

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

CHARTING THE COURSE Securing the Future of America's Oceans



OCEAN PRIORITIES FOR THE OBAMA ADMINISTRATION AND CONGRESS

June 2013

This report was developed by the Joint Ocean Commission Initiative, a bipartisan collaboration of senior leaders representing diverse interests in our oceans. It presents recommended actions that the Obama Administration and Congress should implement to effectively manage our ocean resources so that we can ensure they are healthy and vibrant to support our future.

We are an ocean nation, bounded by the vast Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, the Gulf of Mexico, and the Great Lakes. We are also an Arctic nation with responsibility for the management of this sensitive and strategically important region. Our oceans and coasts are vital to our nation's economy and security, as well as to the health and quality of life of its citizens. Oceans are the engines of our planet's weather and climate systems, and they provide important sources of protein. Natural coastal features, such as dunes and wetlands, offer cost-effective protection for our communities against powerful storms, and they provide important

habitat for coastal and marine life. Our national economy also relies greatly on our oceans, including for tourism, fisheries, oil and gas, minerals, shipping, and transportation. Our oceans offer excellent potential for development of renewable energy, offshore aquaculture, and other economic opportunities of the future. Coastal counties are some of our nation's most populous, and they generate more than one-third of our Gross Domestic Product.

Unfortunately, the continued ability of our oceans to provide these many benefits into the future is at risk. While ocean management is improving through new processes for coordination across jurisdictions, additional attention must be paid to enhancing the resiliency of coastal communities and ocean ecosystems to dramatic changes underway in our oceans. Our nation must also promote renewable energy development and return more of the revenues generated by activities on the Outer Continental Shelf to ocean science and management activities. Our federal government should more strongly support state and regional efforts to address their ocean and coastal priorities. And finally, we must urgently improve our scientific understanding and management of the sensitive and important Arctic region. Addressing each of these priorities requires enhanced coordination of the agencies and states managing our oceans in order to maximize benefits and efficiencies, as well as sufficient federal investment.

The various elements of ocean and coastal ecosystems are closely interconnected, as are the management authorities governing those elements. For this reason, implementing any of the recommendations presented in this report would provide benefits to all ocean and coastal ecosystems and to the many Americans who rely on them for health, wealth, and well-being. These recommendations present a powerful opportunity to shape the future of our oceans and secure the future of our ocean nation. The Joint Ocean Commission Initiative urges our leaders in the Administration and Congress to seize this opportunity.

The challenges we face in managing our oceans effectively also present opportunities for innovation, collaboration, and action. Our oceans are held in the public trust, and we must act together to secure the future of our oceans and the health and wealth of our ocean nation. This report describes the following recommendations, which are focused on four action areas the Obama Administration and Congress should implement in the next two to four years:

Action 1: Enhance the resiliency of coastal communities and ocean ecosystems to dramatic changes underway in our oceans and on our coasts

RECOMMENDATION 1.1: The Administration and Congress should boost funding and support for programs that protect and restore critical coastal features, such as wetlands, dune systems, mangroves, salt marshes, seagrass beds, and coral reefs, all of which provide valuable services, including buffering against storm surges, purifying water, providing habitat for important species, and offering recreational opportunities.

RECOMMENDATION 1.2: The Administration and Congress should provide the support necessary for states and communities to upgrade critical coastal infrastructure, including wastewater and transportation systems, so they are more resilient and able to withstand and adapt to the impacts of coastal hazards, including extreme weather events, sea-level rise, and other changes along our coasts.

RECOMMENDATION 1.3: The Administration and Congress should provide increased funding and support for ocean science infrastructure and research programs needed to understand the complex and dynamic relationship between the oceans and climate and improve our forecasting capabilities.

RECOMMENDATION 1.4: The Administration and Congress should take actions to measure and assess the emerging threat of ocean acidification, better understand the complex dynamics causing and exacerbating it, work to determine its impact, and develop mechanisms to address the problem.

Action 2: Promote ocean renewable energy development and reinvest in our oceans

RECOMMENDATION 2.1: The Administration and Congress should accelerate ocean renewable energy development by providing adequate and stable financial and tax incentives and a fair and efficient regulatory structure. As part of providing this structure, they should support state- and region-led efforts to coordinate data and decision making, engage stakeholders, and bring competing interests together. This can facilitate efficient siting of projects that meet our energy objectives while protecting existing uses of the ocean and important ecosystem features.

RECOMMENDATION 2.2: Congress should establish a dedicated ocean investment fund to invest a modest portion of the revenues from offshore commercial energy activities to provide the financial support for national, regional, state, and local programs working to understand and manage our ocean and coastal resources. If Congress pursues legislation to share revenue from offshore energy leasing and development, a reasonable portion of these funds should be dedicated to improving ocean and coastal science, management, and ecosystem restoration at the federal, regional, state, and local levels.

Action 3: Support state and regional ocean and coastal priorities

RECOMMENDATION 3.1: The Administration and Congress should strongly support multi-state regional ocean partnerships that coordinate data and decision making across jurisdictions, make progress on shared priorities, and more effectively engage ocean and coastal stakeholders. This will allow states to build on current progress toward improved decision-making about coastal and ocean resources and priority economic drivers.

Action 4: Improve Arctic research and management

RECOMMENDATION 4.1: Congress and the Administration should fully implement the National Strategy for the Arctic Region and ensure opportunities for public input and engagement. They should also diligently prepare for U.S. leadership of the Arctic Council and lay the groundwork now for establishing a sound international management framework that meets multiple interests while protecting a sensitive and rapidly changing ecosystem.

RECOMMENDATION 4.2: Congress and the Administration should implement a coordinated scientific research program in the U.S. Arctic that is supported by a strong ocean observing system and adequate infrastructure—including vessels, polar class icebreakers, and fundamental platforms for research. The program should prioritize gaps in current research and connect research and management needs, such as oil spill response and recovery.

RECOMMENDATION 4.3: The Administration and Congress should increase funding for federal agencies operating in the region, particularly the U.S. Coast Guard and NOAA. They should also urge federal agencies—including the U.S. Department of Defense and the National Science Foundation—to better collaborate with state and local governments, Alaskan Native governments, and industry to improve the ability of commercial entities to operate safely in the region and ensure effective response and recovery in the event of a natural or human-caused disaster. This includes improving coordination and data-sharing on oil spill planning, preparedness, and response, vessel tracking and search-and-rescue, as well as investment in new icebreakers, aircraft, and shore-based infrastructure.

RECOMMENDATION 4.4: The U.S. Senate should act expeditiously to provide its advice and consent to accede to the Law of the Sea Convention.

For the full report, please see www.jointoceancommission.org.

About the Joint Ocean Commission Initiative

Established in 2005, the Joint Ocean Commission Initiative promotes and maintains the important work of the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy and the Pew Oceans Commission. The Joint Ocean Commission Initiative Leadership Council is composed of former members of the two commissions and other experienced individuals from a variety of sectors, including industry, government, academia, and national security at the national, state, local, and regional levels.

The Joint Initiative's primary goal is to catalyze ocean policy reform and action at the national, regional, state, and local levels. The Joint Initiative provides high-level, credible, and bipartisan leadership and engagement on ocean and coastal policy issues and distills a clear sense of priorities, communicates them to key decision makers, and educates and cultivates current and new ocean champions. The Joint Initiative was originally co-chaired by the late Admiral James D. Watkins (chair of the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy) and Leon E. Panetta (chair of the Pew Oceans Commission) and is currently co-chaired by William Ruckelshaus and Norman Mineta. The Joint Initiative's 16-member Leadership Council brings expertise, credibility, perspective, and diversity of interests to the ocean policy dialogue. Meridian Institute serves as the secretariat for the Joint Initiative.

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**The list of Joint Initiative Leadership Council Members was current as of the date of publication, June 2013.*



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