NOAA Ocean Policy Statement

Introduction

Our oceans, coasts, and Great Lakes sustain an abundance of natural wonders while contributing significantly to the economy, supporting numerous beneficial uses such as food production, development of energy and mineral resources, transportation of goods and people, and the discovery of novel medicines. In addition to these provisioning services (products obtained from the ecosystem), our nation's oceans contribute to additional goods and services comprising both use and non-use of the ecosystem, including:

1) Regulating services (benefits derived from regulation of ecosystem processes such as climate regulation, disease regulation);
2) Cultural services (nonmaterial or non-market benefits obtained from ecosystems, such as religious, recreation and ecotourism, aesthetic, cultural heritage); and
3) Supporting services (services necessary for the production of all other services, such as nutrient cycling, primary production).

Definitions:

"Ocean" encompasses the entirety of the Great Lakes, the watersheds flowing into the coastal waters, including open ocean areas to the seaward extent of U.S. jurisdiction.

Policy Goals and Objectives

The purpose of this policy is to identify the roles and responsibilities of NOAA in the stewardship of the nation's oceans. Stewardship of these resources is a joint responsibility encompassing hundreds of international, federal and state authorities cutting across many industries, interest groups, sectors of the economy, stakeholders, constituents and partners.

It is NOAA's policy goal to contribute to an ocean research and governance process that results in an agreed upon set of science-based stewardship objectives and actions. Further, it is NOAA's goal to seek generation of the optimal sustainable value of all the goods and services available from the nation's oceans for current and future generations.

To achieve these goals, it shall be NOAA policy to:

Design, adopt and execute an ecosystem approach to ocean stewardship. This approach must ensure sustainability of resources, conserve biodiversity, and maintain economic, social and cultural access to resources.

The approach shall:

(1) Be science-based and include integrative process studies on ecosystem functions, ecosystem observations, and predictive modeling to forecast ocean processes. Providing necessary and sufficient scientific support for ecosystem-based management will allow resources to be managed in ways that recognize and account for the complex interactions between those resources and other parts of the marine environment.

(2) Deploy an ocean observing system that can describe the actual state of the ocean, coasts, coastal watersheds, and Great Lakes to increase the pace, efficiency, and scope of ocean research for ocean forecasting and management. This includes development of decision support tools that take account of uncertainty in scientific information and the diverse and often competing societal values and legal mandates.

(3) Focus on place-based governance that integrates management efforts across NOAA, and with other agencies and states, based on objectives that balance diverse public values that were derived from significant public participation in setting operational objectives.

(4) Support an environmentally responsible offshore aquaculture industry to produce food and other valuable products while protecting wild stocks and the quality of marine ecosystems, through the authorization of offshore aquaculture operations and research; establishment of a permitting process; and through public-private partnerships, research and development in marine aquaculture science, technology, and related social, economic, legal, and environmental management disciplines.

(5) Identify and promote opportunities for collaboration and cooperation among federal agencies, and to build partnerships among federal, state, tribal and local authorities, the private sector, international partners, and other interested parties to develop and implement ocean research and management strategies. These cooperative efforts will include the deployment of Regional Collaboration Teams, applied use of ocean science and technology in ocean resource management, and the promotion of public ocean education and literacy.

In carrying out this policy, it shall be NOAA's objectives to:

a. Prevent Overfishing.
b. Protect Sensitive Species.
c. Conserve Genetic Diversity and Structure.
d. Conserve Living Marine Resource Habitat.
e. Maintain Trophic Structure.
f. Prevent Systemic Over-exploitation.
g. Improve knowledge of natural and anthropogenic processes controlling ecosystem structure and function.
h. Incorporate uncertainty and the precautionary approach into decisions.

Authorities and Responsibilities
This policy establishes the following authorities and responsibilities….