



March 20, 2024

The Honorable Gina Raimondo  
Secretary of Commerce  
Herbert Clark Hoover Building  
1401 Constitution Avenue, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20230

Dear Secretary Raimondo,

Thank you for your work as Secretary of Commerce, in particular, your attention to and support of NOAA. It is refreshing to those of us in the ocean science community to have a Secretary that is aware of and passionately committed to our Nation's oceans and coasts and the myriad economic benefits they provide.

We are writing in response to the [NOAA Congressional Justification](#) of the Fiscal Year 2025 President's Budget. We laud the stated priorities, in support of the administration's goals, of observational infrastructure, climate resilience, and expanded data and services. NOAA's [announcement](#) of the fiscal year 2025 budget focuses on its intention to invest in "delivering actionable environmental information to decision makers focused on the risk areas of wildfires, floods, drought, extreme heat, the coasts, marine resources and overall climate risk mitigation." Given these stated objectives, we were shocked to see \$10 million proposed as the fiscal year 2025 budget for IOOS Regional Observations (NOS-31 through NOS-34), a reduction of more than 76% from fiscal year 2023 and 2024 enacted levels, and less than any funding level for the program since its inception in the 2008 federal budget.

The U.S. Integrated Ocean Observing System (IOOS) is a program established within the NOAA National Ocean Service to produce, integrate, and communicate high quality ocean and Great Lakes information that meets the safety, economic, and stewardship needs of the nation – data and services that will no longer be available if the President's Budget is enacted. The observing and data management infrastructure is implemented through 11 federally-certified, non-federal partners ([Regional Associations](#)) who are tasked with filling critical gaps in the federal system. The Regional Associations provide actionable, near real-time (and retrospective) data, as well as tools and forecasts, that are tailored to the needs of local and regional users while also supporting and enhancing federal models, forecasts, and information products. IOOS supports safe and efficient maritime transportation and commerce, search and rescue operations, offshore energy development and operations, resource management and protection, environmental prediction (e.g., marine heat waves), improved understanding and notification of hazards (e.g., hurricanes and flooding), and more. The Regional Associations regularly engage with local communities, including Indigenous communities, Tribes, and other overburdened frontline groups, to understand their needs and to co-develop tailored regional observing activities, data products, and services.

We appreciate that the president's budget is complex and difficult to compile. We recognize that the Fiscal Responsibility Act added additional challenges, requiring many tradeoffs. However, given the very direct connection of IOOS to the fiscal year 2025 budget priorities, and the tremendous negative impact this

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proposed cut would have on communities across the nation, this tradeoff seems out of alignment. Certainly, it is contradictory to the goal of providing expanded environmental data and services.

A few examples of the services from IOOS that will no longer be available at the level proposed in the President's Budget:

- Improving forecasting of hurricane intensity through ocean temperature data collected by our hurricane underwater glider program;
- Improving flood forecasting by providing surface current and wave data to the NWS Weather Forecast Office;
- Providing water level, wave, current, and wind data that vessel pilots need to navigate safely into and out of ports and offshore wind lease areas;
- Informing regional fisheries quota setting and sustainable resource use by state and tribal resource managers through data collection, modeling, and information that underpins NOAA Integrated Ecosystem Assessments;
- Supporting decision making by shellfish growers and at aquaculture facilities with data and information products to enable informed response to marine heatwaves, ocean acidification, and harmful algal blooms;
- Supporting decisions by regional health agencies to protect human health from harmful algal blooms by observations and forecasts while balancing economic concerns;
- Operating nearly all the existing network of high frequency radars needed for U.S. Coast Guard search and rescue operations, oil spill mapping and response, water quality monitoring, harmful algal bloom tracking and forecasting, safe and efficient marine navigation, inundation mapping, fishery forecasting, and even port security; and
- Providing high resolution models and tailored data products that extend federal capabilities at regional and local levels.

In addition to the core sustained operations of the IOOS Regional Associations, we have proposed activities to recapitalize and modernize our systems (funding from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law) and to reach new user communities with enhanced data delivery services to meet the evolving needs for coastal resilience (funding from the Inflation Reduction Act). These investments in the system and the benefits they will bring to users across the country – in particular Tribes and other underserved communities – are only possible because of the existing operational infrastructure for observation, data management, and engagement. The proposed budget will prevent the IOOS Regional Associations from realizing these projects and delivering new and greater services to decision makers. Further, it will violate the trust that Regional Associations have earned over decades working with a variety of user groups, from harbor and bar pilots to Tribes to fisherman and shellfish growers.

Finally, while housed within NOAA, IOOS is a whole-of-government information system, supporting the missions of 17 federal agencies, including offshore wind development for NOAA and the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management. It is a single system that supports many needs, making it a cost-effective investment for American taxpayers. In fact, a recent study by the Center for the Blue Economy concluded that the value of the IOOS regional observing systems, just to initial users, lies between \$192 million and \$233 million per year, creating an economic value approximately five times greater than the current investment in the

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system. Further, IOOS data and information products and services support decision-making and innovation for the more than \$360 billion (GDP) ocean-based economy.

These are just a few of the ways that U.S. IOOS supports national priorities, while also bringing tremendous value to local user communities. If funding is enacted at the level proposed in the President's Budget, regional observing assets (e.g., buoys and gliders) will need to be taken out of the water, at a cost, and would require additional cost to later re-deploy. We will also lose a highly skilled workforce. So, ultimately, this cut will cost more than it saves.

Twenty years ago in its landmark report, the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy, chaired by Admiral James D. Watkins, USN (ret), called for the establishment of a U.S. Integrated Ocean Observing System. The report stated, "the United States simply cannot provide the economic, environmental, and security benefits..., achieve new levels of understanding and predictive capability, or generate the information needed by a wide range of users, without implementing the IOOS." Many Regional Associations saw their beginnings in those early years, followed by the strong bipartisan support for and establishment of IOOS in law five years later. NOAA, as the steward of U.S. IOOS, has supported through successive administrations the growth and development of the original IOOS vision of the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy and the broader ocean science community.

As you shape the fiscal year 2026 budget, please consider the decision-making support and coastal and climate resilience benefits to our nation's coastal and Great Lakes communities that our sustained observations deliver. The IOOS Regional Associations ideally require increased funding to keep up with inflation and to meet the growing demands of our users; however, level funding at fiscal year 2024 enacted levels is essential to continue delivering the data and services needed by our coastal and Great Lakes communities.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Gerhard F. Kuska".

Gerhard F. Kuska, PhD  
Chair of the Board

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Kristen Yarincik".

Kristen Yarincik  
Executive Director

Cc: Rick Spinrad, Under Secretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere and NOAA Administrator  
Nicole LeBoeuf, Assistant Administrator for Ocean Services and Coastal Zone Management, NOAA  
National Ocean Service  
John Potts, Budget Director, NOAA Budget Office

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