



**EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT
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WASHINGTON, D.C. 20503**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
December 14, 2009

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Ocean Policy Task Force Releases Interim Framework for Effective Coastal and Marine Spatial Planning

Comprehensive, Integrated Approach Helps to Determine how the Ocean, Coasts and Great Lakes are Used and Protected Now and in the Future

WASHINGTON – President Obama’s Ocean Policy Task Force released its *Interim Framework for Effective Coastal and Marine Spatial Planning* (Interim Framework) today for a 60-day public review and comment period. With competing interests in the ocean, our coasts and the Great Lakes, the Interim Framework offers a comprehensive, integrated approach to planning and managing uses and activities. Under the Framework, coastal and marine spatial planning would be regional in scope, developed cooperatively among Federal, State, tribal, local authorities, and regional governance structures, with substantial stakeholder and public input.

The Interagency Ocean Policy Task Force, which was established by President Obama on June 12, 2009, is led by White House Council on Environmental Quality Chair Nancy Sutley, consists of 24 senior-level officials from Administration agencies, departments, and offices.

“The uses of our oceans, coasts and Great Lakes have expanded exponentially over time. These waters provide the United States with many commercial, recreational, cultural, energy, scientific, economic, conservation and national security benefits and they sustain diverse habitats and species. At the same time they are facing environmental challenges including pollution and habitat destruction that make them increasingly vulnerable,” said Nancy Sutley, Chair of the White House Council on Environmental Quality. “Without an improved, more thoughtful approach, we risk an increase in user conflicts and the potential loss of critical economic, ecosystem, social, and cultural benefits for present and future generations.”

"Coastal and marine spatial planning may sound like the stuff of policy wonks, but it is actually vital to anyone who works or plays on the oceans," said Dr. Jane Lubchenco, Under Secretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere and NOAA administrator. "In fact, coastal and marine spatial planning is an essential tool for anyone who depends on the oceans for sustainable jobs, healthy seafood, clean energy, recreation, or vibrant coastal communities."

“America is a maritime nation so we must consider how we can protect the environment, facilitate maritime commerce, and responsibly harness oceanic resources. By pursuing a “whole of government” approach, we can meet our broad goals while protecting our way of life,” said Coast Guard Commandant, Admiral Thad Allen.

“Marine Spatial Planning is an important tool that will inform the decisions that the Department of the Interior makes under its many existing coastal and ocean authorities,” said Associate Deputy Secretary Laura Davis. “It is important that we make every effort to improve communication and coordination on these issues among the federal government, states and stakeholders.”

“The interim framework strengthens the work we do with states, tribes, partners and other stakeholders to protect vital resources in our oceans, coasts, and the Great Lakes,” said Peter Silva, EPA's Assistant Administrator for the Office of Water. “By opening up the flow of information and promoting transparent, sound science, we will be better equipped to deliver the environmental, economic, and health benefits the public rightly expects.”

In developing the Interim Report and Interim Framework, the Task Force undertook a robust public engagement process. The Task Force heard from and involved stakeholders and interested parties, including holding six regional public meetings, convening 38 expert briefings, and receiving almost four thousand individual comments via the web.

The Interim Framework includes a number of important provisions that would significantly overhaul the Federal government’s approach to coastal and marine planning, including:

- **A New Approach to How We Use and Protect the Ocean, Coast, and Great Lakes.** The Interim Framework is designed to: decrease user conflicts; improve planning and regulatory efficiencies and decrease their associated costs and delays; and preserve critical ecosystem function and services. The Interim Framework describes how such plans would be developed and implemented, and provides timeframes and steps for phased implementation of the framework.
- **Moves us Away From Sector-by-Sector and Statute-by-Statute Decision-Making.** While many existing permitting processes include aspects of coordinated planning, most focus solely on a limited range of management tools and outcomes (e.g., oil and gas leases, fishery management plans, and marine protected areas). Comprehensive marine spatial planning presents a more integrated, comprehensive, ecosystem-based, flexible, and proactive approach to planning and managing uses and activities.
- **Brings Federal, State, and Tribal Partners Together in an Unprecedented Manner to Jointly Plan for the Future.** The Interim Framework is not a top-down planning effort. Rather, it describes a new approach to Federal resource planning that is regionally based and developed cooperatively among Federal, State, tribal, and local authorities, and regional governance structures, through the establishment of nine regional planning bodies.
- **Places Science-Based Information at the Heart of Decision-Making:** Scientific data, information and knowledge, as well as relevant traditional knowledge, will be the underpinning of the regionally developed plans.

- **Emphasizes Stakeholder and Public Participation:** The planning process would be fully transparent and participatory – requiring frequent and robust stakeholder engagement throughout all steps of the process (i.e., development, adoption, implementation, adaptation and evaluation).

The Task Force’s Interim Framework is now available for a 60-day public review and comment period. After the close of the comment period on the Interim Framework, the Task Force will finalize its recommendations in both this report and the September 10, 2009 Interim Report, and provide a final report to the President in early 2010.

For more details on the Interagency Ocean Policy Task Force, including the Interim Framework, and to submit your comments, please go to www.whitehouse.gov/oceans.

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