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Testimony of
Congressman Bill Delahunt
On the Cape Cod Water Resources Restoration Project

July 30, 2009

10:00 a.m.

Before the

House Agriculture Committee, Subcommittee on
Conservation, Credit, Energy, and Research

Good morning. I want to thank you Chairman Holden, Ranking Member Goodlatte and Members of the Committee -- for inviting me to speak today on behalf of the Cape Cod Water Resources Restoration Project. I am here to testify in strong support of this project -- which is so critical to the fishing and shellfishing industries in my district.

As many here in Washington know, Cape Cod is known around the country as a thriving tourist destination and retirement area. It is a special place that is treasured for its beaches, its quaint character, historic villages and scenic vistas. However, in contrast to this post card image, is a far more realistic portrait. It is a Cape Cod, with a year round community, living largely on low wages and fixed incomes, that is struggling to survive.

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When you take away the tourism and retirement sectors of the Cape's economy, what you have is an economy driven year round by the building trades, and the fishing, shell-fishing and cranberry industries. It is largely blue collar work that provides median family incomes well below the state and national average. These jobs define the true character of Cape Cod, and they have been the source of income for working families for generations.

Today, these industries are in serious trouble.

Cranberry growers now compete with developers for choice real estate to sustain their crops. Fishermen compete with much larger well financed vessels and depleted fish stocks. Shellfishermen are faced with many threats, including red tide, road and fertilizer run-off, and coastal development that has shut down hundreds of acres of coastal waters.

The current trends are not pretty.

Unless we take aggressive action now, we could very well see these industries disappear. These problems are not unique to Cape Cod, these trends are affecting communities along the entire East coast. But unless we find ways here in Washington, to help these industries survive, these people will go out of business. Our coastal areas are on the verge of becoming the exclusive playgrounds of the rich.

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I am quite fortunate as a Congressman to have a dedicated team of local, state and regional officials who understand this stark reality and are dedicated to preventing this from happening. We are also fortunate to have the USDA, the Soil Conservation Service, and the Natural Resources Conservation Services – or the “NRCS” all pitching in, to help these traditional industries survive in the face of these overwhelming pressures and to help us address the direct threats facing the future of our shellfishing industry on Cape Cod.

The initiative now before this Committee, is the result of many years of hard work and extensive collaboration with hundreds of officials, agencies and community leaders. The NRCS brought together local officials, state agencies, county government and non profit conservation groups – like the Association for the Preservation of Cape Cod and even shellfishermen. They designed this project to restore the quality of our coastal waters and bring back shellfish beds that have been shut down or are at risk of closure.

The initiative identifies seventy five water-restoration initiatives, all in individual local communities across the Cape Cod region. The estimated cost of the project is \$30 million. It will produce a much-needed economic boost to our region and create an estimated 543 jobs, primarily in the areas of construction and engineering, but will also create thousands of full and part time jobs in the shellfish industry.

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The NRCS and the Obama Administration have made this initiative one of its top priorities. It has broad support throughout my district. Funding is readily available so that we can put people to work right away restoring these coastal waters.

We understand that there are a couple of outstanding question that I would like to address for the record --

Questions have been raised about whether Cape Cod is a "rural" area and still qualifies for funding. Let me address this head-on. The NRCS has determined that the area is rural. I agree with their assessment.

The NRCS policy on small watershed projects defines rural as communities with populations less than 50,000. All 15 towns on the Cape have populations that meet these criteria. It may interest you to know that Cape Cod also receives "rural" funding from the Departments of Education, Health and Human Services, and other federal agencies.

We have also been asked whether the shellfish beds that would benefit are "farmed" beds. The project does benefit farmed or "harvested" shellfish beds. We expect these areas to be used by commercial shell-fishermen, and we have a statement from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts to back this up. We can provide additional documentation and information to the Committee, should it be necessary.

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On behalf of the residents of Cape Cod, I would like to conclude by expressing my hope that you will endorse the Cape Cod Water Resources Restoration Project. I want to thank you for the opportunity to testify before this Committee in strong support for this project. I want to state for the record how proud I am to have the Department of Agriculture and the dedicated professionals of the NRCS as partners working with me and our communities as we strive to protect the future of our cranberry, fishing and shellfish industries on Cape Cod.

On behalf of the thousands of hardworking people in my district who depend on these jobs, I want to thank them, and thank you.