STATEMENT OF NICOLE LEBOEUF
DEPUTY ASSISTANT ADMINISTRATOR, NATIONAL OCEAN SERVICE
NATIONAL OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

BEFORE THE

COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND TRANSPORTATION
SUBCOMMITTEE ON OCEANS, ATMOSPHERE, FISHERIES, AND COAST GUARD
U.S. SENATE

A DECADE OF THE DIGITAL COAST PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM: SUCCESSES AND OPPORTUNITIES

JUNE 5, 2018

Chairman Sullivan, Ranking Member Baldwin, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) to provide views on the successes of the Digital Coast Partnership Program (Digital Coast) and opportunities for the future. NOAA and the Department of Commerce appreciate the Subcommittee's interest and support for the Digital Coast's contributions to the economic and environmental resilience of coastal and Great Lakes states, regions, and the nation.

My name is Nicole LeBoeuf and I am the Deputy Assistant Administrator for NOAA's National Ocean Service, within the Department of Commerce. As a steward of the nation's coastal resources, NOAA is pleased to see the tangible impacts the Digital Coast has made on the ground in communities across our nation. The Digital Coast is helping to grow the U.S. economy, safeguard our citizens, sustainably manage our valuable coastal and ocean resources, and find compatible solutions to sometimes competing economic, societal, and environmental goals.

The Digital Coast is a web-based resource of data, tools, and trainings designed to help coastal managers and technicians across the nation address complex coastal issues. As coastal economies and populations continue to expand and are confronted with changing environmental conditions, coastal communities increasingly rely on the Digital Coast to prepare for these changes. It has quickly become one of the most widely used resources for coastal communities to easily find authoritative, high-quality information to make wise infrastructure investments, help communities prepare for impending changes and disasters, and drive economic growth. Now in its eleventh year, the Digital Coast is cost-effective, provides a high return on investment,

contributes to the economy, and is a true partnership with private companies, universities, and federal, state, and local agencies. In short, the Digital Coast is government done right.

I am excited to visit Senator Sullivan's great State of Alaska later this month to gain a better understanding of the unique coastal challenges impacting the region and its present and future needs. In recent meetings between NOAA staff and the state, non-profit organizations, private companies and local communities, the message was clear that reliable data are needed. There is no doubt that Alaska, like many coastal states, still needs basic geospatial and other data to make informed decisions. NOAA is committed to working with state partners and other federal agencies to help provide that information in cost-effective ways that meet the diverse needs of coastal communities.

Addressing the Needs of Coastal Communities

NOAA created and continues to improve the Digital Coast in response to the needs of coastal communities. Before 2007, coastal planners, managers, and other decision-makers did not have ready access to data relevant to coastal issues. They also needed easy-to-use tools, training, and information resources to use the data to its full potential. Our daily interactions with partners, our project work, and surveys to constituents allowed us to develop the Digital Coast based on their needs. The Digital Coast leverages technology to meet user needs and operates under three guiding principles: 1) Inform coastal decision-making; 2) Provide value for the target audience and for the nation; and 3) Evolve continuously and sustainably.

The Digital Coast offers hundreds of state-of-the-art products, from high-resolution data sets to interactive mapping tools. Several of Digital Coast's tools are specifically designed to help locate data at an individual user's local scale. For example, the Coastal County Snapshots tool provides county-level educational information on topics such as flood exposure, ocean and Great Lakes jobs, and wetland benefits. The Coastal Flood Exposure Mapper also helps communities assess their coastal hazard risks and vulnerabilities by creating customized maps that show the people, places, and natural resources exposed to coastal flooding. Finally, the Digital Coast's training academy provides over 125 online and in-person learning resources to ensure that users have the necessary skills to apply the Digital Coast's data and tools to make sound coastal management decisions.

Digital Coast has been instrumental in supporting local, state, and national decision-making that promotes economic growth. Counties use Digital Coast information in their economic development strategies when weighing investment decisions. In the Great Lakes, officials used Digital Coast economic data to pinpoint natural resources that support recreational activities, which helped them determine where to focus their attention to boost local tourism and recreation. Turning to our oceans, the U.S. Coast Guard's ocean vessel traffic data represents one of the most popular data sets, but it is large and cumbersome to use. The Digital Coast reformats the

raw data to address this issue, saving users hundreds of hours.[1] Lidar data, which is high-resolution elevation data, is another popular Digital Coast dataset that NOAA provides, and over 30,000 individuals have downloaded the customized data.[2] Offering this high-resolution elevation data not only saves consumers money; we have heard from some smaller engineering companies that they could not do their jobs without this resource.

Lastly, the Digital Coast provides tools to inform shared solutions among diverse users of coastal resources. For example, he Bureau of Ocean Energy Management used Digital Coast data to assess potential impacts of offshore wind energy development on the tourism and recreation industry in over 100 Atlantic coast counties.

The Digital Coast Partnership

NOAA created the Digital Coast Partnership to solidify our connection to our diverse customers on a long-term basis. The Digital Coast Partnership is a group of eight national organizations that work with NOAA to ensure coastal communities have the relevant data, tools, and information needed to make informed decisions about our nation's coastal areas and help identify needs as they evolve over time. Some of those partners are testifying at this hearing today.

While NOAA developed and maintains the Digital Coast, hundreds of organizations, including private companies, universities, and federal, state, and local agencies, have contributed content. The Digital Coast Partnership has worked with NOAA to identify critical data and information needs and share resources among over 100,000 members. These partners and other content contributors use the Digital Coast as a catalyst and resource for bringing diverse organizations together to work toward common coastal management goals. The large membership of the partnership organizations increases the awareness, use, leverage, and extension of Digital Coast products and services. The partner network amplifies best practices and success stories, which fosters new management ideas, attracts more public interest, and leads to better decision-making on coastal issues.

Return on Investment

The Digital Coast has a high return on investment. Current benefits exceed costs by a margin of three to one, with net benefits of $25 million between 2007-2013.[3] Continued operation of the Digital Coast over the next 15 years is expected to yield a net benefit of $117 million, equating to a return on investment of 411 percent.[4] This return on investment is a good deal for the

[1] National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. (2015). *Projected Benefits and Costs of the Digital Coast*. Available at https://coast.noaa.gov/data/digitalcoast/pdf/benefits-costs.pdf
[2] National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Digital Coast Site Provides $100 Million in Lidar Data. Available at https://coast.noaa.gov/states/stories/digital-coast-site-provides-100-million-in-lidar-data.html
[3] National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. (2015). *Projected Benefits and Costs of the Digital Coast*. Available at https://coast.noaa.gov/data/digitalcoast/pdf/benefits-costs.pdf
[4] *Id.*

taxpayers and provides the growing base of stakeholders easy access to data and tools worth millions of dollars.[5]

Since 2010, the number of coastal communities using Digital Coast resources has consistently surpassed our increasing targets. The number of communities in coastal states accessing information resources in the first quarter of fiscal year 2017 is 6,093, an increase of 286 percent since tracking started in 2010. This means that one out of every three coastal communities in the United States have accessed Digital Coast resources. Three out of four users say their projects could not have been accomplished without the resources found on the Digital Coast.[6]

By providing easy access to a wide range of relevant resources, the Digital Coast helps users do their jobs more efficiently and spend less time and money finding, obtaining, and using the data and products that they need. Having this information in one easily accessible location also helps eliminate duplication of effort by government agencies.

The Digital Coast reduces costs for businesses and the public to gain access to data and information, while sustaining between 890 and 1,530 high-technology jobs in the private sector.[7] NOAA works with private sector firms to acquire nationally consistent data products, leverages costs with other partners, and then integrates them into the Digital Coast framework to address multiple user needs. When NOAA and partners purchase geospatial data from private firms across multiple jurisdictions, each partner saves money. The Digital Coast also facilitates data consistency and standards, as data are collected to the same specifications by the federal government, ensuring a seamless database across state boundaries.

Planning for the Future

NOAA recognizes that partnership is key to Digital Coast's continued effectiveness. NOAA is committed to supporting and enhancing the Digital Coast Partnership to ensure it represents our key customers and user base. As a result, NOAA will strengthen our partnerships with the private and public sectors at both the national and local level. We will increase availability of our core trusted, accurate, and high quality coastal data sets. We will continue to provide decision-support tools and training to understand complex coastal issues and enable better decision-making. We will also expand interagency collaborations through the partnership to fill information and expertise gaps. Finally, we will enhance the core Digital Coast platform to improve this effective gateway to actionable resources. These priorities are outlined in the Digital Coast's strategic plan covering 2016-2021.

---

[5] *Id.*

[6] . MAPPS. *Digital Coast Overview*. Available at: *https://c.ymcdn.com/sites/www.mapps.org/resource/resmgr/federal_issues_digital_coast/digital_coast_overview_ppt_(.pdf*

[7] National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. (2015). *Projected Benefits and Costs of the Digital Coast*. Available at https://coast.noaa.gov/data/digitalcoast/pdf/benefits-costs.pdf

Conclusion

Once again, I appreciate the opportunity to testify today. I support the Committee's effort to highlight how the Digital Coast helps grow our economy and reduces costs while supporting our societal needs for a safe, secure, and healthy environment. Much has been accomplished in 11 years to enable more informed decisions, but we are only just getting started. There are additional needs to address, partnerships to enhance, and efficiencies to be gained. We are excited to accomplish even more in the next decade. I welcome any questions you may have regarding the Digital Coast and NOAA's foundational role in the program. Thank you.