

GLOS Congressional Update

August 10, 2005

Legislation

The Senate passed S. 361, **Ocean and Coastal Observation System Act of 2005**, by unanimous consent on July 1. The measure was received in the House on July 11 and referred to the Resources and Science Committees. Both of these committees have already begun work on H.R. 1584, the companion bill to S. 361, and H.R. 1489 which is similar in scope to the other two bills, but with less detailed provisions. A hearing has already been held on April 19 for H.R. 1489 by the House Resources Committee, Subcommittee on Fisheries and Oceans. This bill is considered most likely to eventually make it out of the Resources Committee. Nonetheless, it is uncertain which of the House bills will be voted out by the Science Committee.

Because there are two competing House bills and given the likelihood that the Resources Committee will complete its bill first, Roger Gauthier and Jon MacDonagh-Dumler met on July 27-28 with congressional staff for the Great Lakes representatives serving on this committee: Congressmen Dale Kildee (D-MI) and Ron Kind (D-WI). It should be noted that Kildee signed on early to cosponsor H.R. 1584. Both offices expressed interest in the IOOS legislation and gave assurances of support when it moves through committee. While these meetings were taking place, the leadership of NFRA (Dr. David Martin, et al.) and lobbyists from SMI met with staff of the House Resources Committee, Subcommittee on Fisheries and Oceans. Important legislative issues were identified and must be addressed for the IOOS legislation to make it out of committee and get to the floor of the House. The most critical issues appear to be: participation of federal agencies in the governance of the regional associations; and, new federal spending necessary for operation of the entire IOOS, including consideration of cost sharing. Resolving the first issue will reside primarily with legal counsel for the agencies involved while the second will require collaboration among the nascent RAs, their partner organizations and the principal federal agencies working within those regions. Markup of legislation in the Resources Committee is expected in the October-November timeframe.

Equally important, Gauthier and MacDonagh-Dumler participated in a formal "Thank You" luncheon to recognize the work and support of staff members of the Senate Commerce Committee. Committee staff efforts were essential to successfully advancing S. 361 which has been a three year effort.

Appropriations

The Great Lakes Task Force (GLTF) in the Senate and House will be helping to garner support during the upcoming conference on the FY 2006 appropriations bill for the Department of Commerce. Joy Mulinex, GLTF Director, will work with Senator Snowe's office to circulate a letter of support for the \$109.66 million appropriated by the Senate CJS Committee. The conference process to resolve differences between the House and Senate appropriations bills will begin in September after the August recess.

Looking ahead to the President's FY 2007 budget, which is being prepared now at the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), Gauthier and MacDonagh-Dumler met with analysts from OMB and the White House Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ). The meeting was arranged by SMI and included the NFRA leadership. Gauthier gave an overview of the benefits of GLOS for the Great Lakes region as did representatives from the Alaska, Maine and Pacific coasts. OMB was particularly interested in examples of successful regional association user-driven projects which demonstrate the value of observing systems. OMB also raised the question of cost sharing by regional associations. CEQ reported that they have been hearing from state groups about regional ocean and water management plans, but that not much has come forward about the importance of IOOS or RAs. They were familiar with state level efforts which emphasized the need for better communications by the Regional Associations to state governments so that state officials can communicate their support of IOOS and Regional Associations to the White House.