

CALL FOR ACTION: PROTECT THE NATION'S OCEANS & COASTS

The _____ (organization) supports this call for action to protect the invaluable natural resources and the economic significance of our nation's oceans and coasts.

In 2004, the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy alerted the nation to systematic failures in the protection and management of the nation's coasts and oceans. What's at stake: the environment, jobs, the economy, and human health and safety. The Pew Oceans Commission put it simply: "America's oceans are in crisis and the stakes could not be higher." Both Commissions recommended bold new visions for protecting coastal and ocean resources and related businesses, but the national response has been inadequate. Projected impacts of climate change, especially accelerated sea level rise, have increased the urgency for action. Increasing development pressures along our coasts continue to raise new concerns about the health of coastal waters and habitats. National leadership to address these issues is essential. It is critical for the new Administration and the 111th Congress to take the following actions.

ESTABLISH A NATIONAL OCEAN TRUST FUND

The next Administration and the 111th Congress should establish a permanent Ocean Trust Fund with a dedicated source of revenues, growing from \$1 billion per year to \$4 billion per year, as was recommended by both national ocean commissions, to support the management, protection, and understanding of the natural and economic resources along our nation's coasts, oceans, Great Lakes and islands.

The Trust Fund will support the focused efforts of coastal states, territories and commonwealths, other appropriate coastal authorities, and federal agencies in addressing critical ocean and coastal science, management, and protection needs of our nation. The fund could be supported by revenues from such sources as unallocated federal revenues from offshore uses including oil and gas or alternative energy activities, and revenues from future carbon tax revenues and other sources. The Ocean Trust Fund should provide funds over and above existing appropriations to meet the increasingly complex and unmet needs of ocean and coastal managers.

ADAPTING TO COASTAL CLIMATE CHANGE

The next Administration and the 111th Congress should support state and local government efforts to prepare for the impacts of coastal climate change.

Economic and environmental impacts of climate change are expected to be most severe in coastal and Great Lake areas of the United States due to accelerated sea level rise and lake level changes, increased shoreline erosion, heightened storm frequencies or intensities, and saltwater intrusion into coastal rivers and aquifers, among others. While mitigation of greenhouse gases is critical to minimizing future impacts, state and local resource managers have immediate responsibilities to plan for and adapt to these impacts, and must begin by assessing the severity and nature of impacts on coastal communities, industries, infrastructure and natural resources. However, states have significant mapping, monitoring, and research needs and need to strengthen state and local capacities for adaptation planning. This will require an unprecedented national investment and effort that will not succeed without the full engagement and support of the next Administration and Congress.

ESTABLISH A NEW "CONSTITUTION" FOR THE COAST

The next Administration and the 111th Congress should establish a new "Constitution" for the nation's coast through the re-crafting and re-authorization of a Coastal Zone Management Act that includes a bold vision for addressing the complex coastal issues of the 21st century.

Our nation faces a looming coastal crisis resulting from increasing coastal populations and climate change. These shifts in the coastal zone pose a threat to coastal resources, infrastructure and economies, and the very health of the oceans. The Coastal Zone Management Act has created an innovative national partnership to address these issues but the time has come to take bold steps to craft a new national vision for ocean and coastal protection that will be both effective and efficient. This bold vision will set clear priorities, retain existing authorities, maintain and build onto existing programs, strengthen partnerships and assistance to local governments, and prepare for climate change and coastal hazards by focusing on protection and management.

EXHIBIT 1: ESTABLISH A NATIONAL OCEAN TRUST FUND

We look to the next Administration and the 111th Congress to provide the leadership needed to establish a permanent Ocean Trust Fund, with a dedicated source of revenues, growing from \$1 billion per year to \$4 billion per year, as was recommended by both the U.S Commission on Ocean Policy and the Pew Oceans Commission. Leadership and commitment of funds are needed now to support the management, protection, and understanding of the natural and economic resources along our nation's coasts, oceans, Great Lakes and islands.

The Trust Fund will support the focused efforts of coastal states, territories and commonwealths, other appropriate coastal authorities, and federal agencies in addressing critical ocean and coastal science, management, and protection needs of our nation. The fund could be supported by revenues from such sources as unallocated federal revenues from offshore uses including oil and gas or alternative energy activities, and revenues from future carbon tax revenues and other sources. The Ocean Trust Fund should provide funds over and above existing appropriations to meet the increasingly complex and unmet needs of ocean and coastal managers.

Current Funding Levels Inadequate

Both Commissions identified lack of sufficient funding at the federal, regional, state, and local levels as a severe impediment to addressing ocean and coastal management challenges. Maintaining the economic and ecological viability of our oceans and coasts – which are no less than the economic and ecological lifeblood of our nation - requires decision makers at all levels to have access to unbiased, credible and up-to-date information to inform their decisions. Today, we know more about the surface of the moon and other planets than we know about the oceans. The nation must increase investment in ocean science and research, particularly broader ecological monitoring programs and investigations so that we have the information and resources needed to properly manage and protect our nation's ocean and coastal heritage.

Sadly, chronic under-investment has left much of our coastal infrastructure in woefully poor condition and public education and awareness is insufficient. Unsightly debris impacts our oceans and coastal waters, and local governments lack the capacity to efficiently preserve and protect our coasts and oceans. Protecting and managing our nation's coastline will not happen without a substantially greater financial commitment. With a collective commitment and thoughtful planning, our investments will be returned many times over in the form of abundant ocean resources, healthy coasts and coastal communities, and a vibrant, sustainable ocean and coastal economy, which is a critical economic engine for our entire nation.

Funding Priorities

A new Ocean Trust Fund is essential to the long term protection and management of the ocean and coastal resources – and future economic health - of the nation. Important actions will be undertaken with this dedicated funding.

- Support bold and innovative approaches to existing and emerging challenges such as habitat destruction, invasive species, coastal erosion, sea level rise, fisheries declines, and marine debris.

Funding will help reduce threats and losses from coastal hazards including coastal storms, erosion and flooding and could assist in shoreline protection and restoration, emergency preparedness and flood management. There are critical needs in wetland restoration, public education, agency coordination, land purchases and fisheries management.

- Support national coastal management programs and technology transfer for state and local actions.

Most state and local governments lack the resources to plan and implement protection of sensitive areas in their coastal areas. Funding to the states could provide technical assistance to local governments to assist in protecting sensitive areas that are important to protecting marine and estuarine environments from secondary and cumulative impacts of pollution from development.

- Direct financial support to state governments for on-the-ground programs to manage and protect ocean and coastal resources.

Specific management measures include ensuring good water quality through fixing failing septic systems, restoring wetlands and other unique coastal habitats, purchasing lands for public access, protecting marine and estuarine organisms and environments and environmental monitoring.

- Support research, monitoring, and education to guide the management of the nation's ocean and coastal resources.

For example, state coastal managers work with National Estuarine Research Reserves, Sea Grant and other partners to address compelling issues facing the coasts and oceans through applied research and education about estuarine, coastal and ocean topics. Additional funding can support strategic public education, technology transfer, and training.

EXHIBIT 2: ADAPTING TO COASTAL CLIMATE CHANGE

The next Administration and the 111th Congress should support state and local government efforts to prepare for the impacts of coastal climate change.

There is little debate that climate change and sea level rise is occurring and that coastal states are on the front lines of the issue. The discussion has now moved to better understanding the severity and timing of change, assessments of the critical infrastructure (roads, power plants, etc) and natural resources (wetlands, beaches, etc) that might be affected, and what coastal managers can do. Coastal states, territories, commonwealths and local governments must prepare now if they are to successfully respond and adapt to the current and eventual impacts of climate change. While mitigation of greenhouse gases is necessary to help minimize future impacts, coastal states, territories and local governments must prepare now to adapt and respond to existing and future impacts with the support of the next Administration and Congress.

COASTAL COMMUNITIES ON THE “FRONT LINE”

Coastal areas are particularly vulnerable to climate change, especially with respect to sea level rise and lake level changes, shoreline erosion, increased storm frequency or intensity, changes in rainfall, and related flooding. Other impacts include changes in chemical (ocean acidification) and physical characteristics (thermal stratification) of marine systems, saltwater intrusion into groundwater aquifers, increased harmful algal blooms, spread of invasive species, habitat loss (especially coastal wetlands), species migrations, and changes in population dynamics among marine and coastal species. Preparing for these impacts has been termed “adaptation” by the coastal research and management community.

To adequately deal with adaptation, a coastal state, commonwealth, or territory must first identify public facilities and public services, coastal resources, coastal waters, energy facilities, or other water uses located in the coastal watershed that are likely to be impacted by climate change. In doing this, states and local governments must examine climate change in relationship to the social, environmental, and economic impacts of sea level rise and fluctuating Great Lake level scenarios, resulting shoreline changes, and potential adaptation strategies. One of the challenges for coastal managers is to devise adaptation strategies for shoreline changes, sea level rise scenarios and changes in fisheries and adjust these in the future as forecasting improves. New policies are being developed to address the siting of public infrastructure, site-level project planning, wetland conservation and restoration, fisheries management, shoreline building setbacks, building elevations, and alternatives to shoreline “armoring.” Coastal programs are interested in decision-support tools that compile historical shorelines, geomorphology, socioeconomic data, and model projections.

FEDERAL POLICY AND FUNDING PRIORITIES

To facilitate effective coastal adaptation, the nation needs:

- A new, stronger focus on interagency cooperation between NOAA, state coastal management programs, FEMA, and state floodplain managers.
- A coordinated research and information system through observation systems and other tools.
- Federal funding to protect coastal communities and the national interest from the impacts of climate change.
- A reinvigorated Coastal Zone Management Act (CZMA) recognized by Congress and the Administration as one of the primary statutes that can foster adaptation to climate change at the state and local levels.

EXHIBIT 3: ESTABLISH A NEW “CONSTITUTION” FOR THE COAST

The next Administration and the 111th Congress should establish a new “Constitution” to protect and manage the nation’s coast through the re-authorization of a strong and reinvigorated Coastal Zone Management Act (CZMA).

For more than three decades the national Coastal Zone Management Act has helped states and territories to manage the nation’s coasts, islands and Great Lakes. But the future of the nation’s coastlines and coastal communities is increasingly at risk from growing populations, unceasing development demands, and new uses that compete with traditional coastal economies. If that weren’t enough, the Earth’s changing climate and rising sea levels pose dramatic challenges to coastal communities, coastal creatures, and the special places that make our coasts so important to all Americans.

A renewed national vision... a new Constitution for the Coasts... is urgently needed to protect our coastal heritage, coastal communities, and coastal-dependent economies. Such a constitution must bring together all levels of governments and spell out clear priorities and key program actions, promote strategic partnerships, and direct the substantial financial investments needed to meet these challenges.

BUILD ON EXISTING PROGRAMS

The new vision for the coast must build on the keystone principles of coastal management that have anchored national and state efforts over the past three decade. Coastal management is now a part of state and local laws so it is imperative to retain state authorities and basic program activities under the 1972 Act even as these programs are strengthened. In addition, states must retain the ability to review federal actions for consistency with approved state policies.

CLEAR PRIORITIES

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Coastal States Organization, and other partners have held public discussions around the country centered on four priorities to direct the nation’s future coastal efforts:

- Support healthy coastal communities and coastal-dependent economies;
- Protect and restore coastal ecosystems, habitats, and unique resources;
- Prepare for impacts of climate change; and,
- Make sure that local, state, regional, and federal coastal programs work together at all appropriate scales.

States will use these priorities and scientific and technical assessments of state and local coastal conditions and need to prepare multi-year strategic approaches to implement them. States will be accountable through measures of performance in meeting priorities. State efforts will be evaluated periodically.

STRENGTHEN PARTNERSHIP AND ASSISTANCE TO LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

State and local government land use decisions and public infrastructure investments are key to the future of protecting coastal resources and creating healthy communities. But state and local governments need technical, planning, and financial assistance to improve decision-making and management. National investments are critical to enabling local governments to be strong partners in developing and carrying out programs to meet coastal management objectives.

PREPARE FOR CLIMATE CHANGE AND COASTAL HAZARDS

The nation’s coasts and coastal communities are on the front lines of climate change. Rising sea level, inundation of coastal lands, increased storm intensity and frequency, loss of habitats, invasive species and other consequences will affect coastal communities in a myriad of ways. The new Constitution for the Coast must provide technical, planning, and financial assistance to local government, states, and federal agencies to take action to adapt to impacts on infrastructure, land use, habitats, emergency response, and local economies.