



# Coalition for the Cape Cod Watershed Project

April 18, 2012

Senator John Kerry  
218 Russell Building  
Second Floor  
Washington, DC 20510

**Subject: USDA Watershed Program (PL-566)**

Dear Senator Kerry:

The undersigned members of the Coalition for the Cape Cod Watershed Project write to ask for your assistance in Congress to restore funding for the USDA Watershed Program, a federal program that is vitally important to the environment and economy of Cape Cod, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and the nation.

The Coalition is deeply concerned that the Administration's current budget proposal completely eliminates funding for the USDA Watershed Program. Loss of this program would have an extremely adverse impact on our region by permanently shutting down the Cape Cod Water Resources Restoration Project (CCWRRP), a nationally recognized comprehensive watershed restoration initiative authorized through PL-566 and funded through the USDA Watershed Program.

The CCWRRP provides critical water quality improvements across Barnstable County through:

- Restoration of 1,500 acres of degraded salt marsh;
- Improvement of fish access to 4,200 acres of spawning habitat; and
- Restoration of 7,300 acres of shellfish beds.

The coastal resources described above play a vital role in the region's economy, particularly with regard to our fishing and shellfishing industries. Consider the following:

- Commercial shellfishing produces an average annual landed value of \$6.3 million on Cape Cod, while recreational shellfishing accounts for \$646,000 annually.
- Shellfishing aquaculture, which is counted separately from commercial shellfishing, yields an additional \$4.5 million annually on Cape Cod.
- In 2009, commercial finfishing produced \$20 million in revenue for Provincetown and Chatham alone, and brought in nearly \$400 million in revenue for the entire Commonwealth of Massachusetts that same year.
- Seventy-five percent of commercial finfish species depend on healthy salt marshes for part of their life cycle. And, river herring, which rely on accessible fish runs in their annual spawning migration, are a primary food source for many of these same valuable commercial fish species.

In short, the future viability of our shellfishing and finfishing industries depends on healthy Cape Cod

coastal resources, many of which are currently deteriorated and in need of restoration. These same resources also impact our tourist-based economy as well as the quality of life of our residents.

Cape Cod is not the only region in Massachusetts affected by the elimination of USDA Watershed Program funding. The Great Marsh Coastal Wetlands Restoration Project on the North Shore, a watershed restoration project similar to the Cape project, is also dependent upon Watershed Program funding to complete the project planning phase and to ultimately implement the project. Farther inland, a number of dam restoration projects rely on the Watershed Program's dam rehabilitation funding. All told, the loss of the Watershed Program would deal a devastating blow to a significant portion of the Commonwealth's coastal resources and economy, and could even be responsible for threats to property and safety due to failure of deteriorated dams.

The Coalition for the Cape Cod Watershed Project urges you to work with your fellow members of the Massachusetts Congressional delegation, the leadership of the House Committee on Agriculture, Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry, and other members of Congress to restore funding for this important program. Specifically, we ask that Congress fund the USDA Watershed Program at the following levels:

- Watershed Planning: \$35 million
- Watershed Operations: \$100 million
- Watershed Rehabilitation for Aging Watershed Dams: \$75 million

This proposed funding is far below historical funding levels for these programs, but has been calculated to meet the needs of projects that are currently pending, including the CCWRRP. Funding the USDA Watershed Program at this level is a modest investment compared to the substantial benefits this program provides in the way of protection of human life and property, natural resource protection and enhancement, jobs creation and stronger local economies. Nationally, current USDA Watershed Program initiatives provide \$2 billion in annual benefits to over 47 million citizens. Your assistance in this effort will help ensure that the important work undertaken through the USDA Watershed Program can continue to protect our natural resources and our economy.

We are extremely grateful for the past strong support you have shown for the CCWRRP, and ask for your continued commitment and leadership in preserving this vital program.

Sincerely,

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Association to Preserve Cape Cod

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Chair  
Cape Cod Conservation District

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