Blue Carbon for Our Planet Act

Summary

Congresswoman Suzanne Bonamici (D-OR), Congressman Bill Posey (R-FL),
Congressman Don Beyer (D-VA), Congressman Brian Mast (R-FL)

Background:

The health of our ocean reflects the health of our planet, and for too long our ocean has literally taken the heat for us. Pollution is causing the ocean to warm and become more acidic, and pushing species to the brink of extinction. Yet our ocean and coastal ecosystems are also resilient and hold tremendous promise as a natural climate solution.

Healthy blue carbon ecosystems, like mangroves, tidal marshes, seagrasses, and kelp forests, can remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and store it for centuries to millennia in stems, branches, leaves, roots, and soils. According to the High Level Panel for a Sustainable Ocean Economy, the protection and restoration of coastal blue carbon ecosystems could prevent approximately one gigaton of carbon dioxide from entering the atmosphere by 2050. These ecosystems also provide habitat for fisheries, protect shorelines from storms and sea level rise, and improve water quality.

Despite their value, coastal blue carbon ecosystems are disappearing at an unsustainable rate. It is projected that 20 to 90 percent of coastal wetlands will be lost by 2100 because of sea level rise and habitat degradation.[1] We must protect and restore coastal blue carbon ecosystems to mitigate and adapt to the climate crisis.

The Blue Carbon for Our Planet Act will:

- **Strengthen federal research on blue carbon.** The bill would create an Interagency Working Group on Blue Carbon, led by NOAA, to oversee the development of a national map of blue carbon ecosystems, establish national coastal blue carbon ecosystem restoration priorities, assess the biophysical, social, and economic impediments to coastal blue carbon ecosystem restoration, study the effects of environmental and human stressors on sequestration rates, and preserve the continuity of blue carbon data.
- **Create a national map and inventory of coastal blue carbon ecosystems and their sequestration potential.** The bill tasks the Interagency Working Group with producing and maintaining a national level map of existing coastal blue carbon ecosystems that assess the type of habitat, size of ecosystem, and assessment of carbon sequestration potential, methane production, and net greenhouse gas reductions. The Group will then use the national map to assess degraded ecosystems and their potential for restoration.
- **Improve protections for existing coastal blue carbon ecosystems.** The bill directs the NOAA Administrator to assess the feasibility and potential of establishing a national goal of conserving at least 30 percent of the ocean and coastal blue carbon ecosystems by 2030, and set targets for restoration of degraded ecosystems.
- **Restore and expand degraded coastal blue carbon ecosystems.** The bill directs NOAA to identify national restoration priorities that would produce the highest rate of carbon sequestration and greatest ecosystem benefits and develop integrated pilot programs that cover geographically and ecologically diverse locations to restore degraded coastal blue carbon ecosystems.
- **Assess the containment of carbon dioxide in the deep seafloor environment.** The bill charges NOAA to work with the National Academy of Sciences to assess the long-term effects of containment of carbon dioxide in a deep seafloor environment on marine ecosystems.
- **Provide for the long-term stewardship and standardization of coastal blue carbon data.** The NOAA Administrator and Secretary of the Smithsonian are tasked with processing, storing, archiving, providing access to, and incorporating to the extent possible, blue carbon data collected through federally funded research and by a federal agency, state agency, local agency, Tribe, academic scientist, or any other relevant agency in the Coastal Carbon Data Clearinghouse.

For additional information please contact Maxine Sugarman in Congresswoman Bonamici's office at 5-0855 or Maxine.Sugarman@mail.house.gov.

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[1] United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Special Report on the Ocean and Cryosphere in a Changing Climate