

Coastal Program Manager Letter

January 22, 2025

Dear Coastal Council,

Ever write something only to look back on it and dislike it?

That's the case with this letter to you. I started one last week and looking at it today, it just doesn't resonate.

So, I looked for some guidance. Specifically, I did a web search of "what do advisory board members want to know from the program manager". Here's what AI gave me:

"Advisory members typically want to know from the program manager about overall program goals, progress updates, key metrics, potential challenges, areas for improvement, and how their expertise can be best utilized to contribute to the program's success..."

Our team of five has done a pretty good job of providing progress updates in these letters, through the quarterly grants report (attached) and at meetings, but many of the other areas have received less attention.

Let me change that.

Program Goals

The overarching goal of Minnesota's Lake Superior Coastal Program mirrors that of the Coastal Zone Management Act (CZMA): preserve, protect, develop, and where possible, restore and enhance coastal resources for present and future generations.

As part of our strategic planning process in 2023, we established four program goals:

- We deliver the highest quality services possible to ready the coastal area for climate impacts and coastal hazards; clean up streams and rivers; protect unique coastal habitats; enhance public access to Lake Superior and its tributaries; and foster sustainability and resilience.
- We continually improve how we make grants and engage with partners and collaborators.
- The team operates at its max potential.
- Our financial resources are stable and sound. We have an eye towards growth.

Key Metrics

We are working to deliver on three key metrics. These are a subset of the performance measures set by the National Coastal Management Program. The targets reflect what program staff feel we can accomplish in a five-year period (2024 – 2029).

- By 2029, complete 12 policies, plans or project to reduce damage from coastal hazards with assistance from Coastal Zone Management (CZM) funding or staff.

- By 2029, complete one project with a historically underserved community that involves implementation of a sustainable development or polluted runoff management plan with assistance from CZM funding or staff.
- By 2029, offer 60 trainings related to government coordination; public access; coastal habitat; coastal hazards; and coastal dependent uses and community development through CZM funding or staff.

We had similar key metrics from 2018 – 2023 so we can track progress over time.

Potential Challenges

Weighing heavy on my mind are several things related to our 2025 funding:

- **Funding levels:** The federal government is operating under a continuing resolution until March 14. At that time, Congress either needs to set appropriations or pass another continuing resolution to avoid a government shutdown. By March 14, we typically know our award amount and are nearing completion of our annual application.
- **Pass-through grant portfolio:** Assuming level funding, we received fewer Annual grant applications than funding to pass through. If level funded, the gap is close to \$350,000.
- **Match gap:** With fewer pass-through projects comes less match. The DNR needs to fill that gap.

Looking farther out, I'm concerned about changing priorities at a congressional and presidential level. Will coastal zone management grants, the funding that supports 100% of our program, be there in the future? Only time will tell.

Areas for Improvement

The Coastal Program and Division leadership have been talking about the Coastal Council over the last few months. Our desire is to find a model that has benefits for everyone involved – members, the Coastal Program, the DNR, our partners, and coastal communities. We believe we are close and will share more information as things progress.

Using Your Expertise

Despite the challenges and potential changes, work must go on. You play a role in ensuring that happens. You give your time and talents to grant review. Without it, we couldn't award grants. And without grants, we'd lose an important spark to the long-term success of coastal management in the state. Thank you for all you've given in this area over the years, and for what you'll give in 2025.

All the best,
Amber