

Planning for Florida's Ocean and Coastal Future: Recommendations of the Florida Coastal and Ocean Coalition

The Florida Coastal and Ocean Coalition

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Florida Coastal and Ocean Coalition

Background

Florida has five million acres of tidally submerged land, 8,426 miles of tidal shoreline, 825 miles of sandy beaches, and no portion of the state is greater than 60 miles from the coast. We are a “coastal and ocean state” - our lifestyle, livelihoods and heritage are uniquely intertwined with the coastal and marine environments. Florida’s coral reefs, estuaries, sandy beaches and coastal wetlands are not only world renowned natural resources and attractions, but also Florida’s economic engine. These ecosystems support a thriving tourism industry which supports many service related jobs and manufacturing industries. Florida’s ecosystems can also be the creator for new technological advancements in ocean energy, engineering, pharmaceutical, aquaculture and other human related industries and jobs. Without proper management, these resources that define and sustain Florida will be overcrowded, depleted, or destroyed.

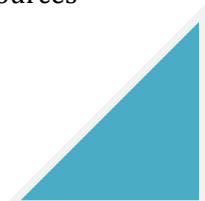
Florida has a myriad of coastal and marine programs and policies to address these resources and activities housed in various agencies, including the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (DACS), the Department of Community Affairs (DCA), and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWCC). There is a need for increased coordination among these agency programs and policies and an overarching vision of how coastal and marine natural resources should be managed. Fractured government programs on ocean and coastal policy create a confusing array of regulations that prove frustrating to citizens and businesses and undermine effective marine protection. A more coordinated, integrated approach needs to be developed for marine and coastal resource protection that emphasizes adaptive ecosystem management, maintenance of ecosystem services, science-based management, reduction of competing uses and transparency.

The *Deepwater Horizon* explosion and spill closed Florida commercial and recreational fisheries, soiled its panhandle beaches, and threatened more extensive damage, thereby causing massive economic losses to the state’s tourism industry and to Florida residents. These events are stark reminders of the fragility and connectivity of Florida’s coastal and marine environment and the impact that decisions made in Gulf of Mexico federal waters can have on Florida’s economy and environment.

On July 19, 2010 President Obama signed an Executive Order establishing a National Policy for the stewardship of the nation’s oceans, coasts, and Great Lakes. The Executive Order attempts to strengthen ocean governance and coordination, establishing guiding principles for ocean management, and adopts a flexible framework

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for effective coastal and marine spatial planning to address conservation, economic activity, user conflict and sustainable use of the nation's oceans and coasts.

It is anticipated that the new national program would be implemented by regional plans developed by councils of coastal states and federal agencies with common ocean and coastal resources, goals and interests. Being bordered by both the Gulf of Mexico and the South Atlantic Ocean, Florida is uniquely positioned to positively influence not only a state coastal and marine policy and spatial plan, but also the Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic regional federal plans. If Florida is able to enact a comprehensive coastal and marine spatial plan it would provide a strong framework and demonstrate leadership for a compatible federal coastal and marine spatial plan on either coast.

In 2011 Florida will have a new Governor and a new Board of Trustees (Cabinet) in charge of state submerged lands and resources. State offices, Legislators, Congressional members and local government officials will also change. Florida's new administration, at every level, will undoubtedly face environmental and economic challenges as Florida struggles to rebuild and recovers from an unprecedented oil spill and a down economy.

Florida Coastal and Ocean Conference

The Florida Coastal and Ocean Coalition is a group of organizations working together to conserve, protect and restore Florida's coastal and marine environment. The Coalition emphasizes the implementation of an ecosystem-based approach to coastal and ocean management, as well as recognition of the important linkage between the health of Florida's economy and the health of its beaches and dunes, coral reefs, mangroves, sea grasses, wetlands and other natural resources. The Coalition calls on Florida's Congressional delegation, Governor, State Agencies, Cabinet, and Legislature for action and leadership to achieve the goal of healthy ocean and coastal ecosystems. We have produced a number of policy papers including [*Florida's Coastal and Ocean Future: A Blueprint for Economic and Environmental Leadership*](#), [*Florida Coastal and Ocean Policy Report Card*](#), and [*Preparing for a Sea Change – A Strategy to Cope with the Impacts of Global Warming on the State's Coastal and Marine Systems*](#), and most recently hosted *The Florida Coastal and Ocean Conference* in Tallahassee, Florida on June 18, 2010. This conference attracted policymakers, resource managers, agency leaders, academics and interested members of the public from around the state. It had been over a decade since a similar coastal and ocean conference was held in Florida.

The goal of the Conference was to explore key issues and identify solutions facing Florida's coasts and oceans, including marine spatial planning, water quality, the future of Florida's coasts, and marine ecosystems and fisheries. The conference format provided expert presentations and facilitated group discussion with audience input on all

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topics during a time when, due to the *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill, Florida has a heightened awareness of our economic and cultural dependence on healthy oceans and coasts. Gulf restoration of natural resources and economies negatively impacted by the *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill has been a topic of great interest to the public in all Gulf coast states, particularly Florida. Projects which help the Gulf marine and coastal ecosystem and economy recover in Florida in an efficient and proper way are now an overriding goal of the Coalition that touches all topics identified below.

Coalition Recommendations

The following recommendations of the Florida Coastal and Ocean Coalition draw on the June 2010 conference the Coalition hosted—the expert presentations and breakout sessions—as well as discussions with Florida policy makers, leaders of the Florida Ocean Alliance, the Florida Ocean and Coastal Council and others over the last year or more. Though the following ocean and coastal policy recommendations are those of the Florida Coastal and Ocean Coalition, they are informed by the input of a large number of Florida’s coastal and ocean policy and public leaders.

Florida Ocean and Coastal Policy and Marine Spatial Planning

A comprehensive coastal and marine policy with an accompanying plan of implementation should be developed to ensure the long-term protection of Florida’s coastal and ocean environments, minimize user conflicts, and prevent resource damage.

Florida Coastal and Ocean Policy Recommendations:

- The State should develop and adopt a comprehensive, science and ecosystem-based coastal and ocean policy that: 1) articulates a long-term vision for the protection of the state’s coastal and marine environments; 2) contains clearly defined goals; 3) addresses environmental, economic and social issues; and 4) is developed in consultation with stakeholders and the general public.
- The Policy should be adopted through an Executive Order issued by the Governor and/or through Legislative enactment.
- The Policy should recognize the strong land-sea connection—what happens on land affects the ocean and what happens in the ocean affects the land. It should also incorporate climate change considerations, including the risks associated with climate change, the need for enhanced resiliency in the face of anticipated climate change and adaptation strategies.

Marine Spatial Planning Recommendations:

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- The State should develop a coastal and marine spatial plan (CMSP)¹ to implement the coastal and ocean policy.
 - DEP should take the lead in CMSP development, with input from FWCC, DCA, water management districts, and key Legislative committees;
 - The CMSP should be approved by the Governor and Cabinet;
 - Agencies should adopt rules implementing the CMSP; and
 - The Board of Trustees, which is responsible for sovereign submerged lands, should play a key role in plan adoption and implementation.
- The CMSP should be ecosystem-based and proactive, it should guide where and whether different uses may proceed in particular marine areas. The goal should be to protect ecological functions and important ecological areas, avoid conflict among uses and resource degradation, and provide certainty for users.
- The CMSP should be scaled to encompass regional ecosystem boundaries and influence decisions in federal waters that affect state resources.
- The DEP and FWC should develop a data base of information, including a comprehensive geographic information system (GIS), which can be used to prepare the marine spatial plan. The agencies should use the information to make maps accessible to all for review and input, including creating a holistic map of all assets. The information should be available to all agencies and for review by the public.
- The CMSP should provide a process for resolving conflicts and decision making involving different resource users and authorities.
- The State should solicit federal funding for coastal and marine spatial planning.
- The process should involve stakeholders and the general public in all decisions.

Water Quality- Numeric Nutrient Criteria

Protecting Florida's coastal and marine resources requires that our waters remain clean and the natural rhythms of tide, upland drainage, and groundwater recharge remain dependable and uninterrupted. Additionally, given much of the economy and livelihood of Florida is driven by our environment; maintaining water quality to support estuaries, coral reefs, seagrass beds, fishing, and beach activities must be given a high priority.

Water Quality- Numeric Nutrient Criteria Recommendations:

¹ We recommend that the geographic scope of the plan should extend landward at least to the mean high-water mark, including inland bays and estuaries, to be consistent with the framework for coastal and marine spatial planning set out in the Final Recommendations of the federal Interagency Ocean Policy Task Force, p. 49 (July 19, 2010).

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- DEP should consider the unique and interconnected relationship between all onshore anthropogenic pollution sources and the increased nutrient loading of nearshore coastal waters when setting science-based numeric nutrient criteria for all coastal waters and estuaries.
- DEP should create statewide science-based stormwater regulations.
- DEP should review their current water quality methodologies and not consider wetlands a nutrient pollutant source or use natural wetlands for direct stormwater treatment.
- The state should address legacy nutrients in sediments through restoration.

Marine Fisheries: Catch, Allocation, and Accountability

Florida is one of the nation's premiere destinations for recreational fishing. Both commercial and recreational fishing contribute immensely to our economy, quality of life, and to the character of our coastal communities. Overfishing threatens these activities and compromises the health of the marine environment. Stopping overfishing is a winning proposition for the fish, fishermen, and Florida's economy. Only through increased stewardship and science-based regulations can we reverse the chronic decline of Florida's fish species and ensure healthy fisheries that will benefit both the ecosystem and recreational and commercial fishermen that support our coastal economies.

Fisheries Recommendations:

- FWCC should work with both South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Councils and the National Marine Fishery Service to improve the independent fishery research and data collection for all fishing sectors - commercial, private recreational, and for-hire charter fishing.
- FWCC should ensure state rule consistency with federally managed species plans for recreational and commercial fisheries to eliminate overfishing, rebuild overfished populations and ensure their sustainable use in the future.
- The State should ensure that allocations of fish among various fishing sectors (see above) are fair, equitable and accountable.
- FWCC should provide research to better understand the true economics between and among the various sectors (above) of fishing in Florida.
- Based on best available science, FWCC should ensure that populations of reef and other fish species off Florida are managed in such a way as to rapidly recover from any anticipated impact from the Deepwater Horizon oil spill and any other manmade or natural impacts.

Shifting Sands- Future of Florida's Coasts

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Although important to Florida's economy and way of life, improperly sited coastal development and activities can threaten sensitive coastal environments and place people and property at risk. Sandy beaches, which help define our heritage and way of life, are home to a diverse array of marine wildlife. These coastal habitats also serve valuable functions such as attenuating floods and protecting structures and people from storm surge, supporting our coastal economies and tourism, and providing a host of ecological services.

Coastal Recommendations:

- The siting and construction of shoreline development adjacent to sandy beaches is regulated through the state's Coastal Construction Control Line Program. DEP should convene an advisory group of experts to undertake a comprehensive reevaluation of the program to ensure it is accomplishing its resource protection goals as intended. Recommend changes that are warranted.
- DEP, working with interested stakeholders, should better inform and educate policy makers and the public about decisions that impact the dynamic nature of beaches and the coastal ecosystem. The State Legislature should provide for enhanced public notice of risks associated with living adjacent to dynamic shorelines.
- The Legislature, working with appropriate state agencies, should limit public expenditures that subsidize development in high risk and high hazard coastal areas.
- Engineered navigation inlets are responsible for up to 70% of coastal erosion in Florida. In 2008 the Florida Legislature passed legislation that redirects the state's effort at reducing this erosion and supports the development of inlet management plans. The DEP should fully implement the inlet management and sand bypassing laws.
- Offshore sand deposits are researched and inventoried in the Reconnaissance Offshore Sand Search (ROSS) database. The DEP should continue this program and incorporate offshore sand resource protection goals into a comprehensive marine spatial planning policy.
- The Coastal Barrier Resources Act was established in 1982 (CBRA). CBRA denies federal subsidies to development projects on undeveloped areas on coastal barriers prone to erosion and flood damage. Congress should preserve the integrity of the Coastal Barrier Resources Act and avoid removing lands from its jurisdiction. Consideration should be given to expanding the scope of its coverage and purpose.

The Florida Coastal and Ocean Coalition looks forward to working with the current and future leaders of Florida to implement these recommendations, particularly the need to create a comprehensive ocean and coastal policy and coastal and marine spatial plan

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and meaningful Gulf restoration projects. A new, coordinated and integrated approach to coastal and marine resource protection and management will benefit Florida's environment, economy and quality of life and help government better plan for Florida's new growth and economic future.

As Florida's new leadership takes office, the Florida Coastal and Ocean Coalition looks forward to opportunities for continued communication and collaboration on implementation of these recommendations and others so that together we can plan for and protect the future of Florida's coastal and marine environment.

For more information and an opportunity for discussion of these topics please visit our website www.flcoastalandocean.org or contact Lindsey Pickel, Coalition Coordinator at lpickel@flcoastalandocean.org

Florida Coastal & Ocean Coalition – Steering Committee

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