U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES COMMITTEE ON
SCIENCE, SPACE, & TECHNOLOGY
Opening Statement

Chairwoman Haley Stevens (D-MI)
of the Subcommittee on Research and Technology

Research & Technology Subcommittee Hearing:
Weathering the Storm: Reauthorizing the National Windstorm Impact Reduction Program

Wednesday, November 10, 2021

Good Morning. Thank you to our distinguished panel of witnesses for joining our virtual hearing on examining the National Windstorm Impact Reduction Program, or NWIRP.

I am speaking to you today from City Hall in Farmington, Michigan, to bring attention to the windstorms that have become more severe and more frequent in my community.

Unfortunately, citizens of Farmington and across the area have seen ample evidence of the destructive power of windstorms and their associated flooding. Despite our advancements, severe windstorms remain among the most destructive and costly natural hazards.

This Summer, Southeast Michigan experienced a nonstop deluge of extreme winds and storms – we had nine hard-hitting, severe storms in nine weeks. Tornadoes, hail, derechos, flash floods, and Supercell storms created a cycle of destruction in our communities.

I share this Storm Report from August 11 that tracked wind gusts up to 75 mph and prompted the issuance of Detroit National Weather Service's first "Destructive" Severe Thunderstorm Warning. The storm marked the first time in Detroit the weather service used its "destructive" storm warning, a new label for the highest category of damage threat. These damaging waves of storms have caused countless power outages and flooded homes. People here are stressed out and exhausted from the turmoil.

In the two years since the last Science Committee hearing on NWIRP, my home state of Michigan has experienced six Severe Storm billion-dollar disaster events. No state in our nation is untouched by the damaging physical and emotional impacts of windstorms and associated flooding.

Advances in recent decades have led to significant improvements in the National Weather Service's ability to forecast hurricanes, tornadoes, and other storms. However, accurate forecasts alone aren't enough to protect lives and property against windstorms and their impacts. I look

forward to hearing testimony from our expert witnesses on the additional needs in research, workforce, and infrastructure for improved windstorm and windstorm impact resilience at NWIRP.

NWIRP was established in 2004 with three main goals – improving the understanding of windstorms, improving windstorm impact assessment, and reducing windstorm impacts. Atmospheric and engineering research conducted by the Program agencies has advanced our understanding of the processes underlying windstorms and their impacts on structures. Post-disaster investigations conducted by Program agencies, in particular NIST, further inform our understanding of the behavior of structures in windstorms. This research has already led to significantly improved model building codes.

Additionally, NWIRP agencies disseminate information to the general public on windstorm preparedness and actions that individuals can take to protect themselves and their homes during a severe windstorm. However, it is policy makers and community leaders who truly hold the key to future windstorm resilience through their decision-making regarding mitigation and preparedness.

The challenges in preparing for and mitigating against severe windstorms are far too broad for any one agency to handle on its own. NWIRP's model for interagency collaboration spanning fundamental research to operations has enabled the Program to make important advances in saving lives and reducing the economic impact of windstorms. With climate change upon us, many new challenges lie ahead.

Authorization for NWIRP expired in 2017, but the Program has continued its excellent work, and I applaud the agencies for this work. As the Science Committee considers the reauthorization of NWIRP, I look forward to hearing from the Agencies on changes to the Program that can continue to improve our nation's resilience to severe windstorms.

Thank you.