Opening Remarks of Ranking Member Whitehouse: *"Examining Restoration Efforts in the Great Lakes Region."*

Madam Chair, I appreciate your convening today's hearing on Great Lakes coastal restoration. I'm sympathetic to Senator Husted's desire for funding to protect Great Lakes coastal ecosystems. All our coastal areas, some fresh some salty, are in dire need of added resources and protection. I highlight this issue time and again when agencies that come before us – US Army Corps, Fish and Wildlife Service, EPA, and more.

Every coastal member knows all too well that the Federal government severely underfunds our coasts. Coastal counties contribute so much to our economy, $10 trillion in goods and services annually, and have forty percent of the U.S. population. Coasts face worsening challenges from storms, sea level rise, excess heat and acidification, yet we underinvest in coastal resources. Upland and inland ecosystems get far more attention and money.

For example, the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), which I call the Inland and Upland Fund, receives $900 million annually, much funded, ironically, by offshore energy leases. When the Great American Outdoors Act was passed, making the $900 million mandatory, I was promised that coastal funding would get its day. That day never comes.

The LWCF does great work, including in my home state of Rhode Island, but it short-changes oceans and coasts. Instead of trying to get a larger slice of the LWCF funding pie, taking it from upland work, I have tried to make the whole pie bigger. I created the National Coastal Resilience Fund (NCRF) as a little sibling to the LWCF, specifically to focus on coasts.

The fund invests in coastal marshes and wetlands, dunes and beach systems, oyster and coral reefs, coastal forests, rivers and floodplains, and barrier islands — resources that protect property, infrastructure and fisheries from storms, sea level rise, land other dangers. Several grants have gone to the Great Lakes region. Dr. Holly Bamford of the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, which administers the fund, can tell you more, including how many projects they have to turn away because it's underfunded.

One smart solution would be to fund the NCRF through offshore wind leases, like how LWCF is funded with offshore drilling leases. I would gladly welcome members to join me in this effort.

I will also flag the bipartisan Oceans Caucus, which Senator Murkowski and I founded in 2011 to draw attention to our coastal resources, economies, and jobs they support. It includes the Great Lakes, with Wisconsin's Senator Baldwin serving as my Democratic Co-Chair. Even Jim Inhofe, from very non-coastal Oklahoma, helped on our work.

The GLRI is a fine program, but in improving our coastal performance we should take inspiration from an old adage and lift all boats.