

Strategic Action Plan Full Content Outlines Preface

Introduction

The National Policy for the Stewardship of the Ocean, our Coasts, and the Great Lakes (National Ocean Policy) sets forth a vision – “An America whose stewardship ensures that the ocean, our coasts, and the Great Lakes are healthy and resilient, safe and productive, and understood and treasured so as to promote the well-being, prosperity, and security of present and future generations.”

By establishing the National Ocean Policy, the President set in motion a series of events designed to make this vision a reality. First, he directed Federal agencies to work together to be better stewards of ocean coastal, and Great Lakes ecosystems and the valuable services they provide. The National Ocean Council (NOC) brings together the leaders of those Federal agencies, departments, and other entities with missions representing the breadth of interests that are necessary to achieve the vision.

Second, he initiated implementation of the National Ocean Policy through nine priority objectives that fall into two categories. The ‘How We Do Business’ objectives are aimed at improving how the Federal government carries out its stewardship responsibilities. ‘Areas of Special Emphasis’ are priorities that require immediate and sustained attention to ensure that our ocean, coastal, and Great Lakes ecosystems, and the communities and economies they sustain, remain healthy and productive.

| How we do Business | Areas of Special Emphasis |
|--|--|
| Ecosystem-Based Management | Resiliency and Adaptation to Climate Change and Ocean Acidification |
| Coastal and Marine Spatial Planning | Regional Ecosystem Protection and Restoration |
| Inform Decisions and Improve Understanding | Water Quality and Sustainable Practices on Land |
| Coordinate and Support | Changing Conditions in the Arctic |
| | Ocean, Coastal and Great Lakes Observation, Mapping and Infrastructure |

Third, he instructed the agencies to develop strategic action plans to address the nine priority objectives that provide a bridge between the National Ocean Policy and action on the ground and in the water. The NOC is overseeing development of strategic action plans for each of the nine objectives in which these details will be described.

Strategic Action Plans

The plans are designed to address specific actions that Federal agencies can undertake to advance the National Ocean Policy and are focused on identifying areas where we can realistically achieve results.

The strategic action plans are preliminary documents that constitute an important but interim step toward completion of the full strategic action plans.

The strategic action plans will identify specific and measurable near-term, mid-term, and long-termⁱ actions, with appropriate milestones, performance measures, and outcomes to meet each priority objective. Each plan will identify lead and participating Federal agencies, gaps and needs in science and technology, potential resource requirements and efficiencies, and steps for integrating and/or coordinating Federal agency budgets. The plans will be adaptive to allow for updating and revision based on new information or changing conditions. By having a unifying National Ocean Policy that clearly articulates priorities and addresses them through the development of strategic action plans, we can more effectively ensure that the limited Federal resources we have are targeted to deliver demonstrable and significant results.

Advancing the National Ocean Policy

The nine strategic action plans will be collectively designed to advance the vision of the National Ocean Policy and uphold its principles of environmental stewardship, science-based decisions, ecosystem-based and adaptive management, balanced resource use, support for research, improved awareness and education, international cooperation and leadership, measurable benchmarks, and integrated, interagency planning. The plans are intended to demonstrate the connection between stewardship of the ocean, our coasts, and the Great Lakes and the broad national goals of environmental health and sustainability, human health and well-being, national prosperity, social justice, international diplomacy, and homeland security. These plans will be living documents that will be revisited and revised for the benefit of our Nation's people.

One priority objective that has drawn particular attention is coastal and marine spatial planning (CMSP). It is important to note that the National Ocean Policy and the CMSP strategic action plan set out a *process* by which CMSP will be undertaken; *neither prescribes particular outcomes*. Development of and decisions about specific spatial plans will be made by Regional Planning Bodies that will include representation from Federal, state, and tribal governments, with substantial stakeholder and public participation.

Strategic Action Plan Full Content Outlines

As a first step in developing strategic action plans, writing teams composed of representatives from the NOC agencies have developed what we call 'full content outlines' for each plan. The purpose of the outlines is to provide an *initial* view as to how Federal agencies might address the priority objectives as described in the National Ocean Policy. They are preliminary documents that constitute an important but interim step toward completion of the full strategic action plans. The outlines, by design, do not and are not intended to provide all of the details that will be provided in the full plans. Nor is there necessarily the same level of specificity across all outlines. The outlines serve as an early and valuable point in the plan development process for focusing public and stakeholder input.

Each outlineⁱⁱ presents, in bulleted form, potential actions to address its priority objective. They briefly describe the reason for taking the action, expected outcomes and milestones, gaps and needs in science and technology, and the timeframe for completing the action. They also provide an overview of the

priority objective the strategic action plan will address, and the greater context for the plan in implementing the National Ocean Policy.

While the full content outlines have received a preliminary vetting with all participating agencies, this is an ongoing process to be further informed by comments received during the public comment period (See below). None of the actions listed yet represents a commitment on the part of participating agencies. Some actions may be removed or modified, and others may be added in the final product.

Developing the Full Content Outlines

In developing the outlines - and ultimately the full plans - the writing teams were operating under certain parameters that guided their discussions. Each plan is to have approximately six actions that are focused on Federal efforts. The actions are to be succinct, feasible activities based on measurable and achievable outcomes within the milestones and timeframe indicated. They are to be consistent with the President's management and budget goals, especially in consideration of the current budget climate in which little to no new resources likely will be available in the near- to mid-term. In that light, the actions are intended to focus on eliminating redundancy, encouraging efficiency, and evaluating and prioritizing ongoing and new activities. Options for long-term activities requiring additional resources will be considered as plans are developed in the out-years.

Further, the outlines and the coming full plans are to emphasize activities that can be undertaken by Federal agencies, either alone or with partners. For example, it was not within the purview of the writing teams to include an action such as ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (though it is specifically endorsed within the National Ocean Policy) since this decision rests with the U.S. Senate. The outlines also do not suggest changes to existing legislation or proposing new legislation.

There was coordination among the writing teams as dictated by the interconnected nature of the priority objectives. For example, ecosystem-based management goes hand-in-hand with coastal and marine spatial planning, is informed by science, and must be done with regional ecosystem protection and restoration activities in mind. The writing teams also considered other geographic initiatives and partnerships, including the Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Task Force, and activities in the Great Lakes and the Chesapeake Bay. These connections will be further explored and described as the full plans are developed.

From the beginning of the plan development process, the NOC solicited public input via its website and other engagement activities. Approximately 600 comments were received from approximately 70 individuals and entities. In addition, the NOC's Governance Coordinating Committee, composed of state, tribal, and local government officials, and its official advisory body, the Ocean Research and Resources Advisory Panel, provided input. The writing teams considered these comments as they developed and refined the outlines. While some of these comments could be addressed in the outlines, others will be taken up as the writing teams develop full draft plans.

Public and Stakeholder Comments

Stakeholders and the public have the opportunity to view these outlines and provide input on them during the June 2 - July 2, 2011 public comment period. Public comments on the outlines will help inform development of the full plans. Draft full plans will be made available for public review and comment later this year.

ⁱ Near-term is approximately one year. Mid-term is approximately 3-5 years. Long-term is longer than 5 years.

ⁱⁱ Development of the full strategic action plan for Coastal and Marine Spatial Planning is on a specialized track due to the nature of the topic. While it is connected to the other eight full content outlines, it is presented in a different format.

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