlands are vital to preserving and enhancing water quality and wetland ecosystem restoration and protection is also a priority for preserving wildlife habitat and support services. The Administration is also focusing on assessments of water and watersheds and we will continue to establish direction in this policy area over the next two years. Each of these goals should be addressed and managed comprehensively and that requires a multi-agency approach that transcends individual agency responsibilities. The Administration is looking for ways to replicate the success of Coastal America in a broader context to address these issues.

These issues are complex and interrelated. Often, individual agencies are only authorized to take incremental approaches. But we think that in most cases, authorities and resources are sufficient, if they can be deployed more strategically.

To be effective, collaborative strategies must integrate technical and managerial capabilities and resources of Federal partners with those of State, Tribal, local, and nongovernmental organizations to identify and solve specific local problems. These collaborative endeavors must be united by the principles of sustainable development. Further, effective natural resource management strategies must be developed within an ecosystem and watershed context.

The following criteria for ensuring successful collaborative governance were developed by the Coastal America Principals in 2002. The criteria are applicable to any organized collaborative enterprise. To be successful, the collaborative arrangement:

- § Must allow and provide for individual missions of the different programs to be maintained in their entirety.
- § Must increase coordination among the programs.
- § Must increase efficiency (which is similar to, but different than, increased coordination).
- § Must provide for accountability (collectively and by agency) to be maintained, and expectations to be met.
- § Should be transparent and easily understood by the all stakeholders.
- § Should encourage a collaborative approach between Federal, State, Tribal and local entities.

Coastal America exhibits these criteria as it operates through a local-regional-national structure that is composed of:

- *Principals Group* – Assistant Secretaries of the partnering departments. Meet periodically to set policy direction for collaboration.
- *National Implementation Team* – Larger group of senior managers from the partner agencies. Meet monthly to address policy conflicts and provide support to the Regional Teams.
- *Regional Implementation Teams* – This is the core of Coastal America. Nine teams covering all domestic coastal areas, including the Upper Mississippi and Great Lakes. Comprised of senior regional officials of the partner agencies. As the primary operating units for interagency consultation and action, they identify regional issues, develop strategies, and select and prioritize projects. They are advocates for the projects with their headquarters counterparts. They communicate, build relationships, synthesize information and look for ways to break down barriers that could prevent collaboration.

- *Project Teams* – Locally-based groups comprised of Federal, State, Tribal and local organizations. They are established as needed to implement projects. The Regional Implementation Teams spawn and support the project teams.

### • **The Added Value**

Coastal America provides an established mechanism and process that allows the agencies to plan and act strategically and employ their resources and authorities in concert to achieve more effective results quicker. Participants in Coastal America enjoy the following benefits:

- § Ready mechanisms and processes for addressing complex ecological issues.
- § Quicker implementation of projects that cross jurisdictional lines.
- § Mechanism to focus national attention and encourage support for innovative solutions that may require removal of programmatic or regulatory barriers.
- § Mechanism for involving private sector in restoration and protection efforts (Corporate Wetlands Restoration Partnership).
- § Effective means for increasing public understanding of coastal processes, issues, and needs (Coastal Ecosystem Learning Centers).

The Coastal America experience is unique and is an excellent model for effective collaboration within the Federal government. This partnership focuses complex and diverse interests on collaborative, comprehensive solutions to which several agencies may each contribute. It is the nature of collaborative efforts that each of the partners makes a contribution to the whole, thus providing for a more comprehensive solution.

I would like to turn now to the questions posed by the Subcommittee in my invitation letter. First, you asked how Coastal America's environmental restoration activities would be coordinated with activities of the Estuary Habitat Restoration Council, the estuary habitat restoration strategy and the estuary habitat projects authorized by the Estuary Restoration Act of 2000.

The coordination mechanisms have not yet been fully developed, because there has not yet been funding for projects under the Estuary Restoration Act of 2000. The Administration is continuing to examine the options for implementing the Act, and I assure the Subcommittee that coordination will be considered.

The Subcommittee asked how many acres have been restored by Coastal America projects since the program's inception and what the costs have been. We do not have a complete accounting of the cumulative acres restored or the dollars spent. Participating agencies report those accomplishments and expenditures for which they are responsible.

Implicit in the development of such a shared system is the need to settle on common terms and definitions along with common performance measures. The Administration is now moving forward to develop common performance measures for work processes that are common to multiple federal agencies. OMB is providing leadership to the Executive Branch agencies through the budget process. In April of this year, OMB Director Mitch Daniels provided the first draft guidance for shared performance measures for wetlands. These have served to foster discussion among the participating agencies. We foresee the development of

shared measures in the near future.

Although I cannot report to you today a specific number of acres of wetlands that has been restored over the ten years that Coastal America has been in operation, I can apprise you that more than 600 separate projects have been initiated through Coastal America. These projects include wetland restoration, dam removal, species protection and pollution mitigation. These projects range in size from 1 to 60,000 acres.

As to cost, Coastal America is a program that operates with minimal funding from several Federal agencies. In Fiscal Year 2002, Coastal America's budget was \$282,000. In Fiscal Year 2001, it was \$192,000; in Fiscal Year 2000, it was \$135,000. The recent increase represents the increased support being given to Coastal America by this Administration.

Lastly, the Subcommittee asked how CEQ is resolving the fiscal year 2002 interagency funding problems faced by Coastal America. The Council on Environmental Quality has statutory authority to receive payments from agencies to finance Federal interagency environmental projects and task forces, such as Coastal America. Because of issues regarding NOAA's authority to accept interagency financing for Coastal America, CEQ agreed to create a management fund pursuant to its statutory authority to finance Federal interagency environmental projects and task forces. However, CEQ did not want to issue a new charter for a Coastal America Task Force without having promulgated management fund regulations with amendments to allow continued administration of the Coastal America Program by NOAA. These regulations were mandated by statute in 1984 and had not been promulgated as of 2002. Thus, we worked with the Office of Management and Budget and the Office of Administration to (1) finalize the amended regulations; and (2) finalize the Coastal America management fund charter, in that order. We were successful, and I have adopted the amended regulations and executed a Coastal America management fund charter.

As a result of this work, a Coastal America management fund has been created in full accord with the new regulations. We have a budget in place for Coastal America's immediate needs, and three agencies are in the process of transferring funds to this management fund for Coastal America.

Thank-you for the opportunity to address the Subcommittee today.