

**SUPPORTING STATEMENT  
NATIONAL ESTUARIES RESTORATION INVENTORY  
OMB CONTROL NO. 0648-0479**

**A. JUSTIFICATION**

**1. Explain the circumstances that make the collection of information necessary.**

This request is for revision and extension of an existing information collection, for assistance in the administration of the National Estuaries Restoration Inventory (NERI).

The [Estuary Restoration Act](#) (ERA) of 2000 (Act) was signed into law in November 2000 and makes restoring our nation's estuaries a national priority. The Act promotes the restoration of one million acres of estuarine habitat by 2010 by leveraging limited federal resources with state, local, and private funding. As part of the Act, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) is required to develop and maintain the NERI, a database of estuary restoration projects. The purpose of the database is to provide information to improve restoration methods, provide information for reports transmitted to Congress (Section 108(b)), and track the acres of habitat restored toward the million-acre goal. Project information collected and maintained is made available to the public through various queries and reports. The database contains project information for projects funded through the ERA as well as non-ERA project data that meet quality control requirements and data standards established under the Act. This information collection is a requirement only for those parties receiving ERA funds. The entry of project information is optional for projects that are not funded through the ERA but meet project requirements for the NERI.

The NERI was originally developed using another project tracking database housed in the NOAA Fisheries' Restoration Center. The existing Restoration and Conservation Database (RCDB) was developed to track habitat restoration projects implemented and/or funded by the NOAA Restoration Center. Many projects within the RCDB meet the project requirements for the National Estuaries Restoration Inventory. Therefore, relevant data fields from the Restoration Center database are copied into NERI on a regular basis to avoid duplication of effort and unnecessary burden to respondents.

A separate Paperwork Reduction Act (PRA) request for the Restoration Center's Community-based Restoration Program (CRP) is approved under OMB Control Number 0648-0472 (expiration date: 10-31-2015). This request requires recipients of CRP funding to provide information regarding the status and success of funded projects in the form of periodic performance reports and final reports. Information collected by this request will continue to be tracked using the RCDB. Details on the CRP request are available in Item 4.

There is a change to this information collection: paper and adobe fillable forms will now be used, rather than direct entry by respondents into the database, it has been determined that the web-based system submission system is not cost-effective.

**2. Explain how, by whom, how frequently, and for what purpose the information will be used. If the information collected will be disseminated to the public or used to support information that will be disseminated to the public, then explain how the collection complies with all applicable Information Quality Guidelines.**

The purpose of the NERI is to collect information on estuary habitat restoration projects to track project success and to improve restoration methods. The information collected by the database has been used by Restoration Center staff and the ERA Work Group for reports transmitted to Congress, briefings to the ERA Council, as well as responses to other inquiries for data. Reports to Congress take place every two years, beginning in the fall of 2003. Reports to Congress consist of an overview of the status of the database including acres of habitat restored, monitoring information, and database maintenance efforts. The initial report to Congress provided only a briefing of the status of the inventory, as it was still in development. Since then, NERI data, (e.g., sum of acres restored), has been used in presentations at ERA Council meetings. Requests for information have also been made by upper level NOAA management, other federal agencies, nonprofit organizations, and members of the public.

To facilitate these requests for information, the information contained in NERI is accessible to the public via on-line query forms and reports on the NERI website (<https://neri.noaa.gov>).

Parties receiving ERA funds are required to submit information for entry into NERI. A summary of the questions asked for the database is below.

Data entry is optional for all other parties with projects eligible to be submitted to NERI. Efforts have been made to dynamically import eligible project data from existing federal databases, including NOAA's RCDB, the Department of Interior's United States Fish and Wildlife Service's (U.S.FWS) Habitat Information Tracking System (HabITS) tracking system, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' Ecosystem Restoration Business Portal system.

NOAA has promoted the use of the inventory via outreach to the habitat restoration community. These efforts have consisted of: (1) presentations at various conferences, meetings, etc., (2) approaching restoration practitioners via professional list serves, phone calls, etc., (3) announcing and promoting use of published spatial data through various data catalogs and mapping services (Geospatial One-Stop, state and local mapping applications, etc.).

The information collection by NERI consists of:

(a) General Information – Basic project information such as project title, whether the project is funded by the ERA and if not, whether it meets the specific requirements to be counted as an ERA project, a topic sentence describing the project, the current status of the project including the implementation start and completion dates and the size of the project. In addition, this area identifies specific questions for ERA-funded projects such as the primary partner, lead federal agency, date of the funding agreement, and whether the project qualifies as an innovative technology project, which is defined by the Estuary Restoration Act.

(b) Abstract – a detailed description of the project with background about the site, historic impacts to the site, project information, and additional information about partners, acres restored, timeline, etc.

(c) Contact Information – basic details necessary to identify and contact project managers such as name, title, address, organization, city, state, zip code, phone and fax numbers, e-mail, and URL for Websites.

(d) Geographic Location – details on the physical location of the project site including city, county, state/territory/province (for Canadian projects), region, zip code, United States Geological Survey (USGS) Hydrologic Unit Code (HUC), longitude, latitude, USGS topographic quadrangle, congressional district, and whether a GIS layer is available for the project boundary.

(e) Project Benefits – details on expected benefits of the restoration project including descriptions of benefits, whether the benefit has been achieved, and additional comments.

(f) Habitat Types – a listing of habitat types restored as well as number of acres restored (by acres created, re-established, or rehabilitated) and benefited (acres enhanced or protected) for each habitat type, as well as stream miles (the linear extent of rivers and streams that is made accessible for diadromous and migratory fish passage), and methods used for obtaining acreage and stream mile values. The method for obtaining acreage and stream miles is an important field because it helps to determine the reliability of a reported value.

(g) Restoration Techniques – list of techniques used in the project. Descriptions of each technique and its success are also provided to highlight the benefits and pitfalls of using various restoration methods.

(h) Monitoring and Success Criteria – list of monitoring parameters used in the project. Detailed monitoring information will also be provided including monitoring frequency, methods, start and end dates, as well as success criteria used for determining project success.

(i) Restoration Plans – Title, date, lead organizations, URL, and type of restoration plan that the project contributes to.

(j) Project Budget – project support provided by Federal and non-Federal entities as well as the original proposed cost estimate for the project, and the final actual cost of the restoration. This information will allow restoration practitioners to compare the costs of project implementation and how actual costs exceed projections.

(k) Project Partners – details on support (e.g., planning, funding, technical assistance) provided by other organizations including partner name, type of partner, and URL.

(l) Project Photos – Images showing the progress of the project such as before, during and after pictures of the restoration. Each image will contain a caption, credit, and date. These pictures will be used for dynamic project Web pages that will be available on the NERI website.

The information collected by NERI is available to the public on-line through the NERI Website. Therefore, the Section 515 Information Quality Guidelines apply to this information collection and comply with all applicable information quality guidelines, (i.e., OMB, Department of Commerce, and NOAA guidelines).

The information collected by NERI undergoes a quality assurance/quality control (QA/QC) process prior to being disseminated to the public for queries and reports. For manually-entered projects, each individual project is reviewed by database administrators prior to being made available to the public. For projects imported through existing tracking systems such as NOAA's RCDB or U.S. FWS's HabITS databases, the quality of project information is ensured by the source data administrator (through NOAA or U.S. FWS). Data from these sources is imported regularly, after undergoing quality assurance/quality control procedures specific to each data source's respective agency. This process is repeated whenever a project is updated.

NERI is not a comprehensive set of all restoration projects occurring in the nation. Data is currently limited to projects funded through a subset of existing Federal programs that have been incorporated into the application, as well as those to be submitted voluntarily by project proponents. Therefore, much of the data is not completely generated by NOAA, but originates from the project manager or another Federal database. A description of the data collection, information sources, QA/QC, and dissemination processes, as well as an overview of data sources and limitations will be made available upon request and is also provided on the NERI Website.

NOAA Fisheries will retain control over the information and safeguard it from improper access, modification, and destruction, consistent with NOAA standards for confidentiality, privacy, and electronic information. See response to Question 10 of this Supporting Statement for more information on confidentiality and privacy. The information collection is designed to yield data that meet all applicable information quality guidelines. As described above, prior to dissemination, the information will be subjected to quality control measures and a pre-dissemination review pursuant to [Section 515 of Public Law 106-554](#).

**3. Describe whether, and to what extent, the collection of information involves the use of automated, electronic, mechanical, or other technological techniques or other forms of information technology.**

The collection of information for the National Estuaries Restoration Inventory (NERI) now involves paper or fillable adobe forms instead of web-based data entry forms, as maintaining the web-based data entry option is not cost-effective. Methods of submittal include email of electronic forms, and mail and facsimile transmission of paper forms. Restoration practitioners submit information to be entered into the NERI from Federal, State, local and tribal governments, not-for-profit institutions, and other entities across the country. Restoration practitioners may have different levels of technical expertise. The NERI Web site contains a comprehensive on-line user's guide, a data dictionary, specific instructions, and examples. Restoration practitioners use personal computers to access the data entry form and then must print it for submission. The information collected is made available for queries and reports on the NERI Web site.

To obtain project coordinate information (longitude and latitude), restoration practitioners may choose to use hand-held Global Positioning Systems (GPS) or numerous on-line mapping applications, but these options are not required for projects. Users are requested to state how acreage and stream mile measurements were obtained (e.g. GPS, land surveys, aerial photography) in the data entry form.

**4. Describe efforts to identify duplication.**

NOAA Fisheries' Restoration Center maintains an existing database of restoration projects that is used to track projects funded and implemented by the Restoration Center. Restoration Center staff using materials from progress reports and direct conversations with restoration practitioners populates this database. A separate Paperwork Reduction Act (PRA) request for the Restoration Center's Community-based Restoration Program (CRP) is approved under Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Control Number 0648-0472 (current extension expires 10-31-2015). This request requires recipients of CRP funding to provide information regarding the status and success of funded projects in the form of periodic performance reports and final reports. The information is used to populate the Restoration Center's existing database (RCDB).

Many projects within the RCDB meet the project requirements for the National Estuaries Restoration Inventory. Therefore, relevant data fields from the Restoration Center's database are copied into NERI on regular basis to avoid duplication of effort and unnecessary burden to respondents. The NERI information request is a similar request for information but since it is a different program, it does not encompass the same projects or the same data fields as the CRP request. Therefore, a separate request is needed for NERI.

**5. If the collection of information involves small businesses or other small entities, describe the methods used to minimize burden.**

Respondents are small not-for-profit entities. Only projects funded through the Estuary Restoration Act are required to submit project information into NERI. A pre-formatted PDF of the data fields is provided to assist in the collection of information prior to being entered into the database. Specific instructions and definitions for data fields are also provided on the data entry form. Technical support is also available via e-mail. The information to be collected is very basic and should not be a burden for small entities receiving ERA funding to produce.

**6. Describe the consequences to the Federal program or policy activities if the collection is not conducted or is conducted less frequently.**

If the information is not collected it will be more difficult to provide accountability on the expenditure of Federal funds for estuary habitat restoration activities under the ERA or to validate performance measures, and timely responses to any Freedom of Information Act requests would be inhibited.

**7. Explain any special circumstances that require the collection to be conducted in a manner inconsistent with OMB guidelines.**

Not Applicable.

**8. Provide information on the PRA Federal Register Notice that solicited public comments on the information collection prior to this submission. Summarize the public comments received in response to that notice and describe the actions taken by the agency in response to those comments. Describe the efforts to consult with persons outside the agency to obtain their views on the availability of data, frequency of collection, the clarity of instructions and recordkeeping, disclosure, or reporting format (if any), and on the data elements to be recorded, disclosed, or reported.**

A Federal Register Notice published February 12, 2013 (78 FR 9887) solicited public comment on this information collection. No comments were received.

Consultations with interested and affected persons are an integral part of this information collection. We have been in coordination with national and regional restoration entities such as Restore America's Estuaries, the Gulf of Maine Council on the Marine Environment, and the Gulf of Mexico Foundation, to ensure the application meets their tracking needs. Although these entities are not required to submit their project information since they have not received ERA funding, they are all interested in using data from the application to show restoration efforts at the national and regional levels. In addition, members of the ERA Working Group which consist of other federal agencies such as the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Natural Resource Conservation Service, and the Environmental Protection Agency, have provided input on how to improve the information collection and efforts have been made to incorporate the majority of these suggestions into the application. Most of these suggestions involved formatting changes to remove less critical data elements that reduce data entry burden on respondents.

Recently, NOAA contacted members of the ERA Working Group which consist of four other federal agencies including the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Natural Resource Conservation Services, and the Environmental Protection Agency requesting feedback on the NERI database and information collection, with all respondents stating support for the database overall. Respondents concurred that instructions were clear and information was easily accessible and searchable on the NERI website. Data entry is voluntary for organizations which do not receive ERA funding; therefore respondents reasoned NERI offered a snapshot of information and is not a comprehensive collection of all agencies' estuarine restoration efforts. Instead, NERI serves as a collection of example restoration projects that can be used by restoration practitioners to learn from NERI's other value includes networking and educational benefits for restoration practitioners who access the database, noted one respondent. Respondents agreed with our estimation; stating the burden of time to maintain a project record in NERI to be reasonable.

**9. Explain any decisions to provide payments or gifts to respondents, other than remuneration of contractors or grantees.**

No payments or gifts will be provided to any respondents.

**10. Describe any assurance of confidentiality provided to respondents and the basis for assurance in statute, regulation, or agency policy.**

The information collection does not request any proprietary or confidential information. No confidentiality is provided.

**11. Provide additional justification for any questions of a sensitive nature, such as sexual behavior and attitudes, religious beliefs, and other matters that are commonly considered private.**

No information of a sensitive nature is collected.

**12. Provide an estimate in hours of the burden of the collection of information.**

The three-year burden for this collection is estimated to be 308 hours (annualized to 103 hours). However, it should be noted that data collected for the NERI database is intended to provide information to restoration practitioners throughout the country, including those entering the data. Therefore, the burden of data collection is expected to be offset (and in some cases exceeded) by the benefits accrued to restoration practitioners from having access to a national database for project tracking and data queries.

For the Fiscal Year 2011, \$4 million in funding was available through the ERA for estuary habitat restoration projects. NOAA expects no more than 10 restoration projects to be awarded ERA funding in FY2013. Assuming continued project funding under the ERA, NOAA expects between 1-10 new awards to be made annually. Based on recent activity, NOAA estimates that approximately 5-10 additional projects will be entered to the database annually on a voluntary basis. In addition, funded respondents will be required to return to NERI in the following year to update their entries. While updates are not required for voluntary submissions, of the 10 voluntary records submitted, 7 are expected to be updated after initial entry. Using these assumptions for both mandatory and voluntary projects and assuming that one project is entered or updated by a single respondent, NOAA estimates that in year one of the next three years, up to 20 new projects will be entered into the database. In year two, an additional 20 projects will be entered into the database and an existing 17 projects will be updated. In year three, another 20 projects will be added to the database and an existing 17 projects will be updated. Annualizing over three years (20, 20 + 17, 20 + 17), there would be 31 respondents and responses per year.

For new projects, the total response time per project is estimated at four hours: approximately three hours spent collecting project information and writing the project abstract and one hour for entering information into the database. For projects that are already in the database and are being updated, the total response time per project is estimated at two hours: 1 hour and 30 minutes for collecting new project information and 30 minutes to update the information in the database. Assuming approximately 20 new projects being entered into the database each year and 17 existing projects updated the second and third years, the total burden would be 308 hours (20 x 4 hours = 80 for each year, and 114 (80 + 17 x 2 (34)) hours for the second and third years), annualized to 103 hours per year.

These totals include the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, and gathering and maintaining project information needed to answer database questions based on

information that awardees should have readily available, and the one-time need to use a GPS or internet URL to determine latitude and longitude coordinates of project sites.

**13. Provide an estimate of the total annual cost burden to the respondents or record-keepers resulting from the collection (excluding the value of the burden hours in #12 above).**

No capital or start-up costs are expected to result from this collection by the respondents. Operations and maintenance costs are expected to be limited to Internet and computer access for submitting project information to the NERI database and Website. It is expected that existing computer equipment and Internet connections will be used by respondents at little to no additional cost.

It is expected that no more than 25% of the 31 annual respondents will either use facsimile transmission or mail to submit paper data entry forms. Based upon this percentage, it is estimated half of those aforementioned respondents will use mail, resulting in a \$1.84 burden (4 respondents x \$0.46 per stamp), and the remainder of those respondents will use facsimile transmission, resulting in a \$12.00 burden (4 respondents x 3 pages x \$1.00 per page). The overall annual burden to respondents is estimated to be \$13.84 (\$14).

**14. Provide estimates of annualized cost to the Federal government.**

One full-time employee (FTE) will devote approximately 25% of his/her time annually for oversight, reporting, QA/QC, and data imports. One contractor will devote 10% of his/her time to implement changes and maintain the application. With an annual average salary an annual salary of \$80,000 for an FTE at 25% time (\$20,000), and an annual salary for a contractor of \$75,000 at 10% time (\$7,500), the annualized cost to the Federal government to conduct this information collection is estimated to be \$27,500. No significant equipment, overhead, printing or other costs should be involved with the processing of this information collection.

**15. Explain the reasons for any program changes or adjustments.**

The collection of information for the NERI involves paper or fillable adobe forms instead of web-based data entry forms, as maintaining the web-based data entry option is not cost-effective. This will result in an estimated \$14 recordkeeping/reporting cost to respondents.

**16. For collections whose results will be published, outline the plans for tabulation and publication.**

The results of this collection will not be published.

**17. If seeking approval to not display the expiration date for OMB approval of the information collection, explain the reasons why display would be inappropriate.**

The PRA statement, with the OMB Control Number, expiration date, and additional information about the collection, is available for respondents on both the PDF form, as well as the NERI website.

**18. Explain each exception to the certification statement.**

There are no exceptions.