



# COASTAL AND ESTUARINE RESEARCH FEDERATION®

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Robert Twilley  
President, 2015-2017

To All CERF Members,

The past few months have been a tumultuous and conflicted period for me as I deal with reports of decreased U.S. federal support for environmental programs, and for science in general. It feels like I have spent all of my time responding to these concerns, and yet at the same time feel like I have done little to respond. As director of one of the 33 National Sea Grant College Programs, I know that there is a real threat of reduced investments in coastal and estuarine research, education and outreach. In March 2017, rhetoric about science and environmental programs became a reality for me when the Washington Post released an Office of Management and Budget (OMB) proposal to cut the National and Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) budget by 17% and eliminate the National Sea Grant College Program in Fiscal Year 2018 (FY18). This leak came on the Friday night before the association of 33 Sea Grant programs assembled for our annual spring meeting in Washington, DC. There becomes a real sense of purpose for the Sea Grant Association to respond, as has our own state program, with an incredible energy by our constituents to defend a successful program that has provided value to coastal communities for 50 years. But I would like to reflect on this response as it relates to my feeling of not doing enough as a leader of another science organization, CERF. We also have a responsibility to respond to our membership and with other science organizations to what has become real attempts to diminish environmental science, management, and policy in the United States.

As we respond to these proposed budget cuts and reduction of environmental programs, it is important for us to understand the source of these threats and identify appropriate allies across the political spectrum. There is a fifty-year history of the federal government taking a leadership role, in partnership with the states, to value a healthy environment as a critical component of our democracy. The rights to clean air and clean water, and the reality that healthy ecosystems contribute to our economic development and wealth as a nation, are now fundamental principles of governance in our society. As I work with local, state, and national leaders within the legislative side of government to share the voices of our Sea Grant constituents, I have been greatly encouraged that the priorities reflected in the President's budget do not reflect the values of these legislators back home. It is very important that we respond to proposed budget reductions and other attacks on the value of science in our society, to more clearly communicate the important role that the federal government plays in supporting programs that protect valuable ecosystem services. I would encourage us as a science society to be very strategic in how we respond to the sources of threats, recognizing that coastal and estuarine science should not be

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#### AFFILIATE SOCIETIES

Atlantic Estuarine Research Society  
California Estuarine Research Society

Gulf Estuarine Research Society  
Atlantic Canada Coastal & Estuarine Science Society  
New England Estuarine Research Society

Pacific Estuarine Research Society  
Southeastern Estuarine Research Society

politicized and that there are supporters for science and the environment throughout the government regardless of political party.

CERF has been participating and continues to develop responses to the threats of reduced funding to programs that protect aquatic resources in the United States, and threats to research and development investments by the federal government. CERF has a long-standing Board-approved process and guidelines for policy actions, with a recognition that there are inherent opportunities and risks presented by these actions, and that actions must be driven by CERF's mission and represent a consensus option of Federation members. The CERF Governing Board, led by the Executive Committee, has carefully considered our policy responses in line with the approved guidelines. We also recognize that we must be strategic in our response, and that we can't do it alone. Therefore, we have consciously worked to magnify our voice by partnering with other organizations in our response.

Following these guidelines and strategies, CERF has been involved in responding to the current threats to the value of science to society. CERF has signed on to letters from the American Institute of Biological Sciences (AIBS), Coalition for National Science Funding (CNSF), and the Consortium of Aquatic Science Societies (CASS) to the Trump Administration and to Congress about the importance of prioritizing science and science funding. Susan Park, our Executive Director, has been very active with a leadership role in CASS to develop a response to the President's FY18 budget in strong support of agencies and programs in NOAA, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and other federal agencies that support aquatic sciences and resource management. The Executive Committee of CERF has endorsed the values of science in our society that are being promoted by the March for Science planned for Earth Day, April 22. As highlighted in several publications discussing this planned event on Earth Day, organizations that promote science in support of good public policy should use this opportunity to commit to the communication of those ideals to local communities. Our new strategic plan focuses on how CERF strengthens that commitment to science communication and engagement.

The agenda for our next CERF Governing Board meeting, which takes place April 21-22, includes time for us to discuss ways that CERF can be properly engaged in these discussions of science and the communication of discoveries that benefit the quality of life for our nation. One of our priorities, which is clearly indicated in our new strategic plan, is to increase the capacity of our members to engage in policy activities, whether it be local or international. That expands our reach as a society to help affect policy change across the globe. We are committed to providing additional resources to help our members be better advocates for their science and for the application of science in coastal and estuarine policy and management. To that end, we have planned several activities such as workshops and special sessions at CERF 2017 that will help members interested in engaging policy makers and better communicating the value proposition of our science to society, one of the fundamental values of CERF. The current CERF webinar series focuses on enhancing communication in coastal and estuarine science, and the upcoming issue of the CERF newsletter will contain additional resources and ideas on ways to proactively strengthen the role and perceived value of science in our society, compiled by CERF member Leanna Heffner. But one of the most important messages resulting from threats to our profession as scientists, and to the organizations that use science to improve the quality of life in our society, is a renewed commitment to communicate the value of our work to constituents in our local communities every day. We must commit to telling our story of how the science of healthy

coastal ecosystems has value for all of society, and sustains our wealth as a nation. I know I have dedicated that to Sea Grant, and I dedicate that to CERF.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robert Twilley". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent initial "R".

Robert Twilley  
CERF President, 2015-2017