

## [H.R. 944, to reauthorize the National Estuary Program](#)

### FLOOR SITUATION

On Monday, June 1, 2015, the House will consider [H.R. 944](#), a bill to reauthorize the National estuary Program, under suspension of the rules. H.R. 944 was introduced on February 12, 2015, by Rep. Frank LoBiondo (R-NJ) and was referred to the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, which ordered the bill reported by voice vote on April 15, 2015.

### SUMMARY

H.R. 944 amends section 320(g) of the Clean Water Act (CWA) to allocate a portion of National Estuary Program (NEP) funds for competitive awards. States, interstate and regional water pollution control agencies and entities, State coastal zone management agencies, interstate agencies, other public or nonprofit private agencies, institutions, organizations, and individuals would be eligible for these grants.

The EPA Administrator would be required to solicit applications from these eligible entities and select recipients that are best able to address urgent and challenging issues that threaten the ecological and economic well-being of coastal areas. These areas include: 1) extensive sea-grass habitat losses resulting in significant impacts on fisheries and water quality; 2) recurring harmful algae blooms; 3) unusual marine mammal mortalities; 4) invasive exotic species that may threaten wastewater systems and cause other damage; 5) jellyfish proliferation limiting community access to water during peak tourism seasons; 6) flooding that may be related to sea level rise or wetland degradation or loss; and 7) low dissolved oxygen conditions in estuarine waters and related nutrient management.

H.R. 944 authorizes the appropriation of \$27 million for each of fiscal years 2016 through 2020 for the NEP. This funding level is consistent with appropriations over the past five years.

### BACKGROUND

“Estuaries, which are partially enclosed waterbodies where freshwater from land drainage through rivers or streams flows into an open sea or the ocean, are unique and highly productive waters that are important to the ecological and economic bases of our nation. In particular, fisheries, wildlife, recreation, and tourism are heavily dependent on healthy estuarine systems. Yet, despite their value,

most estuaries in the United States are experiencing stress from physical alteration and pollution, often resulting from development and rapid population growth in coastal cities and counties.”<sup>1</sup>

In the mid-1980s, Congress recognized the importance of, and the need to protect the natural functions of, estuaries. As a result, in 1987, as part of Public Law 100-4, Congress added section 320 to the Clean Water Act to establish the National Estuary Program (NEP). The NEP is designed to promote comprehensive planning for long-term protection of nationally significant estuaries in the United States that are deemed to be threatened by pollution, development, or overuse, through collaborative voluntary efforts of federal, state, local, non-profit, and private interests. The NEP aims to address water quality problems in, and promote the ecological integrity of, estuaries. The NEP coordinates and provides funding for long-term planning and management activities to address the complex factors that contribute to the degradation of estuaries.<sup>2</sup>

### **COST**

The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) [estimates](#) that enacting H.R. 944 would cost \$116 million over the 2016 to 2020 period, assuming appropriation of the authorized amounts. Enacting H.R. 944 would not affect direct spending or revenues; therefore, pay-as-you-go procedures do not apply.

### **STAFF CONTACT**

For questions or further information please contact [Jerry White](#) with the House Republican Policy Committee by email or at 5-0190.

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<sup>1</sup> [House Report 114-104](#) at 2.

<sup>2</sup> Id.