

Program Manager's Letter

May 28, 2025

Dear Coastal Council,

My 11-year-old daughter keeps mentioning the movie *Wicked*. As I understand it, it is the story of Elphaba, (aka the wicked witch of the west) and Glinda (the good witch of the north) before Dorothy arrives in Oz. Her interest is heartwarming because I too grew up with Oz. Maybe you know the story. A girl named Dorothy ends up in the magical Land of Oz after she and her dog Toto are swept away from their home in Kansas during a tornado. Upon arrival, she meets Glinda who gives her a pair of ruby slippers and tells her the only way she can return home is to follow the yellow brick road to the Emerald City and ask the great and powerful Wizard of Oz to help her. Along the way, she meets a tin man who wants a heart, a lion that wants courage, and a scarecrow that wants a brain. After several adventures, including a run in with the wicked witch, she learns she had the power to return home all along using the ruby red slippers that adorn her feet.

Like Dorothy, the program is in an unfamiliar place. In my 17-year tenure with the program, we have always had an appropriation by April at the latest. That is not the case this year. Equally, if not more unsettling, is whether we will receive an appropriation at all in 2025. If we do get money, it will not be until October (or later). 2026 is just as uncertain, with the current Administration recommending complete elimination of coastal zone management funding, among other federal programs.

Here's where I wish we had a yellow brick road – a path to follow as we work through these uncertainties. Without it, we're forced to lay the bricks in that road ourselves. And lay we do.

- Brick one – Our 2025 application at level funding is nearly complete. If a full appropriation comes through, we'll be able to wrap up the application in a few short days. Also, NOAA is already reviewing tasks that need additional environmental review. Ideally, NOAA will have completed it by the time the award is made, eliminating the need for special award conditions that can prevent a project from starting right away.
- Brick two – We've suspended accepting Capacity grant applications. We have awarded all the dollars we allocated in our current federal awards and with no guarantee of future funding, have no more money to give away.
- Brick three – We're requesting one-year, no cost extensions to the first of two awards we received under the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) and our 2024 Coastal Zone Management Award. Currently, these expire in November and December, respectively. This extra year, plus the time and resources we have under a second round of BIL funding and an award under the Inflation Reduction Act are enough to cover staff salaries through July 2026.
- Brick four – We've reached out to you, and local and Tribal governments, state agencies and other partners encouraging them to sign on to the Coastal States Organization's community support letter. I have not heard final numbers yet, but knowing our community I suspect the response was good.
- Brick five – We continue to plan and prepare for the future as well as complete tasks that impact the program's future coastal management activities. For example, we have made considerable progress on

our Section 309 Assessment and Strategy, with hopes of completing it later this summer. Yesterday, I submitted our required information submittal in advance of our NOAA review, which will take place virtually the week of August 18. And at the council meeting on June 3, you'll recommend funding priorities and scoring criteria for the 2025 STAR and the 2026 Annual grants.

I want to give a shout out to Clint, Cynthia, Julie and Marcia, who are weathering these uncertain times with me. All have shown great heart, courage, and smarts as we work through the ups and downs of this unprecedented time. Like the tin man, lion, and scarecrow, they already have what they need to excel.

And I'd like to give a shout out to you for your resolve, as the council is experiencing its own uncertain times. Don Schreiner officially stepped away in advance of our March meeting, leaving us with only nine people to serve as the council. The dropping numbers and lagging attendance continue to indicate a need for change. At our last meeting you articulated the type of council you want from a public participation standpoint, sharing that having four citizen members was too few. I've since reconfigured the proposal to have eight citizen members in addition to representatives from the four county governments and three state agencies. The recommendation to invite the Fond du Lac and Grand Portage Bands of Lake Superior Chippewa, 1854 Treaty Authority, Minnesota Sea Grant and the Lake Superior Reserve remains the same. Finally, I removed the specifics around who would review grants. This gives us additional time to discern what is the most appropriate course to take. Again, another brick road we get to build with the DNR and governor.

In closing, Dorothy said it best when she said, 'There's no place like home'. Home for us is an incredible part of the state, the nation and frankly the world. Please get out and enjoy it. We all know that summer is short. Make this the best one available to you.

Best,
Amber