



January 15, 2025

Mr. Sean M. Duffy, Sr.
Chair, NOAA Hydrographic Services Review Panel
Executive Director, Big River Coalition
4741 Utica Street, Suite 200
Metairie, LA 70006

Dear Mr. Duffy:

Thank you for your letter sharing the recommendations of the NOAA Hydrographic Services Review Panel (HSRP) following the September 2024 public meeting in Detroit, Michigan. I am glad to hear it was productive and agree that in-person meetings provide valuable opportunities that are not always possible in virtual settings. Having attended the Lakebed 2030 Conference the week prior to the HSRP, I had the pleasure of learning from and engaging with stakeholders about the complex environment of the Great Lakes, as well as the demand for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) foundational geospatial data and navigation products and services in the region.

I have reviewed the HSRP's recommendations and recognize the care that went into their development. Reflecting on those recommendations, I offer the following:

1. NOAA appreciates your focus on the resources available for our navigation products and services. The Fiscal Year (FY) 2025 President's Budget request strives to address many challenges in a constrained budget environment, including meeting the requirements of the Fiscal Responsibility Act of 2023. To support various Administration priorities while under a capped budget, very difficult decisions were made. While we still do not know the final outcome of the FY 2025 enacted budget, we understand that many of the cuts proposed for NOAA National Ocean Service (NOS) would present significant challenges for some of our grants, projects, and partnerships. As NOAA plans the FY 2026 request, NOAA appreciates knowing your recommendations. I also appreciate HSRP's continuing efforts to build and sustain awareness of these essential programs and their increasing value to the Nation.
2. NOAA recognizes the economic necessity and significance of NOS navigation products and services, particularly their role as critical infrastructure for the United States. To further illustrate this significant impact, NOAA has conducted socioeconomic analyses on the value of core services, including a 2022 study that estimated the overall annual



value of NOAA's Electronic Navigational Charts at \$2.0 to \$3.4 billion per year¹ and a 2014 study that estimated the value of NOAA PORTS[®] at \$300 million per year² from an expanded PORTS system serving the Nation's 175 major seaports. The value of NOAA's navigation services programs has also been demonstrated through our response to disasters, including the re-opening of essential ports after the collapse of the Francis Scott Key Bridge and impacts felt from Hurricanes Helene and Milton in 2024. NOAA would welcome the HSRP's input on assessment of the lost economic value and increased environmental and security risks incurred due to navigation products and services for U.S. waters that are dated or lack sufficient resolution.

3. NOAA is working with regional partners to develop a mapping strategy for the Great Lakes. In December 2024, the Lakebed 2030 team kicked off an effort to formally draft a Great Lakes regional mapping strategy with the goals to develop a joint U.S./Canadian prioritization process; unified messaging on the importance, need, and purpose of mapping the Great Lakes; and a plan to fully fund the strategy. NOAA's Integrated Ocean and Coastal Mapping program and other NOAA entities with shared interests in comprehensive mapping of the Great Lakes are actively involved in this effort. The goal is to have a completed Great Lakes regional mapping strategy by the end of 2025.

The HSRP's recommendations push NOAA to take a hard look at our navigation products and services and how best to continue providing the country with safe and reliable navigation, as well as local, regional, and national social and economic benefits. I greatly appreciate the HSRP's engagement as a valued champion of this critical NOS portfolio. Thank you for your ongoing partnership and service to NOAA and the Nation.

Sincerely,



Dr. Richard W. Spinrad
Under Secretary of Commerce
for Oceans and Atmosphere
and NOAA Administrator

¹ Estimated Gross Benefits Provided by Navigational Charts in the United States. Revised 2024.
www.nauticalcharts.noaa.gov/about/docs/about/Estimated+Gross+Benefits+Provided+by+Navigational+Charts+in+the+US.pdf.

² The Value of PORTS[®] to the Nation. 2014.
https://tidesandcurrents.noaa.gov/publications/Value_of_PORTS_to_the_Nation_Aug_2014.pdf.