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Ms. Noemi Mercado  
Partnership Programs Branch  
Oceans, Wetlands and Communities Division  
Environmental Protection Agency  
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, DC 20460

October 20<sup>th</sup>, 2017

Dear Ms. Mercado:

The Peconic Estuary Program (PEP) appreciates the time and thought that was put into the 2017 Program Evaluation of the PEP by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Program Evaluation team; our program received valuable feedback through the evaluation process. The 2017 Program Evaluation Final Letter recognized the Peconic Estuary Program's successes and recommended efforts to further strengthen the Program.

The PEP has embarked on the process of updating our 2001 Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan (CCMP), which is required by the EPA's 2016 revised *CCMP Revisions and Updates Guidance* to be revised at least once by September 2018. The EPA recognized that PEP has secured funding for contractor assistance for writing support and facilitation support to revise its CCMP; however, external factors have prevented the smooth development and execution of these contracts and the CCMP Revision schedule is now delayed.

The Peconic Estuary Program understands the importance of revising its 2001 CCMP in order to address current environmental issues and effectively manage the Peconic Estuary and its natural resources. To ensure the CCMP incorporates a regional consensus to develop a holistic approach for protecting and restoring the Peconic Estuary, the PEP's top priority is to foster a robust stakeholder input process. The Peconic Estuary Program's Education and Outreach Team has already been working closely with a variety of community groups to collect stakeholder input for the CCMP Revision, by conducting in-person meetings and communicating via social media, the PEP website, and emails. The Education and Outreach Team's efforts will complement the CCMP Revision facilitation support contract work.

The Peconic Estuary Program is committed to making substantial progress on the CCMP Revision during FY 2018. As per EPA's recommendation, the PEP is submitting a timeline plan to comply with EPA's CCMP Revision schedule. The following details provide a) a date to resolve CCMP contract issue, b) an anticipated date for a draft CCMP, and c) an anticipated date for a final CCMP with associated documents.

| Description of Product/Deliverable                | Original Due Date* | Revised Due Date |
|---|--------------------|------------------|
| Execute contract for CCMP services                | 02/15/2016         | 11/30/2017       |
| Complete CCMP draft in conjunction with Core Team | 12/31/2016         | 09/30/2018       |
| Finalize 2018 CCMP                                | 03/01/2018         | 12/31/2019       |



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\*As outlined in the Memorandum of Understanding between the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation and the State University of New York, Stony Brook University (MOU No. AM09995).

Although contracting issues have delayed large-scale initiation of the CCMP Revision, the PEP is moving forward with multiple steps essential to complete a robust CCMP Revision. Climate change is profoundly impacting the Peconic Estuary and the Program is taking steps to ensure climate change is considered in all management activities undertaken in the Peconic Estuary. PEP is commencing research to analyze the impacts of climate change on critical lands protection in the Peconic Estuary study area and completing a thorough review of and assessment of the climate change vulnerabilities of the Peconic Estuary Program and Shinnecock Indian Nation environmental restoration and protection programs. A final report will be produced summarizing recommendations in response to the risks identified which will be incorporated into the PEP CCMP Revision. Moreover, the Peconic Estuary Program is currently revising the Peconic Estuary Program Habitat Restoration Plan in consultation with our stakeholders to articulate overall goals, objectives and measureable ecosystem targets which will be incorporated with the CCMP Revision. In addition, the Peconic Estuary Program is currently working with our Technical Advisory Committee to reevaluate and revise the Peconic Estuary Environmental Monitoring Plan, a vital step to provide insight into the effectiveness of current and revised CCMP strategies.

Peconic Estuary Program looks forward to working with the EPA as this effort moves forward.

Sincerely,

Sarah Schaefer

Acting Director, Peconic Estuary Program