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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

[Docket No. 021218316-2316-01; I.D. 111402A]

RIN 0648-ZB37

Financial Assistance for Research and Development Projects in Chesapeake Bay to Strengthen, Develop and/or Improve the Stock Conditions of the Chesapeake Bay Fisheries

AGENCY: National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Department of Commerce.

ACTION: Notice of availability of funds.

SUMMARY: A total of up to \$1,500,000 in Fiscal Year (FY) 2003 funds is anticipated to be made available by Congress through the NOAA Chesapeake Bay Office to assist in carrying out research and development projects that address various aspects of Chesapeake Bay fisheries (commercial and recreational), including coastal and estuarine research, monitoring, modeling, and assessment; fisheries research and stock assessments; data management; and, multiple species interactions through cooperative agreements. About \$800,000 of the base amount is available to initiate new projects in FY 2003, as described in this announcement. It is the intent of the NOAA Chesapeake Bay Office to continue with several existing relationships and to make awards through this program for currently funded multiple year projects pending acceptable scientific review. NMFS issues this document to set forth instructions on how to apply for financial assistance, and how NMFS will determine which applications will be selected for funding.

DATES: Applications for funding under this program must be received by 5 p.m. eastern standard time on March 17, 2003. Applications received after that time will not be considered for funding. Applications will not be accepted electronically nor by facsimile machine submission.

ADDRESSES: You can obtain an application package from, and send

completed applications to: Derek Orner, National Marine Fisheries Service, NOAA Chesapeake Bay Office, 410 Severn Avenue, Suite 107A, Annapolis, MD 21403. You can also obtain the application package from the Chesapeake Bay Fisheries Research Program Home Page <http://noaa.chesapeakebay.net/fisheries>.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Derek Orner, National Marine Fisheries Service, NOAA Chesapeake Bay Office, 410/267-5660; or e-mail: derek.ornier@noaa.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

I. Introduction

A. *Authority.* The Fish and Wildlife Act of 1956, as amended, at 16 U.S.C. 753a, authorizes the Secretary of Commerce (Secretary), for the purpose of developing adequate, coordinated, cooperative research and training programs for fish and wildlife resources, to continue to enter into cooperative agreements with colleges and universities, with game and fish departments of the several states, and with non-profit organizations relating to cooperative research units. The Secretary of Commerce is authorized under the Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act, 16 U.S.C. 661-666c, to provide assistance to, and cooperate with, Federal, State, and public or private agencies and organizations in the development, protection, rearing, and stocking of fisheries, resources thereof, and for fisheries habitat restoration. This announcement is subject to the availability of funding under the Departments of Commerce (DOC), Justice, State, the Judiciary, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act of 2003 which makes funds available to the Secretary.

B. *Catalog of Federal Assistance (CFDA).* The Chesapeake Bay Fisheries Research Program is listed in the "Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance" under number 11.457, entitled Chesapeake Bay Studies.

C. *Program Description.* The Chesapeake Bay Stock Assessment Committee (CBSAC) was established in 1985 to plan and review Baywide resource assessments, coordinate relevant actions of state and Federal agencies, report on fisheries status and trends, and determine, fund and review research projects. The program implements a Baywide plan for the assessment of commercially, recreationally, and selected ecologically important species in the Chesapeake Bay. In 1988, CBSAC developed a Baywide Stock Assessment Plan, in response to provisions in the

Chesapeake Bay Agreement of 1987. The Plan identified that key obstacles to assessing Bay stocks was the lack of consistent, Baywide, fishery-dependent and fishery-independent data. Research projects funded since 1988 have focused on developing and improving fishery-independent surveys and catch statistics for key Bay species, such as striped bass, oysters, blue crabs and alolids. Stock assessment research is essential, given the recent declines in harvest and apparent stock condition for many of the important species of the Chesapeake Bay. The Fisheries Steering Committee was established in 2001 to guide the various Chesapeake Bay fisheries' issues including management and research.

II. Funding Priorities

Proposals should exhibit familiarity with related work that is completed or ongoing. Where appropriate, proposals should be multi-disciplinary. Coordinated efforts involving multiple eligible applicants or persons are encouraged. Proposals must address one of the priorities listed here. If the proposal addresses more than one priority, it should list first on the application the priority that most closely reflects the objective of the proposals.

(A) *Stock Assessment Research* - Consideration for funding will be given to applications that address the following stock assessment research and management priorities for the Chesapeake Bay. These priorities are not listed in any particular order:

(1) Assessments of the abundance, productivity, distribution, and exploitation patterns of important Chesapeake Bay finfish and shellfish resources. Proposals may include research on life history characteristics, larval dynamics, stock-recruitment relationships, and schedules of vital rates. Descriptions of stock structure, demographics and spatial distribution would also be appropriate. It is anticipated that proposals will combine analyses of existing fishery-dependent and fishery-independent data.

(2) Development and/or implementation of a program to provide a reliable data base for estimating the impact of recreational fishing on living marine resources in Chesapeake Bay. Projects should:

- a. Conduct a review of any work previously conducted on the development of methods for conducting a Baywide recreational survey;
- b. Implement on a Baywide scale based on earlier work (if applicable);
- c. Provide reliable estimates of recreational catch, fishing effort, catch rates, size composition, and sex ratios