

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 6, 2025

The Honorable Howard Lutnick
United States Secretary of Commerce
1401 Constitution Ave NW
Washington, DC 20230

The Honorable Russell Vought
Director of the United States Office of
Management and Budget
725 17th St NW
Washington, DC 20503

Secretary Lutnick and Director Vought:

We write today to express our deep concern with reports of this Administration's proposal to eliminate federal funding for the U.S. Integrated Ocean Observing System (IOOS) in Fiscal Year 2026. For over 20 years, Oregon's coastal communities, Tribes, and maritime stakeholders have relied on the Pacific Northwest Association of Networked Ocean Observing Systems (NANOOS) for critical data and forecasts that promote our region's blue economy, enhance safety in coastal communities, and inform navigation for our mariners.

Through effective public-private partnerships, IOOS is the nation's top network of monitoring technologies that centralizes accurate information for stakeholders across the country. The Pacific Northwest depends on the system's real-time data to ensure the safety and efficiency of a wide range of coastal activities. In our region, IOOS helps ships and boats safely navigate treacherous waters, provides tsunami evacuation routes and weather alerts to coastal communities, protects human health and economies from the harmful effects of algal blooms, and allows crabbers, fishermen, and shellfish farmers to plan their harvests to occur during favorable ocean conditions.

The elimination or reduction of IOOS funding would have devastating and far-reaching effects. Without IOOS, oceanographers would lose access to data from buoys and radars that feed into National Weather Service forecasts and U.S. Coast Guard search-and-rescue operations. Coastal communities would no longer have convenient access to life-saving public data that informs communities about the risks of natural disasters such as coastal flooding or significant erosion. Constituents up and down the West Coast require accurate and timely weather forecasts for public safety and disaster preparedness.

Tillamook County, for example, is one of the most disaster-prone counties in the state of Oregon and has many coastal storms every year. "Tillamook County is still completing work on roads and bridges that were damaged and destroyed in a 2015 storm," said Erin Skarr, Chair of the Tillamook County Board of Commissioners. Nehalem Bay, a coastal state park in Tillamook County, would directly feel the consequences of losing IOOS. "The proposed funding elimination to Integrated Ocean Observing System (IOOS) will cripple this critical system that we rely on. We use these resources to understand and assist communities and public emergency services agencies in order to make our communities safer, stronger and more resilient. Without these critical services, we will not have the life-saving information we need to provide education, training, and accurate maps to guide those who live and work in the area to safety," warned Trish Johnson, Director of the Emergency Volunteers Corps of Nehalem Bay.

“The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) has been a vital partner in Oregon’s efforts to prepare for the threat of a catastrophic Cascadia Subduction Zone earthquake and tsunami. From the deployment of buoys that deliver real-time data and warnings, to the technical expertise and educational outreach that empower our communities, NOAA’s contributions have made a profound difference,” said Linda Kozłowski, President Manzanita City Council. “The recent reduction in NOAA funding has been deeply felt. We urge your support for this essential resource.”

Federal funding for IOOS and NANOOS is also crucial for the survival of Oregon’s coastal ecosystems and economies, which are already struggling in the face of worsening extreme weather events and the unpredictable economic policies of the Trump administration. IOOS provides ocean and weather data for industries participating in maritime trade along the Oregon coast and the Columbia River, a vital artery for Oregon’s economy.

IOOS data provides important linkages between the ocean ecosystem and its variability through seasonal and decadal changes. According to Lori Steele, Executive Director of the West Coast Seafood Processors Association, the fishing and seafood industries and fishery managers depend on data correlated by IOOS to make important and timely decisions affecting every fishery, and therefore the U.S. seafood industry and broader economy. For example, Dungeness crab, one of Oregon’s most valuable fisheries, depends on the IOOS’ tracking of events like the “warm blob” and other ocean conditions that can create harmful algal blooms, which impact season openings and can have significant economic consequences.

As a single system that supports many needs, IOOS is a cost-effective investment for the American taxpayers. IOOS contributors and users have warned of the dangers of stripping the funds for such an efficient, reliable, and highly utilized system. “Our fisheries, coastal communities and all Oregonians who enjoy food from the sea and a safe day at the coast or on the water benefit from the timely and critical information that NANOOS provides,” said Dr. Jack Barth, a professor of Oceanography at Oregon State University. “It is time to recommit and invest in these efforts, not to cut them with a stroke of a pen.”

In order to harness the economic potential of America’s maritime sector and protect the livelihood of coastal communities, we must fully fund this cost-effective system. The IOOS program was last reauthorized in a bipartisan fashion in 2020 and signed into law by President Trump. Funding at the authorized level of \$56 million for Fiscal Year 2026 would enable IOOS to sustain its operations and deliver crucial information about our waterways and weather beyond just Oregon and the Pacific Northwest, reaching and touching all Americans.

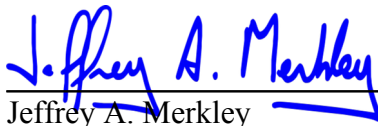
Because we continue to hear from concerned constituents, we request that you provide responses to the following inquiries by June 13, 2025:

1. What is the Department of Commerce’s and Office of Management and Budget’s justification for a proposal to eliminate critical funding for the IOOS program? Please provide a description of the process that contributed to the decision to propose cutting the IOOS program.

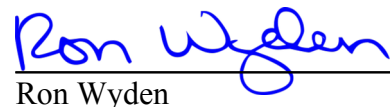
2. Will the Department of Commerce commit to resubmitting a revised budget request that includes \$56 million in funding for the IOOS in order to avoid harm to our communities that rely on this data?

Thank you for the consideration of our request. We urge great caution in cutting this critical program and look forward to receiving your response.

Sincerely,



Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator



Ron Wyden
United States Senator