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UMaine, UNE, partners to receive $20 Million National Science Foundation EPSCoR Grant for Sustainable Ecological Aquaculture Network

Orono, Maine — A $20 million National Science Foundation EPSCoR (Experimental Program to Stimulate Competitive Research) grant will establish a Sustainable Ecological Aquaculture Network (SEANET) program in Maine.

Maine EPSCoR at the University of Maine will use the grant to mobilize the collective capacity of Maine's coastal science resources to establish SEANET, a research network focused on sustainable ecological aquaculture. SEANET will take a multi-institutional, transdisciplinary research approach to gain a comprehensive understanding of how sustainable ecological aquaculture can interact with coastal communities and ecosystems.

This multi-institutional, public-private partnership led by UMaine, in collaboration with the University of New England and other institutions in Maine, will use the state's 3,500-mile coastline as a living laboratory to study physical oceanography, biophysical, biogeochemical, socioeconomic and policy interactions that have local, bioregional, national and global implications.

Maine has multiple institutions with world-class expertise in marine sciences, engineering, climate change and social sciences. The SEANET research partners will initially include UMaine, UNE University of Southern Maine, University of Maine at Machias, Bowdoin College, Maine Maritime Academy, St. Joseph's College, Southern Maine Community College, Bigelow Laboratory for Ocean Sciences and the Cobscook Community Learning Center. In addition, dozens of other partners and stakeholder groups will collaborate on the project's research, education, workforce development and economic development activities.

The SEANET research program will utilize the field of sustainability science to understand the social and environmental connections, and feedback loops among sustainable ecological aquaculture and coastal communities and coastal ecosystems.

"This research project will use various types of science to understand how aquaculture fits in our multi-use working waterfront, while building partnerships and training students, so that we can use similar approaches to other coastal resource management issues in the future." said Paul Anderson, director of SEANET at the University of Maine.

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EPSCoR at the University of Maine to Receive $20M National Science Foundation Grant for Coastal Research

"I am delighted that the National Science Foundation selected Maine EPSCoR for this Research Infrastructure Improvement grant," said Sen. Susan Collins. "Through tourism, commercial fishing, and sea farming, our state's economy is highly dependent on the ecological well-being of the Gulf of Maine. This grant will help fund the vital research performed by faculty and students at the University of Maine and its partners at other research and education institutions in the state as they seek to find new ways to support the cultural and economic traditions of Maine's working waterfronts and assist local governments in making informed decisions regarding coastal usage."

"This award is great news for the university, its partners, and indeed, the entire state of Maine," said Sen. Angus King. "This important funding will help establish a new and innovative network of experts who will work together to advance our understanding of Maine's working waterfronts, which are a vital part of our state's economy. It will also benefit countless students who will gain valuable research and field experience, making this a win for everyone involved. I look forward to seeing the good work it will support."

Rep. Mike Michaud said: "This significant investment is wonderful news for the University of Maine, all of those involved with EPSCoR, and the entire state. Maine has established itself as a leader in innovation when it comes to better understanding how we can both support our valuable ecosystems and ensure they are strong drivers of our economy, and I'm excited that this grant will further that work. I know this grant will allow that innovation to continue, and I look forward to following the project."

"The coast of Maine is not only a big part of our economy but it's an important part of what makes our state unique," said Rep. Chellie Pingree. "Our history and our future are wrapped up in our coastline, and this grant is going to help us better understand the risks and opportunities for our coastal economy. It's a big investment in the university and coastal communities that will pay big dividends in the future."

University of Maine President Susan Hunter affirmed the project's importance, saying, "This NSF grant recognizes the leadership and contribution of University of Maine scholars and students who aim to support coastal ecosystems, economies, and communities by promoting sustainable policies and practices in Maine."

University of New England President Danielle Ripich said, "UNE is committed to building research and programs to support the marine economy of Maine. This public-private partnership brings two great institutions together to improve our coastal enterprises. Together with all the partners, we can do good things for Maine."

EPSCoR is a federal program directed at states that have historically received less federal research and development funding. The program provides states with financial support to develop partnerships between their higher education institutions, industry, government, and others in order to effect lasting improvements in its research and development infrastructure, capacity, and national academic competitiveness. Maine EPSCoR at the University of Maine is responsible for administering and implementing the NSF EPSCoR program for the state.

For more information see www.umaine.edu/epscor/