

**TESTIMONY OF
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**BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE OCEANS, ATMOSPHERE, FISHERIES AND COAST
GUARD
COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND TRANSPORTATION
UNITED STATES SENATE**

**REGARDING
THE NATIONAL OCEAN POLICY TASK FORCE'S INTERIM REPORT AND
FRAMEWORK FOR COASTAL AND MARINE SPATIAL PLANNING**

NOVEMBER 4, 2009

Chairwoman Cantwell, Ranking Member Snowe and members of the Subcommittee, my name is Laura Davis. I am the Associate Deputy Secretary of the Department of the Interior. I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss the President's Interagency Ocean Policy Task Force and the Department of the Interior's role in the process and its oceans and coastal responsibilities.

In establishing the Interagency Ocean Policy Task Force, the President said, "We have a stewardship responsibility to maintain healthy, resilient, and sustainable ocean, coasts and Great Lakes resources for the benefit of this and future generations." We at the Department of the Interior are proud to be part of the Task Force and pledge to do our part to fulfill the President's vision for a coordinated, comprehensive national policy for our ocean, our coasts and the Great Lakes.

As the Nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior is responsible for conserving and providing access to many of our significant coastal and ocean resources.

The Department manages and conserves ocean and coastal lands and waters to protect native species and their habitats, provide recreational opportunities for the public, and ensure safe and responsible natural resource energy development. Department scientists conduct extensive ocean, coastal, and Great Lakes research and mapping to predict, assess, and manage impacts on coastal and marine environments. In collaboration with our partners, the Department integrates effective multiple-use management from upland ecosystems to deep oceanic waters.

Our oceans, coasts and uplands are interconnected and interdependent both ecologically and economically. As a steward of our ocean and coastal resources, we see first hand, the affects of climate change and other threats and the imperative to increase the resiliency and adaptability of these ecosystems in the face of these challenges.

The 1.7 billion acres of the Outer Continental Shelf that we manage are crucial to securing our energy independence through conventional and renewable energy development. The 35,000 miles of coastal lands and waters of the ocean and Great Lakes we manage stretch across 35 States and territories and are of enormous recreational, biological, and cultural value to the Nation. Over 254 National Park Units and National Wildlife Refuge Units spanning 34 million acres of ocean and coast conserve and protect places where people connect with the ocean. These areas provide communities the ability to preserve their cultural heritage and economic livelihood. We also work with our insular areas to assist them in ensuring that the coral reefs on which their island communities depend will be there for future generations.

I want to convey to you, Madam Chairwoman, and to the members of the Subcommittee, that the Secretary shares the President's commitment to making our ocean, coasts and the Great Lakes healthy, resilient, and sustainable – environmentally and economically – through improved coordination among Federal agencies and partnership with States, territories, Tribes, and regional and local authorities. And I want to thank the fellow members of the Task Force, those here today and not here today, for their participation in this important effort. Chair Sutley is a great leader and each of the members of the Task Force is committed to the President's vision.

NATIONAL OCEAN POLICY TASK FORCE

Recognizing that the time has come for a clear and comprehensive national ocean policy to uphold our stewardship responsibilities, and serve as a model of coordinated, consistent, efficient and informed ocean and coastal decision-making, on June 12, 2009, President Obama issued a memorandum to the heads of executive departments and Federal agencies establishing an Interagency Ocean Policy Task Force. The Task force is led by the White House Council on Environmental Quality and charged with developing a recommendation for a national policy that ensures protection, maintenance, and restoration of the ocean, our coasts and the Great Lakes. It will also recommend a framework for improved stewardship, and effective coastal and marine spatial planning designed to guide us well into the future.

The Department of the Interior has been proudly and actively engaged in the Task Force from the outset. We appreciate that the Task Force collaborations have already strengthened DOI coordination and planning. Interior has also participated in and supported each of the expert roundtables and the series of six public regional meetings with interested stakeholders. Close partnering and extensive public engagement has resulted in greater understanding of the common challenges and opportunities our diverse ocean and coastal responsibilities present and the need for innovative, science-based and ecosystem-based strategies to guide our decision making now and for the long-term.

I am honored to be the Department of the Interior representative on the Task Force. The Department has very actively participated in contributing to the Interim Task Force report that was presented to the President and released to the public in September and we continue to participate in the development of the proposed Coastal and Marine Spatial Planning Framework that will be delivered in December. Senior Departmental and bureau representatives are fully engaged in the numerous subgroup, working group and Task Force meetings that have supported the development of the interim report and the proposed Coastal and Marine Spatial Planning framework. Along with sister agencies, The Department has contributed extensive staff resources to support CEQ in writing these documents. David Hayes, our Deputy Secretary and I have attended the public hearings associated with the Task Force, and the Department hosted the virtual Pacific Islands meeting ensuring Washington connectivity to several Hawaiian Islands and to Guam, American Samoa and to the Commonwealth of Northern Mariana Islands. Departmental representatives have attended roundtable discussions that CEQ staff hosted and have supported all six of the public hearings.

ACTIVITIES OF INTERIOR AGENCIES

As noted above, the Department of the Interior conserves, protects, and manages more than 35,000 miles of coastline, and 254 ocean and coastal parks and refuges, as well as over 1.7 billion underwater acres of the Outer Continental Shelf (OCS). Our scientists conduct extensive ocean, coastal, and Great Lakes research and mapping to predict, assess, and manage impacts on coastal and marine environments.

Through these efforts, Interior has improved its role and effectiveness within the ocean and coastal community at the State, regional, and national levels.

The Department of the Interior is helping lead the development of large-scale ocean and coastal ecosystem-based policies, allowing us to cross jurisdictional lines and tackle key problems with partners to carry out on-the-ground projects, and catalyze collective agency and public involvement to find solutions. I would like to highlight for the Committee a few examples our recent success in coordinating on ocean and coastal issues.

Pursuant to Congressional direction, the Minerals Management Service (MMS), working with NOAA and other Federal agencies, has developed the Multipurpose Marine Cadastre (MMC), which allows Federal managers and technical staff, as well coastal States; local, territorial, and tribal governments; private industry; and the academic community, to directly access information and resources necessary to promote and conduct good ocean governance.

The MMC is an integrated submerged lands spatial information system consisting of legal (e.g., real property/cadastre), physical, biological, human resource, and cultural information in a common reference framework. It is an ambitious, multiyear endeavor that will help greatly inform any marine spatial planning approach.

The MMS has leasing, permitting and oversight responsibility for oil and gas, renewable energy, and mineral activities within the OCS. MMS employs a robust environmental and collaborative process in reviewing these activities including memoranda of understanding with the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC), the U.S. Coast Guard, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Department of Defense, among others.

The U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), a world leader in natural science, is an unbiased, multi-disciplinary earth and biological science agency that works in full partnership with States and Federal agencies, to provide data and maps of the seabed and characterization of the aquatic habitat. From the upper watersheds to the abyssal deep of the ocean, USGS is engaged in monitoring water quality and assessing water availability; forecasting coastal change; building a better understanding of ocean-based hazards from landslides, submarine volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, tsunamis, and extreme storms.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the National Park Service, the Office of Insular Affairs and the Bureau of Land Management all have numerous successful programs underway that work with Federal, State, territory, tribal, international, and private partners to fulfill extensive coastal and marine-based natural resource conservation planning and coordinate statutory responsibilities. Notable activities involve science, mapping, and monitoring, as well as restoring and protecting barrier islands, coastal wetlands, watersheds, and ocean ecosystems.

THE COASTAL AND MARINE SPATIAL PLANNING FRAMEWORK AND INFORMATION INFRASTRUCTURE

The Department of the Interior looks forward to ongoing cooperation and coordination with our partners and stakeholders to meet the President's call to develop a recommended framework for effective coastal and marine spatial planning (CMSP). We share and fully support the President's goal of working toward establishing a framework that is a comprehensive, integrated, ecosystem-based approach to address conservation, economic activity, user conflicts, and sustainable use of ocean, coastal, and Great Lakes resources consistent with international law.

With management responsibility over 35,000 miles of shoreline, Interior very much recognizes the threats to the sustainability of our coastal communities, economy, and natural resources, posed by rising sea levels as today's coasts may become part of tomorrow's oceans. Additionally, Interior supports securing clean, renewable energy security derived from the oceans as a national priority.

CONCLUSION

Interior has and will continue to take a leadership role in national, regional, and local efforts to build the long-term engagement with non-Federal partners to meet goals for coastal and ocean ecosystem and economic health. We stress the coordination of coastal

and ocean activities across the bureaus that are responsive to regional priorities established by the states, and effectively meet departmental strategic goals. We work closely with the ocean and coastal community at the state, regional, and national levels. An Ocean and Coastal Activities Coordinator helps to facilitate this critical coordination.

The President's Interagency Ocean Task Force provides an exciting and important opportunity for us all to work together to develop and implement a coordinated, comprehensive plan for our oceans, coasts and Great Lakes. We look forward to working with you as we go forward with this process and I thank you again for the opportunity to appear before you today.

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