A NATIONAL POLICY FOR THE STEWARDSHIP OF THE OCEAN, COASTS, AND GREAT LAKES

On July 19, 2010, President Obama signed an Executive Order establishing a National Policy for the Stewardship of the Ocean, Coasts, and Great Lakes. That Executive Order adopts the *Final Recommendations* of the Interagency Ocean Policy Task Force and directs Federal agencies to take the appropriate steps to implement them.

The Executive Order strengthens ocean governance and coordination, establishes guiding principles for ocean management, and adopts a flexible framework for effective coastal and marine spatial planning to address conservation, economic activity, user conflict, and sustainable use of the ocean, our coasts and the Great Lakes.

Overview

America's rich and productive coastal regions and waters support tens of millions of jobs and account for the great majority of the national economy, totaling trillions of dollars each year. They also host a growing number of recreational, scientific, energy, and security activities and provide a wealth of natural resources and ecological benefits. The Deepwater Horizon-BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico and resulting environmental crisis is a stark reminder of how vulnerable our marine environments are, and how much communities and the Nation rely on healthy and resilient ocean and coastal ecosystems. Uses of the ocean, our coasts, and the Great Lakes are expanding at a rate that challenges our ability to manage significant and often competing demands.

In June 2009, President Obama created the Interagency Ocean Policy Task Force and charged it with developing recommendations to enhance national stewardship of the ocean, our coasts, and the Great Lakes and promote the long term conservation and use of these resources. The Task Force was led by the White House Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) and included 24 senior-level policy officials from across the Federal Government.

The Task Force released an *Interim Report* in September 2009 and an *Interim Framework for Effective Coastal and Marine Spatial Planning* in December 2009. The Task Force's *Final Recommendations* combine and update the proposals contained in the two earlier reports. The Task Force received and reviewed close to 5,000 written comments from Congress, stakeholders, and the public before finalizing its recommendations. The Executive Order adopts these recommendations.

The National Policy

President Obama recognizes that America's stewardship of the ocean, our coasts, and the Great Lakes is intimately linked to national prosperity, environmental sustainability, human health and well-being, adaptation to climate and other environmental change, social justice, foreign policy, and national and homeland security. The Executive Order adopts a National Policy that includes guiding principles for management decisions and actions toward stewardship that ensures that the ocean, our coasts, and the Great Lakes are healthy and resilient, safe and productive, and understood and treasured so as to promote the well-being, prosperity, and security of present and future generations.

The National Ocean Council

The Executive Order establishes an interagency National Ocean Council to coordinate ocean, coastal, and Great Lakes issues across the Federal Government and implement the National Policy. The Executive Order also directs the establishment of a Governance Coordinating Committee to formally engage with state, tribal, and local authorities.

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Implementation Strategy and Categories for Action

The National Policy prioritizes action areas, including ecosystem-based management, regional ecosystem protection and restoration, and strengthened and integrated observing systems, that seek to address some of the most pressing challenges facing the ocean, our coasts, and the Great Lakes. These priority strategies and objectives provide a bridge between the National Policy and action on the ground.

A Framework for Effective Coastal and Marine Spatial Planning

The National Policy identifies coastal and marine spatial planning as a priority. With competing interests in the ocean, our coasts, and the Great Lakes, coastal and marine spatial planning offers a comprehensive, integrated approach to planning and managing uses and activities over the long term. Under the Executive Order, coastal and marine spatial planning would be regional in scope, developed cooperatively among Federal, state, tribal, and local authorities, and include substantial stakeholder, scientific, and public input. The coastal and marine spatial planning framework:

- Establishes a new regional approach to how we use and protect the ocean, our coasts, and the Great Lakes to decrease user conflicts, improve planning and regulatory efficiencies and decrease costs and delays, and preserve critical ecosystem services.
- Creates a comprehensive alternative to sector-by-sector and statute-by-statute decision-making.
- Establishes regional planning bodies, bringing Federal, state, and tribal partners together in an unprecedented manner to jointly plan for the future of the ocean, our coasts, and the Great Lakes.
- Places science-based information at the heart of decision-making.
- Emphasizes stakeholder and public participation.

Timeline for Implementation

The National Ocean Council will hold its first meeting later this summer to begin the immediate work of implementing the National Policy. After an initial organization period, the National Ocean Council's interagency policy committees will begin to develop strategic plans for the priority objectives. This work will take place during the first 6 to 12 months. The National Ocean Council will ensure substantial opportunity for public participation as it develops strategic action plans, including the strategic action plan for coastal and marine spatial planning.

The National Ocean Council will begin building coastal and marine spatial plans using a flexible, phased approach. During the first phase (1-12 months), the National Ocean Council will initiate the process for coastal and marine spatial planning, including organizing Federal, State, and tribal regional representatives. During the second phase (9-24 months), the National Ocean Council will directly engage states and tribes to build capacity, test specific issues or elements of the process, and continue to foster public and stakeholder awareness and participation. During the third phase (18 months - 5 years), regional planning bodies will build out and scale up their efforts to establish a comprehensive process in all regions, and will finalize and implement initial coastal and marine spatial plans in all regions by 2015.

The full text of the National Policy for the Stewardship of the Ocean, Coasts, and Great Lakes is available at www.whitehouse.gov/oceans.