

Published on *OpenChannels* (<https://www.openchannels.org>)

---

## New US Ocean Policy Calls for Marine Spatial Planning

In July, President Obama signed an executive order establishing a national ocean policy for the US - the country's first comprehensive, integrated policy for stewardship of its oceans and coasts. The policy launches a process of coastal and marine spatial planning for the nation, and coordinates the various ocean-related activities of more than 20 federal agencies under a new and centralized National Ocean Council. The President's action reflects the recommendations of a federal task force that explored ways to promote long-term conservation and use of ocean resources.

Implementation of the policy will center around a regional-level process of coastal and marine spatial planning (CMSP), which the policy defines as "a comprehensive, adaptive, integrated, ecosystem-based, and transparent spatial planning process, based on sound science, for analyzing current and anticipated uses of ocean, coastal, and Great Lakes areas."

Under the plan, the CMSP process will be carried out on a phased basis across nine regional planning areas. Each regional process will report to the interagency National Ocean Council, which will also certify that the resulting plans are consistent with national policy. The plan for each region will be developed cooperatively among federal, state, tribal, and local authorities. The framework follows an earlier proposal by the task force, described in an interim report last December (see "[In US, interim framework released for marine spatial planning](#)", MEAM 3:4).

Until now, US ocean policy has been a patchwork: more than 140 federal laws apply to the oceans, and 24 agencies have ocean management responsibilities. The new national policy represents a unifying ocean vision, based on essential principles of marine science, economics and fairness, says Elliott Norse, president of the Marine Conservation Biology Institute. "It creates a new, more effective, forward-looking system for governing America's ocean realm," he says. Conservation groups have generally welcomed the new policy, while acknowledging much of its effectiveness will depend on how it is implemented.

Meanwhile some user groups, notably recreational fishing associations, have voiced concern that the new policy could lead to widespread closure of accustomed use areas. "The top-down tone of the policy is clear while significant concepts that could set the foundation for vast areas to be closed to angling and public recreation remain vague and undefined," said the American Sportfishing Association in a press statement.

The new National Ocean Council will hold its first meeting in August-September 2010 to begin implementing the national policy, including the phased regional process for spatial planning. It may be the biggest marine spatial planning process ever undertaken: the US has the world's largest Exclusive Economic Zone, spanning more than 12 million km<sup>2</sup>.

For more information on the national ocean policy:

- The Final Recommendations of the Ocean Policy Task Force: [www.whitehouse.gov/files/documents/OTPF\\_FinalRecs.pdf](http://www.whitehouse.gov/files/documents/OTPF_FinalRecs.pdf)
- President Obama's executive order directing federal agencies to implement the task force recommendations: [www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/executive-order-stewardship-ocean-our-coasts-and-great-lakes](http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/executive-order-stewardship-ocean-our-coasts-and-great-lakes)

---

Source URL: <https://www.openchannels.org/news/meam/new-us-ocean-policy-calls-marine-spatial-planning>