TOWN OF CHINCOTEAGUE, INC.

December 3, 2014

Lisa Kiefel, Planning Portfolio Manager
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
Attn: CECW-CE
441 G Street NW
Washington, DC 20314-1000

RE: Letter of Support - Proposed Feasibility Study

Dear Ms. Kiefel:

The attached proposal for a Feasibility Study of Coastal Community Resiliency within the Environs of the Town of Chincoteague, Virginia was presented to our Town Council on Monday December 1, 2014. Council members indicated their support for the proposal and asked several questions about the scope of a feasibility study and the options for cost sharing.

A motion by Councilman Ellis, seconded by Councilman Frese to support the application for a feasibility study by the Army Corps of Engineers and to authorize the Town Manager to submit a proposal was unanimously approved.

As you instructed, the proposal is being sent by email on this date and a copy will be forwarded by U.S. Mail. Thank you for your assistance and consideration of this proposal.

Sincerely,

Robert G. Ritter, Jr.
Town Manager

6150 COMMUNITY DRIVE, CHINCOTEAGUE ISLAND, VIRGINIA 23336
(757) 336-6519 FAX (757) 336-1965

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Lisa Kiefel, Planning Portfolio Manager
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
Attn: CECW-CE
441 G Street NW
Washington, DC 20314-1000

RE: Request for Proposals from Non-Federal Interests for Proposed Feasibility Studies (FR Doc. 2014-18495)
Proposed Feasibility Study for Coastal Community Resiliency within the Environs of the Town of Chincoteague, Virginia

Dear Ms. Kiefel:

The following proposal is in response to the Federal Register notice (FR Doc. 2014-18495) for feasibility study proposals from non-federal interests to be included in the 2015 USACE Annual Report to Congress.

The Town of Chincoteague, Inc. requests that study authority be provided for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to address Flood Risk/Coastal Storm Risk Management, Navigation and Aquatic Ecosystem Restoration problems and opportunities on the Eastern Shore of Virginia, with primary emphasis on the Town of Chincoteague environs but also allowing flexibility for authority to address opportunities and problems within coastal Accomack County, Virginia.

General authority was granted by Congress under the Assateague Island Seashore Act of 1965, to cooperate with the Department of Interior in the study and implementation of storm damage reduction measures along the Mid-Atlantic ocean coast. Deliberate management actions to construct and maintain a dune line along Assateague Island have resulted in 50 years of stability and protection for important natural, cultural and economic resources surrounding Chincoteague Island.

P.L. 89-195 LAWS OF 89TH CONG.—1ST SESS. Sept. 21, 1965

Sec. 8. The Secretary of the Interior and the Secretary of the Army shall cooperate in the study and formulation of plans for beach erosion control and hurricane protection of the seashore; and any such protective works that are undertaken by the Chief of Engineers, Department of the Army, shall be carried out in accordance with a plan that is acceptable to the Secretary of the Interior and is consistent with the purposes of this Act.

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Our request for assistance from the US Army Corps of Engineers at this time is based on water resource issues that are currently being studied by multiple federal agencies and universities in the vicinity of Chincoteague Island, and with the hope that best practices for community resiliency identified in the USACE North Atlantic Coast Comprehensive Study will be applied locally. USACE expertise in finding real world solutions is needed to put academic research and technical studies to work for the Town of Chincoteague and its environs.

- **Storm Damage Reduction**
  An expanded authorization and scope is necessary for the USACE to recommend management actions for the protection of recreational assets and implementation of 'protective works' on Assateague Island, which currently protects the Town of Chincoteague from ocean storm surge and wave damage.
- **Barrier Island/Inlet Change**
  An expanded authorization and scope is necessary for the USACE to evaluate cumulative impacts of natural forces and active management on changes to the Chincoteague Inlet to minimize coastal flooding and potential sea level rise on Chincoteague and Wallops Islands.
- **Flooding, Drainage and Shoreline Erosion**
  An expanded authorization and scope is necessary for the USACE to assist the Town in studying a major storm drainage improvement project to Fowling Gut, and protective shoreline erosion control measures at the south end of Chincoteague Island
- **Navigation**
  An expanded authorization and scope may be necessary for the USACE to identify solutions to persistent shoaling at the entrance to the Curtis Merritt Harbor of Refuge and to maintain the navigable channels surrounding Chincoteague Island and connecting the coastal bays
- **Transportation**
  An expanded authorization and scope may be necessary for the USACE to coordinate with VDOT and other permitting agencies to develop plans for marsh restoration, and channel stabilization to prevent erosion and storm damage to the Route 175 causeway which serves as the single point of access for the Town of Chincoteague, the Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge and the Assateague Island National Seashore in Virginia

Specifically, the Town of Chincoteague is requesting that the feasibility study authority should meet an immediate need to:

1) Evaluate the impacts of a possible breach and inlet creation from the Atlantic Ocean into Tom's Cove using the RiskMAP tools, and

2) Evaluate the impacts of a possible breach and inlet creation from the Atlantic Ocean into Chincoteague Bay or Assateague Bay north of Chincoteague Island using the RiskMAP tools, and

3) Evaluate the impacts of future changes to the Chincoteague Inlet, and

4) Recommend management options in response to these events as well as identify sustainable, cost effective management options to reduce flood risk and damage from coastal storms, to maintain the navigable waterways surrounding Chincoteague Island, to

assure ocean inlet access for the USCG and our fishing fleet, and to minimize shoreline erosion of protective marshes.

The study would build on and complete the FEMA RiskMAP and NFWF/TNC analysis, it would guide Wildlife Refuge and Seashore long range management plans, and would provide a range of viable options based on the North Atlantic Coast Comprehensive Study for our community response to coastal risk for the next 50 years.

Information is provided below in support of the proposed feasibility study:

1. Provide the name of all non-Federal interests planning to act as the sponsor, including any non-Federal interest that has contributed or is expected to contribute toward the non-Federal share of the proposed feasibility study or modification.

- **Town of Chincoteague, Virginia (resolution attached)**
- **Accomack County, Virginia (support anticipated depending on scope of study)**
- **Commonwealth of Virginia (support anticipated depending on scope of study)**

2. State if this proposal is for a feasibility study or a modification to an authorized USACE project or feasibility study and, if a modification, specify the authorized project or study.

- **This proposal is for a feasibility study.**

3. State the project purpose of the proposed study or modification.

- **The purpose of the proposed study includes Coastal Storm/Flood Risk Management, Navigation and Aquatic Ecosystem Restoration**
- ***This authorization will build on previous work completed by USGS, USACE, FEMA and NASA to conduct an engineering feasibility study that would assess the current and future function of the barrier island/inlet/coastal bay system surrounding Chincoteague Island, develop an array of options for resource management and evaluate the feasibility and cost associated with sustainable protection and restoration actions***

4. Provide an estimate, to the extent practicable, of the total cost of the proposed study or modification.

- **A range of advisory studies would be necessary to perform the RiskMAP model analysis, participate in long range management planning, prepare a report of project options, and establish the scope of resources and needs for future design and project implementation.**
- **Cost would not exceed $3 million.**

5. Describe, to the extent practicable, the anticipated monetary and nonmonetary benefits of the proposal including benefits to the protection of human life and property; improvement to transportation; the national economy; the environment; or the national security interests of the United States.

- **All of these categories would benefit**. Significant economic, cultural and environmental resources within the environs of the Town of Chincoteague would be protected, developed and enhanced by feasibility study recommendations and implementation of coordinated coastal resiliency projects.

Protection of life, safety and property

- Fifty years ago Chincoteague was devastated by the Ash Wednesday storm of 1962 which over washed Assateague Island and caused major flooding and property damage. Through the foresight of Congress and the responsible stewardship of federal agency actions, a naturalized beach and dune system was re-established.
- The Town of Chincoteague and mainland federal facilities have attracted infrastructure investment and real estate development valued at over $2 billion which relies on the deliberate management of Virginia's barrier island system to work with natural system and achieve stability and resiliency in the face of a changing climate.
- Recreational tourism is an economic engine for Accomack County and the Eastern Shore of Virginia. Over 1,200 businesses in the Town of Chincoteague include employers, self-employed small business owners and tourist rental homes which support the regional economy.
- The USFWS estimated the economic impact of Refuge visitor expenditures and employment at $113.8 million in 2010. The impact of a storm event which reduces parking at the Seashore is estimated at a 34% annual loss to the regional economy, or $38.4 million, or as much as $400,000 per day in the peak summer months.

Maintain critical navigation routes and transportation

- Regular dredging and maintenance of the Chincoteague Inlet and the navigable channels surrounding Chincoteague Island supports our Harbor of Refuge, a commercial finfish and shellfish industry valued in excess of $3.3 million in 2010, a recreational boating industry and access to the US Coast Guard Station.
- Chincoteague Island (3,600 residents) and Assateague Island National Seashore/Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge (1.4 million annual visitors) rely on a single point of access along the 5 mile long Route 175 causeway which was most recently improved by VDOT with a $68.7 million bridge realignment in 2010. This important transportation infrastructure link is exposed to high risk from storm events and erosion.

Restore ecosystems

- Changing conditions over the last 4 years have doubled the width of the Chincoteague Inlet and exposed the protective marshes and shorelines of Chincoteague Island to increased storm surge and erosion. Restoration and strengthening the natural systems of sand bars, marshes, ridge and

glade drainage systems, and island tree cover needs a coordinated management plan to help our coastal community to adapt and defend against future storm risks.

National Security

- Critical federal agency facilities at Wallops Island place NASA, NOAA, NAVY/SCSC and DOI in the same position as the Town of Chincoteague… as partners which will benefit from the continued assistance and expertise of the US Army Corps of Engineers.

6. Describe if local support exists for the proposal.

- **Yes**. The long range planning activities of FEMA Region 3, NASA/Wallops Island Flight Facility, Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge, and Assateague Island National Seashore have elevated our community concern and support for specific storm damage protection measures for Chincoteague Island.
- Local support is specific in its request for USACE participation.

7. State if the non-Federal interest has the financial ability to provide for the required cost share.

- **Yes**, with support from County and State partners if necessary.
- The Town of Chincoteague has an established 'Chincoteague to Assateague Beach Access' Advisory Committee to the Town Council with a community donation fund balance of $22,000.
- The Town of Chincoteague Town Council has designated a portion of the annual Transient Occupancy Tax to support a Beach/Recreation/Tourism Reserve Fund with a current balance of $121, 701 and a net annual contribution of approximately $70,000. This fund may be allocated toward studies, design and project implementation.

8. Submit a letter or statement of support from each associated non- Federal interest.

- **Letter of Support from Town of Chincoteague**
- **USFWS Community Resiliency supporting goal and objective**

Thank you for considering this request for a Feasibility Study of Coastal Community Resiliency within the Environs of the Town of Chincoteague, Virginia

Sincerely,

Robert G. Ritter, Jr.
Town Manager

Attachment A
Selected text from Draft CCP/EIS for Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge
(Notice of Intent 75 FR 57056)(FR Doc. 2014–10799 Filed 5–14–14).

Community Resiliency
The Refuge would work with the Town of Chincoteague to explore potential impacts and identify protective methods to address hazard mitigation, in coordination with others, such as Accomack County, Commonwealth of Virginia, NPS, National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), and USACE. The refuge would also work with partners to explore how best to advance the study, information exchange, and project resources for adaptive management practices that sustain the resiliency of this unique barrier island system including but not limited to Assateague, Wallops, Assawoman, and Metompkin islands in the face of dynamic coastal processes and climate change.
(Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge, Draft Comprehensive Conservation Plan/EIS, Section 2.5.1 Existing Management Actions that Continue Under All Alternatives, Page 2-10)

Objective 5.3 Community Resiliency
Collaborate with Federal, State, and local partners to explore potential impacts and identify protective methods to address hazard mitigation and improve community resiliency, in coordination with others.

Rationale:
The town of Chincoteague, Accomack and Northampton counties, adjacent coastal communities, and NASA are concerned about future impacts of sea level rise and storm surge on infrastructure and access to the region. The refuge shares this concern and would work in coordination with other state and Federal agencies and other appropriate partners to investigate the vulnerabilities and anticipated impacts of climate change and sea level rise on the Eastern Shore. The refuge would also work with partners to explore how best to advance the study, information exchange, and project resources for adaptive management practices that sustain the resiliency of this unique barrier island system including but not limited to Assateague, Wallops, Assawoman, and Metompkin Islands in the face of dynamic coastal processes and climate change.

Strategies:

- Continue working with coastal geologists to model the impacts of coastal storm events and other dune breaching scenarios on Assateague Island to evaluate potential effects that breaches and modifications to infrastructure may have on natural and manmade habitats, refuge infrastructure, and flood control for the Town of Chincoteague. ***(Chincoteague and Wallops Island National Wildlife Refuges CCP/EIS, Page 2-38)***