GENERAL COUNSEL OF THE
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
Washington, D.C. 20230

June 2, 2009

The Honorable Raul M. Grijalva
Chairman, Subcommittee on National Parks,
Forests and Public Lands
Committee on Natural Resources
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman:

Thank you for your letter requesting the views of the Department of Commerce (Department) on H.R. 1612, the *Public Lands Service Corps Act of 2009*, which reauthorizes and amends the *Public Lands Corps Act of 1993*. This bill would strengthen and facilitate the use of the current Public Land Corps program, and would expand the program to include the Department's National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).

The Department recognizes, appreciates, and supports the intent of the legislation to include NOAA, given that the bill would amend the definition of public lands to include coastal, ocean, and Great Lakes waters. The conservation and management of coastal, ocean and Great Lakes resources are critical components of NOAA's mission. Several of NOAA's program offices could benefit from this legislation, including Sea Grant, the Office of National Marine Sanctuaries, the Office of Ocean and Coastal Resource Management, National Centers for Coastal and Ocean Science, and the Office of Habitat Conservation. These programs would be able to utilize the Public Lands Service Corps in efforts to promote the health of coastal and marine areas, including through protection and restoration of habitat.

The NOAA Restoration Center currently maintains active partnerships with the Alaska Youth Conservation Corps and the California Conservation Corps to implement habitat restoration projects that benefit coastal and marine resources, and engage youth in hands-on activities that instill strong conservation values while benefiting the local community. However, NOAA currently has limited authority to partner with non-profit organizations to implement student volunteer or service corps programs. H.R. 1612 would provide NOAA with the broad authority necessary to conduct these programs in support of NOAA's mission. For example, a Public Lands Service Corps authorized to conduct on-the-ground restoration work in coastal areas would build on NOAA's current activities and would provide NOAA with a new stream of environmentally aware and well-trained practitioners who could grow into the future scientists and managers that will be needed in the growing field of habitat protection and restoration.

The Department supports the flexibility provided in H.R. 1612 to allow NOAA to determine the appropriate size and scope of a Public Lands Service Corps program. We appreciate the

opportunity to present the Department's views on H.R. 1612. The Office of Management and Budget has advised the Department that there is no objection to the submission of this letter to the Congress from the standpoint of the Administration's program.

Sincerely,

Cameron F. Kerry

cc: The Honorable Rob Bishop
Ranking Republican Member

The Honorable Madeleine Z. Bordallo
Chairwoman, Subcommittee on Insular Affairs, Oceans and Wildlife

The Honorable Henry E. Brown, Jr.
Ranking Republican Member, Subcommittee on Insular Affairs, Oceans and Wildlife