

U.S. Senator Maria Cantwell

NOAA Coastal Resilience Call

June 5th, 2023

[\[AUDIO\]](#)

Sec. Raimondo: [Start of audio] Working in coastal communities, and frankly how important it is. If you're going to preserve people's way of life and livelihood you have to invest to have resilient coasts and climate ready coasts.

Every year, the impacts of climate change and pollution get worse, threatening habitat for wildlife and the health and security of hundreds of millions of Americans that live in coastal communities.

I'm also the Secretary of Commerce, I care a lot about jobs and the economy and the truth of it is we can't be competitive as a nation if our coastal communities are constantly reeling from the effects of hurricanes, flooding, or natural disasters.

So this \$2.6 billion investment represents our very serious commitment to helping coastal communities take action to protect their economic competitiveness. A significant portion of this funding, just about \$600 million, will support climate resilience in coastal communities, including projects that will protect communities from extreme storms.

We're going to invest this money through a new climate resilience regional challenge. This will be a competitive grant program, investing in collaborative approaches to coastal resilience at regional scales.

We have found at the Commerce Department over the past few years, that these regional competitions are an incredibly effective way to mobilize the whole community. And we get the most effective use of federal government resources.

We're also including \$400 million in funding for Tribal priorities for a variety of programs related to hatcheries and restoring fish populations. This is a huge investment from the administration and making sure these fish populations, in particular salmon, that are so critical to cultures and livelihoods of so many tribes and communities across our country.

In a couple minutes, I'll be turning it over to Senator Cantwell, but I will just say here, no one knows more about protecting these fish populations and making sure the hatcheries are healthy than Senator Cantwell.

In fact, the very first meeting that we had, she made it clear to me that this was her priority. And the reason we are here today, having this money to invest, investing in a way that keeps the Tribal needs top of mind is due to the relentless and exceptional leadership of Senator Cantwell.

The \$2.6 billion also goes toward training Americans for climate related jobs. We're going to be creating a lot of jobs here. In order to meet the moment we need to make sure folks have the skills they need to do these jobs.

Beyond the \$2.6 billion for Climate Ready Coasts and Communities, we'll be using an additional \$700 million in IRA funding to invest in NOAA's infrastructure to combat climate change. Some of that funding will help NOAA meet the growing demand for climate information and climate services. We know that having the best data in the right hands at the right time is an essential part of climate resiliency.

The funding will be used to help NOAA expand their work on climate, climate products in partnership with communities and local and Tribal governments as well as the private sector.

The remaining funding will be used to improve NOAA's supercomputing capacity, strengthen our fleet of hurricane hunter aircraft and research vessels, and replace aging facilities. The facilities piece here is especially important, because it will not only help to accomplish our climate mission, but again, it'll help create new jobs and economic opportunity in coastal regions across the country.

So once again, everything I've just outlined, builds on the \$3 billion that no are received through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. Once again, that too would not have happened without Senator Cantwell's leadership.

These investments are how we're going to help communities, tribes, businesses and families across the country become climate ready, and it's just a shining example of how President Biden's Investing in America Agenda is helping all of us to tackle the climate crisis and ensure our communities are resilient, healthy and prosperous.

And NOAA and our team, I can speak on behalf of Dr. Spinrad and I, we are committed to making sure these programs are implemented with excellent transparency and accountability. And we're excited to see the progress that we can make together.

Staff: Thank you, Secretary. Now we're going to turn it over to Senator Cantwell.

Sen. Cantwell: Well, good morning everyone and thank you Secretary Raimondo for your leadership and the team with Dr. Spinrad and others on such important investments that we need to get out to America, as you just described. And I really appreciate your leadership overall at Commerce, but certainly as Secretary of Commerce on important oceans policy.

The Inflation Reduction Act was all about making long overdue investments in America, particularly when it comes to addressing the climate crisis and while there's been a lot of attention to accelerating the transition to clean energy, which was a big part of it, the Commerce Committee also made sure that we included robust funding to help coastal communities prepare for those climate impacts.

Now, I think with the Bipartisan Infrastructure Bill, and this announcement today, this is a record amount of investment in salmon, salmon habitat, and in salmon recovery. So we very much appreciate it.

Coastal communities face a unique and widespread climate challenge, including more severe ocean storms, sea level rise, ocean acidification, shifting fish populations that impact fishing communities, as the Secretary just mentioned. So we wanted to make sure there was robust Tribal funding and to make sure that tribes have a greater say in how those funds are used.

This funding makes a one-time investment in science that we need to make smarter decisions. We know that our large scale, ecosystems are being impacted by climate and we need to build what is our natural infrastructure to prevent against those storm surges, those floods, and other things that can be mitigated by us making some natural resource infrastructure investments.

We need to make sure that this funding as it does includes new NOAA Fisheries Science, because this is critical in guiding us, marine research vessels investment, and as the Secretary said, workforce infrastructure so that we can stay on top of these problems.

It does represent big hatchery investments and this is particularly important in my state, and also in building capacity to plan for the future.

It also includes money for continued improvement in fish passage. This is about removal of fish barriers, such as levees, or what we call deadbeat dams, investments in culverts and blockages, and helps to ensure salmon migration routes enable more salmon to return to their spawning grounds.

So we're very happy to have got this direction and resource to the Department of Commerce and NOAA. And we look forward to continuing to work with them on this investment and making these communities more stable, and making these natural infrastructure investments.

So I thank you again, Madam Secretary.

Sec. Raimondo: Thank you, Senator. We're now going to turn it over to Administrator Dr. Ron Spinrad.

Administrator Dr. Spinrad: Thank you so much. And thank you, Senator Cantwell.

Let me start by thanking President Biden for his obvious climate leadership, as well as Secretary Gina Raimondo, and leaders in Congress like Senator Cantwell who've been truly steadfast supporters of climate action, and really instrumental in making sure both the Inflation Reduction Act as well as the Bipartisan Infrastructure law are transformational opportunities for us at NOAA to work with communities to prepare for climate impacts.

I think it's important to point out that now, more than ever, communities across the country are facing the realities of climate change and extreme weather. Whether it's from prolonged drought, to hazardous flooding, to widespread heat waves. Since January, in fact, there have

been a record setting seven disasters that have totaled a billion dollars or more each in damages, highlighting the profound economic and social impacts of more frequent and costly climate and extreme weather events.

NOAA's historic \$3.3 billion investment from the Inflation Reduction Act, building on the investments for the Bipartisan Infrastructure law represents a significant shift in our ability to help communities become more resilient to these climate related risks, while also protecting lives and livelihoods and safeguarding ecosystems. Collectively, this \$6 billion investment will empower the agency to support communities as they work to build resilience to climate change.

Let me give a bit of an overview and some more detail. I want to share some key aspects of our IRA investments. \$2.6 billion will be focused on building and strengthening the resilience of coastal and Great Lakes communities.

We'll spend \$575 million for our climate resilience regional challenge. That is a new competitive program that you heard the Secretary allude to focused on holistic collaborative approaches to coastal resilience at regional scales.

We are also investing \$390 million, 15% of the overall coastal resilience funding, on Tribal priorities, particularly by providing funding for tribes to support things like habitat restoration, capacity building, fish hatcheries, and Pacific salmon. This funding includes Tribal set asides, and is responsive to comments received during consultations with tribes.

Almost \$350 million will be invested in what we're calling climate ready fisheries and initiative to support projects to conserve fisheries and protected species in coastal regions, enabling NOAA to build dynamic fisheries management systems that incorporate climate and ecosystem data that support management decisions and the resilience of communities that depend on our nation's fisheries.

\$100 million dollars will go toward climate resilience accelerators, a new competitive business program that will fill a critical unmet market need. Accelerators will support businesses with coastal, Great Lakes, and ocean based resilience products and services related to NOAA's mission and help businesses navigate commercialization pathways.

NOAA will also tap into existing resilience related funding opportunities, such as the National Oceanographic Partnership Program, and the ocean technology transition program to advance coastal and climate resilience science and services.

You've heard the Secretary allude to workforce development while we'll be putting \$60 million into the climate ready workforce program to help meet the emerging and existing needs of employers by placing workers in high quality jobs that enhance climate resilience. The program's investments will help American workers to advance careers dedicated to climate resilience and position a workforce that's able to implement climate resilience efforts across the public and private sectors.

\$200 million will support improvements in NOAA's climate and data services, ensuring that all Americans have access to environmental intelligence needed to protect lives and livelihoods.

We will create industry proving grounds to collaboratively research, develop, and test tailored products and services for the private sector, including the insurance, reinsurance, and health industries.

We will fund improvements and expansions of existing programs that advanced climate information, services, and adaptation capacity, and build equitable climate resilience.

We will advance forward looking projections, data assimilation methods, and numerical weather prediction skill and models, in order to improve the prediction of climate and weather extremes on oceans and ecosystems and deliver climate projections needed to inform important decision making. We will also expedite the assessment and development of the next generation phased array radar capabilities to make severe weather warnings more accurate.

\$752 million will support critical infrastructure improvements necessary to maintain NOAA's mission, including, for example, the Northwest Fisheries Science Center in Seattle, Washington, and the NOAA Fisheries Sandy Hook lab in New Jersey. Piers in Newport, Rhode Island, and Charleston, South Carolina. The construction of two charting and mapping research vessels, as well as critical midlife repairs for NOAA fisheries survey vessels. The acquisition of a second Gulfstream 550 hurricane hunter aircraft, enhancement for NOAA's high performance computing capacity, and facilities projects at the Monterey Bay Stellwagen Bank, the Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale, the Greater Ferolonds, the Mallows Bay, and the Olympic Coast National Marine Sanctuaries.

In closing, let me just say the investments made through IRA represent a true sea change in how NOAA is able to accomplish our mission. But we can't do it alone. We look forward to engaging with those communities, tribes, Tribal organizations, and other partners across the country.

As we invest in America through these initiatives, we'll be providing additional details on specific funding opportunities starting this summer, throughout the year. And I do look forward to ultimately seeing the benefits from these investments in the form of climate ready and resilient communities.

And with that, I believe we're going to move into Q&A. So I'm going to turn it back to the Department of Commerce Public Affairs.

Staff: Thank you, Administrator Spinrad.

He is correct. We are going into our question and answer portion, our brief question answer portion. If you're interested in asking a question, please hit the raise hand and function on the Zoom. I'll give folks a moment to do that.

Looks like we're not very curious today. We have no question. So we will be ending this call. As a reminder, the contents of this call is embargoed until 5am tomorrow, and this is on the record. Thanks all.

Sen. Cantwell: Can I make one more point before we leave.

Staff: Certainly.

Sen. Cantwell: I just wanted to also thank Dr. Spinrad and to point out I believe this is the first time NOAA is putting real funding towards salmon and steelhead hatchery investment to boost production to support those Tribal fisheries and our orca population that rely on Chinook salmon. So just again, want to thank them for that.

Administrator Dr. Spinrad: Thank you Senator.

Staff: And it looks like we do have a last minute question from Bill Lucia.

Bill Lucia: Yep. Hi, there. Thanks for taking my question. I appreciate it. I was just wondering if maybe senator Cantwell or Secretary Raimondo could give any more specific examples of the types of projects here in Washington state that this this new funding might support?

Sen. Cantwell: Well, the science facility that we need to upgrade at NOAA Montlake. So investments in National Fisheries Science, and the hatchery funding that I just mentioned, would impact and [help] our communities.

We will get you a specific project. But as I mentioned, just helping to focus on hatchery resource can help us with our Southern Resident Orca population in need for more Chinook. And then I believe there is \$3 million for the Olympic National Marine Sanctuary, which is a down payment on the Discovery Center for Olympic Marine Sanctuary visitors in the Port Angeles area.

So there's several things here. And the culvert fish passage, just continuing to focus on the migration of salmon and improving that capacity, we probably could give you a very, very, very, very, very big list of all of those culvert issues throughout the Northwest and why helping to get salmon back to their natural spawning grounds is so important.

If you will, Puget Sound is a powerhouse of salmon. But the opportunities to get salmon back to their natural habitat means us removing those barriers. And so this will be \$70 million to help us increase the investment in that.

Administrator Dr. Spinrad: And if I could weigh in with just a quick comment as well, in addition to everything that Senator just alluded to. Obviously, the coastal resilience regional challenge is an opportunity for those coastal communities in the state of Washington to compete for the \$575 million to address issues like storms and sea level rise that may impact those communities as well.

Sen. Cantwell: I don't know if you saw up in Skagit County, this probably is really more under Army Corps of Engineers, but just how that jetty collapse is impacting salmon. So all of these - basically the natural events are challenging us and this is a response to those natural climate challenges and trying to build better natural infrastructure to help us weather the storm. Really weather the storm and try to save fish.

Administrator Dr. Spinrad: Absolutely. And of course, there's issues of ocean acidification affecting the shellfish industry on the coast as well.

Sen. Cantwell: Yes, and Secretary Raimondo tied this very well together. These investments in our natural infrastructure to help these, but they really do impact economies throughout my state and throughout the United States. And this is why we're making this investment to help us with our resiliency. So these communities can continue to earn livings off of these natural economies.

Staff: I could not have said it better myself. Thank you, Senator Cantwell. Thank you, Administrator Dr. Spinrad. This concludes our call. Thank you again for joining. As a reminder, this call is on the record but embargoed until 5am tomorrow, Tuesday morning. Thank you very much and have a great day guys.