

NATIONAL OCEAN POLICY

CONSERVATION LAW FOUNDATION



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For a thriving New England

New England's oceans and coasts have shaped our economy, our culture and our way of life for centuries. The waters off the New England coast are home to some of the country's most unique habitat areas and endangered wildlife species. At the same time, New England's oceans and coasts hold some of the most promising areas for offshore wind energy development in the country and provide \$16.5 billion in annual revenue from recreational and commercial fishing and tourism alone. Taking full advantage of our cherished resources in a sustainable manner that respects current ocean uses is vital to the health of New England's environment and economy.

Ocean Management in New England: Ahead of the Curve

New England is a national leader in the smart planning of ocean and coastal use. In January of 2010, the Massachusetts ocean management plan became the nation's first-ever comprehensive management plan for state ocean waters. In 2009, Maine designated test sites for offshore energy projects by seeking input from a variety of stakeholders to ensure that renewable energy development is compatible with Maine's historic coastal communities. And, demonstrating a commitment to better planning, Rhode Island completed the Ocean Special Area Management Plan in 2010 that will help to advance offshore wind energy while respecting current ocean uses and protecting important ocean wildlife and critical habitat. These all serve as leading examples to other states and were models upon which the federal government developed the National Ocean Policy.

The National Ocean Policy and Strategic Action Plans

On July 19, 2010 President Obama signed an Executive Order establishing an integrated National Policy for the Stewardship of the Ocean, Our Coasts, and the Great Lakes (National Ocean Policy, or NOP). The NOP was developed by a task force of 25 federal agencies and departments to fulfill the president's directive for "a national policy that ensures the protection, maintenance, and restoration of the health of ocean, coastal, and Great Lakes ecosystems and resources, enhances the sustainability of ocean and coastal economies, preserves our maritime heritage, provides for adaptive management to enhance our understanding of and capacity to respond to climate change, and is coordinated with our national security and foreign policy interests."

Improving the way in which federal and state agencies work with each other and the public is a distinct goal of the National Ocean Policy. To do this, the NOP presents a set of nine priority objectives for policies and management actions (see box on the next page) and establishes a new National Ocean Council (NOC), which will be responsible for developing strategic action plans for these priority objectives and leading coordination and collaboration between federal agencies. The National Ocean Policy also presents great opportunities for improving economic development and creating jobs through wiser planning and better data and information collection.



Smart planning of ocean uses allows us to protect habitat for threatened species such as the Atlantic wolffish. (Photo credit: Jonathan Bird)

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About CLF

Since 1966, Conservation Law Foundation has used the law, science, policymaking, and the business market to find pragmatic, innovative solutions to New England's toughest environmental problems.

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NINE PRIORITY OBJECTIVES

Overarching Approaches: "How we do business"

- **Ecosystem-Based Management:** Adopt ecosystem-based management as a foundational principle for comprehensive management of the ocean, our coasts, and the Great Lakes
- **Coastal and Marine Spatial Planning:** Implement comprehensive, integrated, ecosystem-based coastal and marine spatial planning and management in the U.S.
- **Inform Decisions and Improve Understanding:** Increase knowledge to continually inform and improve management and policy decisions and the capacity to respond to change and challenges. Better educate the public through formal and informal programs.
- **Coordinate and Support:** Better coordinate and support federal, state, tribal, local, and regional management of the ocean, our coasts, and the Great Lakes. Improve coordination and integration across the federal government and, as appropriate, engage with the international community.

Areas of Special Emphasis:

- **Resiliency and Adaptation to Climate Change and Ocean Acidification:** Strengthen resiliency of coastal communities and marine and Great Lakes environments and their abilities to adapt to climate change impacts and ocean acidification.
- **Regional Ecosystem Protection and Restoration:** Establish and implement an integrated ecosystem protection and restoration strategy that is science-based and aligns conservation and restoration goals at the federal, state, tribal, local, and regional levels.
- **Water Quality and Sustainable Practices on Land:** Enhance water quality in the ocean, along our coasts, and in the Great Lakes by promoting and implementing sustainable practices on land
- **Changing Conditions in the Arctic:** Address environmental stewardship needs in the Arctic Ocean and adjacent coastal areas in the face of climate-induced and other environmental changes
- **Observations, Mapping, and Infrastructure:** Strengthen and integrate federal and non-federal observing systems, sensors, data collection platforms, data management, and mapping capabilities into a national system, and integrate that system into international observation efforts.

Conserving Our Ocean Treasures

One of the greatest opportunities under the National Ocean Policy is to conserve some of our country's most remarkable natural treasures—those that are far offshore and out of the public eye. Consider Georges Bank, just 100 miles due east of Boston and one of the most biologically productive ecosystems in the world. Known the world over for its historic cod and haddock fisheries, few know about the magnificent deep-water canyons that radiate off its eastern edge and are home to a stunning array of deep-water corals, sponges, sea anemones and diverse fish. Off the coast of Maine lies Cashes Ledge, another biodiversity hot spot that supports an unusual

and expansive deep-water kelp forest. And then there are Stellwagen Bank, Schoodic Ridge, Jordan Basin, Fippennies Ledge and Bear Seamount—all places with wondrous attributes. Without a policy that coordinates stewardship and management of these valuable resources at the federal, state and regional levels, their health and the intricate web of life that depends on them are at risk.

Learn more by reading *Final Recommendations of the Interagency Ocean Policy Task Force* at www.whitehouse.gov/files/documents/OPTF_FinalRecs.pdf. Information about the National Ocean Council is at www.whitehouse.gov/administration/eop/oceans.