

## Regional and State Ocean Leadership

Due to the physical and ecological characteristics of oceans, coasts, and watersheds, marine resources are difficult to delineate along traditional geopolitical borders, which confirms the need for regional cooperation in the protection and management of the oceans. The current patchwork of federal, state, and local ocean policies is inherently incapable of effectively and coherently addressing such complex challenges as ocean dead zones, overfishing, habitat loss, and the impacts of and possible adaptations to climate change along our densely populated coasts. It also constrains our ability to explore and take advantage of promising new opportunities such as ocean-based forms of alternative energy production, environmentally and economically sustainable offshore aquaculture, and marine bioprospecting. Regional collaborations among states can facilitate effective management across jurisdictional boundaries and are necessary for implementing ecosystem-based management and the presence of such entities encourages region-specific science and management. Moreover, multi-state and other regional governance mechanisms can strengthen the voice of local stakeholders in communicating their needs to the federal government. States have been forging ahead, working to incorporate new alliances; these efforts should be further supported by coordination with federal agencies.

### **Guiding Principles for Effective Regional Collaboration**

Regional ocean governance mechanisms can facilitate more coordinated and collaborative approaches to realizing opportunities and addressing concerns in the region. By developing compatible and coordinated plans and processes, governments at all levels can work together to develop regional goals and priorities, improve responses to regional needs, and develop and disseminate regionally significant research and information. Efforts to enhance regional and state ocean governance initiatives should observe the following principles:

- ***Regional Research and Information.*** Decision makers at all levels, but particularly at the local level, need accurate and timely information about ocean and coastal ecosystems, including how human activities impact those ecosystems.
- ***Regional Ecosystem Assessments.*** Assessments of the natural, cultural, social, and economic attributes in a region would help guide management decisions and improve the process mandated under the National Environmental Policy Act by providing a single science-based regional assessment that can be the basis for individual environmental impact statements.
- ***Enhance Regional Governance Capacity by Improving Federal Coordination in Regions.*** Our governmental institutions need to be recalibrated to enable government at all levels to work together more effectively at the regional level. One step toward improved regional coordination is for federal agencies to identify opportunities and further coordinate existing programs and activities to assist and support more effective response to regional priorities.

**Federal Support for State and Regional Ocean Leadership**

The federal government should develop a national framework to support regional approaches and collaboration, and more regions and states should develop and implement ocean governance mechanisms.

**Leading Examples of Collaboration**

Effectively designed and implemented regional approaches can offer ways to:

- Forge common agreement on ecosystem boundaries and long-term management goals;
- Set measurable benchmarks to meet goals;
- Identify or create a political and institutional mechanism to focus authority at the appropriate level to accomplish goals; and
- Maintain a sustained effort among state, local, and federal partners to achieve goals.

The West Coast Governors’ Agreement on Ocean Health is a noteworthy example of regional and state collaboration on ocean and coastal policy issues pertinent to a specific region. The Gulf of Mexico Alliance also exemplifies the coordination of different states and federal agencies seeking to protect a shared aquatic environment. Individual states also engage in improving management of ocean resources within a state, with Alaska, California, Florida, Hawaii, Maine, New York, New Jersey, and Massachusetts have demonstrated interest or actively working toward their own state ocean management plans.

**See Also:**

- National Ocean Policy Reform
- Oceans and Climate Change
- Ocean Science, Research, and Education
- New Funding for Ocean Policy and Programs
- Law of the Sea Convention

**For Further Information:**

- From Sea to Shining Sea: Priorities for Ocean Policy Reform
- An Agenda for Action: Moving Regional Ocean Governance from Theory to Practice
- Regional and State Ocean Activities Summary