

**Statement of  
The Honorable Eddie Bernice Johnson  
Subcommittee on Water Resources and Environment  
Hearing On  
“Protection and Restoration of Coasts and Estuaries”  
June 26, 2008**

In today’s hearing we will hear testimony on the protection and restoration of our nation’s coasts and estuaries.

As many of you know, I represent a district in Dallas, Texas. My district possesses neither coasts nor estuaries. But it is my strong belief that it is important for this Subcommittee to hold hearings on these issues, because our nation’s coasts and oceans provide a wealth of resources for the entire country. And amongst these areas, nowhere is more valuable than our estuaries.

Estuaries are the bodies of water that receive both fresh water from rivers, and salt water from the sea. This mix of water makes for a unique environment that is extremely productive in terms of its ecosystem values. Estuaries are rich in plant life, coastal habitat, and living species. The ecological productivity of these regions translates directly into economic productivity. Government studies have found that estuaries provide habitat for 75% of the U.S. commercial, and 80-90% of the recreational fishing catches.

The regions surrounding estuaries are population and economic centers. While the nation’s coastal counties make up for only 13% of the land area in the lower 48 states, 43% of the population live in them. Similarly, coastal counties account for 40% of the employment, and 49% of the economic output for the nation.

Perhaps the central problem in the protection and restoration of estuaries is that they ultimately lie downstream from all. Everything that enters the smallest stream, tributary or headwater in a watershed eventually runs into its respective estuary – impacting, in some way, all the biological elements of that ecosystem – and all of the commerce that revolves around that estuary.

Just two days ago, we held a hearing on comprehensive watershed management and planning. It should, no doubt, be clear that today’s hearing dovetails with Tuesday’s hearing nicely. Only through holistic watershed management and planning – flood control, water quality protection, water supply, and navigation - will we achieve necessary coastal protection.

To do this properly, we cannot look to the Federal government alone. Indeed, we cannot necessarily look to the Federal government as the lead. Instead, proper watershed management and estuarine protection must be a process that involves all levels of government, and all manner of stakeholders.

This is not to say that the Federal government does not have a role. Indeed, only through the active involvement of the Federal government will we be able to restore and protect our coasts and estuaries. Through traditional tools such as Federal water quality

standards and robust compliance and enforcement activities – and also through monitoring, policy development, and technical and financial support – the Federal government has an important role to play. But I cannot emphasize enough – it cannot and should not play that role alone.

The Federal government, through the EPA and other agencies such as NOAA, has a number of interesting initiatives in which they have used non-traditional tools to try to achieve coastal habitat improvements and estuarine protection. In today's hearing, I look forward to hearing about those in more detail.

I also look forward to hearing from Chairman Dicks, from the State of Washington, on the need to protect one of the nation's most important estuaries, the Puget Sound. It is imperative that the resources be dedicated to protect this nationally significant water.

I am very pleased that we have Bill Ruckelshaus here to testify today on the importance of protecting the Puget Sound. As many of you know, Mr. Ruckelshaus has been instrumental in the protection of our environment through his being the first Administrator of the EPA in the 1970s, and then returning again in the 1980s to successfully resurrect the EPA from the demoralized shell of an agency it had become during the early years of the administration. We can give him our heartfelt thanks for the important public service towards environmental and public health protections he has engaged in throughout his life, and that he continues to do today.