One Year after Tsunami, Cantwell Pushes NOAA to Track Tsunami Debris

Local News

Posted by: David Haviland

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Washington D.C. - U.S. Senator Maria Cantwell urged the head of the National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration (N

During an Oceans, Fisheries, Coast Guard, and Atmosphere Subcommittee hearing today, Cantwell questioned NOAA

After a devastating earthquake and tsunami struck Japan on March 11, 2011, an enormous amount of debris was washed out to sea. Currently, the debris is spread out across an area measuring 2,000 by 1,000 nautical miles and is expected to reach Hawaii later this year and Washington state starting in early 2013. Washington state’s coastal economy supports 165,000 jobs and produces $10.8 billion in economic activity each year.
“We’re very concerned. And we think it’s going to have an impact but we certainly would love to h

Lubchenco responded: “I think the cut to this program is going to be a challenge. It is one of the very important

It’s just not clear what impact it’s going to be having. …We will do the best with what we have. If we had more we would be doing more. - NOAA head Dr. Jane Lubchenco

Cantwell said: “Well, that’s not a good answer for someone trying to represent a state and an economy t

Watch a video
* of Cantwell’s exchange with Lubchenco today.*

Last November, Cantwell secured Senate Commerce Committee passage of an amendment to address the threat approaching tsunami debris poses to industries up and down Washington’s coastline. Cantwell’s amendment would identify the debris as a unique threat and require the Undersecretary for Oceans and Atmosphere to develop an interagency action plan to help prepare our region for this potentially serious problem. Cantwell continues to fight to ensure a plan is in place to address the threat the tsunami debris poses to Washington state’s coastal economy.
Cantwell urged Lubchenco today to come up with a plan to address the threat tsunami debris may pose to the coastal economy: **“What our major concern is, and we’ve had this addressed in a hearing in a mark-up before this committee, is that when it’s here it will be too late to have a plan. And when it starts impacting the fishing industry and people can’t fish because they have too much debris, or it affects tourism, or many other things, it’s too late. So we want to make sure that we are ahead of the situation and we have a plan for whatever those three scenarios occur.”**
Cantwell also questioned Lubchenco on the FY13 proposed budget cuts to the tsunami DART (deep-ocean assessme

President Obama’s FY13 budget proposes a $4.6 million cut that would seriously affect the National Tsunami H

Since TWEA’s passage in 2006, the Washington State Department of Natural Resources Geology and Earth R

“The National Tsunami Hazardous Mitigation Program and Dart Warning Buoy System…the warning syste

Lubchenco responded: “Those dart buoys are key in helping us fine-tune our warnings as the tsunami is moving

“Japan had 30 minutes, so 30 minutes of warning. And if you think about the amount of damage that was done,

Lubchenco agreed to provide Cantwell with the information she requested.

Cantwell also questioned Lubchenco on the agency’s decision to cut critical ocean acidification monitoring fund

“And then similarly but a different piece of information is the cut to the program for monitoring ocean acidificatio

Lubchenco responded: “**Senator, this is one of those choices that I’m not happy about because it’s a program that is very, very important. We will continue to do monitoring; it’s not that we’re not doing anything. We won’t be able to do it at the scale we would like to do it.”**“It’s $250,000 for a return investment of an industry th

“Cutting back on science that is important for jobs and the economy can’t be substituted,” Cantwe
Shellfish farmers in Washington state are already severely impacted by ocean acidification. In Washington, the shellfish industry supports over 3,200 jobs and has a total economic contribution of $270 million annually. In addition, recreational shellfish harvesting generates over $27 million dollars per year in revenue for state parks, restaurants, outfitters, and other local businesses.
“Shellfish growers are major employers in rural western Washington paying in excess of $27 million in wages annually in Mason and Pacific counties,” said Bill Dewey of Taylor Shellfish. **“The information generated from the IOOS buoys is vital as we struggle to produce oyster seed in an increasingly acidic ocean.”**
Senator Cantwell has long fought for additional scientific knowledge on the impacts of ocean acidification, as well as a nationwide program to address the problem. In 2010, Cantwell chaired an Oceans Subcommittee hearing to highlight the rising threat of ocean acidification. At the hearing, a report from the National Academies of Science’s National Research Council was released that found evidence to indicate that a more acidic ocean could dissolve the shells of the tiny organisms that make up the base of the ocean’s food chain. Ocean acidification and ocean dead zones already threaten the entire shellfish industry in the Pacific Northwest by giving rise to dangerous bacteria that hinder natural reproduction.Cantwell co-sponsored the Federal Ocean Acidification Research and Monitoring Act and worked to enact the bill into law in March 2009. The legislation established the nation’s first comprehensive research program to specifically study ocean acidification.
Today, Cantwell also asked about NOAA’s commitment to Washington state’s West Coast groundfish fi

In one year alone, the fishery is already seeing positive results from the switch to catch shares. Fishermen have seen
triple
 since the catch share program began. This was a fishery that in 2000 was declared a federal disaster by the U.

“I wanted to ask you about your commitment to make sure that that is a vital catch-share program and that NOA

Lubchenco responded: “It is a vital program. We are doing everything we can to support it. And it is already by a

The West Coast groundfish fishery has been working for years to end the race for fish by implementing a catch share system. Implementation of the Pacific Coast groundfish trawl catch share program began in 2011, but Washington state fishermen are worried that promised program support from the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) might fall victim to federal government cuts. Last March during an Oceans Subcommittee hearing, Cantwell secured a commitment from then NMFS Assistant Administrator Eric Schwaab to make the West Coast groundfish fishery a top priority in budgetary decisions.The *Seattle Times* praised the catch share program in a December 2010 editorial, saying it would “reduce economic and environmental waste.”**“If the new system works, it should remove the economic waste of the ‘race for fish,’ improve fisheries management and provide fish lovers with a supply of delicious whiting, turbot, sole, Pacific cod and black cod,”** the *Times* editorial board wrote on December 27. Tens of thousands of Washington jobs depend on the health of the ocean’s resources, but overfishing could threaten long-term sustainability and the health of the fishing economy. Fisheries along Washington’s coast produced roughly $3.7 billion in sales impacts and supported 72,000 jobs in 2008, according to the NMFS.
Cantwell also questioned Lubchenco on the proposed $15 million dollar reduction in FY13 funding for the Pacific Coas

“What do you think the impacts are on the regional councils and fisheries from this budget?” Cantwell sa

Lubchenco responded: “So clearly we are not funding the regional fishing management councils and commissio

“The salmon, the proposed funding for salmon in the FY13 budget is down from what it was last year, as you kn
Cantwell has consistently fought to sustain Washington’s valuable salmon populations. Last November, Cantwell won Senate Commerce Committee passage of her legislation to sustain thriving wild salmon populations, or ‘salmon strongholds.’ The Pacific Salmon Stronghold Conservation Act seeks to preserve the economic, ecological, cultural, and health benefits of wild Pacific Salmon for generations. It was introduced last July with the backing of all eight U.S. Senators representing the Pacific Coast states of Alaska, Washington, Oregon, and California.The bipartisan Pacific Salmon Stronghold Conservation Act of 2011 establishes a public-private partnership board administered by NOAA’s NMFS and comprised of federal, state, tribal, and non-governmental-organizations invested in sustaining strong wild salmon populations. The legislation charges this multi-jurisdictional group to sustain core salmon stronghold populations and habitats in order to preserve our thriving salmon stocks for future generations.Cantwell introduced similar salmon stronghold legislation during both the 110th and 111th congresses. Cantwell has long supported salmon recovery programs, including prioritizing funding for the Pacific Coastal Salmon Recovery Fund. In the states of Washington, California, Idaho, and Oregon, roughly 20 percent of salmon habitat supports about half of the region’s salmon abundance.