

WEST COAST GOVERNORS' AGREEMENT ON OCEAN HEALTH: SESSION TO OBTAIN PUBLIC INPUT

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INTRODUCTION:

In September 2006, California Governor Schwarzenegger, Oregon Governor Kulongoski, and Washington Governor Gregoire jointly released the "West Coast Governors' Agreement on Ocean Health," launching an historic partnership and action plan for ocean and coastal resource protection along the Pacific Coast. The Agreement directed staff of the three Governors to take certain immediate actions, and to develop a more extensive action plan within one year. The immediate actions included:

- Joint letters to the President and Congress opposing offshore oil and gas development;
- Initiating the preparation of a Sea Grant Regional Research Plan for the West Coast in coordination with the National Sea Grant office, academia, and other research institutions; and
- A request to the White House Council on Environmental Quality for federal agency coordination and support in addressing issues of regional significance.

The three states have embarked on the development of the Agreement's first action plan, engaging the public through dissemination in March 2007 of a discussion paper to guide public input, followed by a series of public meetings in all three states, and the launch of a website. During this workshop session of Coastal Zone '07, panelists will provide a brief overview of the Agreement and participants will be encouraged to provide input on possible actions for the regional action plan. Staff will take into consideration all comments received by August 1, 2007 in developing the draft action plan, which they

will issue by October 1, 2007. The states will approve a final plan by the end of the year. Detailed information is available at the Agreement website; WestCoastOceans.gov.

Another significant component to development of the action plan is engagement with the federal government. The federal government's shared jurisdiction over ocean resources and potential financial, policy, and technical contributions are of vital importance to implementing the Agreement.

At the request of the three Governors, the Chair of the White House Council on Environmental Quality and its Cabinet Committee on Ocean Policy (COP), James L. Connaughton, pledged to support meaningful collaboration among the West Coast states and federal agencies to address the priorities of the West Coast Governors' Agreement on Ocean Health. Working through the COP's Subcommittee on Integrated Management of Ocean Resources, three federal leads were appointed for this purpose from West Coast regional offices of the Department of Commerce (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, NOAA), Department of the Interior (Minerals Management Service), and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The agency leads are charged, among other things, with coordinating the involvement of other federal agencies.

Members of the Governors' staff meet regularly with the federal liaisons to identify opportunities for coordination and cooperation in achieving the goals of the Agreement. The states anticipate that measures in the action plan will form the basis for collaborative actions between the three states and the federal government in advancing the priorities of the West Coast Governors' Agreement on Ocean Health.

BACKGROUND:

Washington, Oregon, and California share a rich and diverse bounty of ocean and coastal resources that provide enormous economic, environmental, and social benefits for each of the three states. Yet, the continued use and enjoyment of coastal and ocean resources is at risk. Polluted waters, declining populations of fish and other marine life, degraded nearshore habitats, risks of severe storms as well as tsunamis and impacts from climate change are but a few examples of serious threats to the continued vitality of the ocean-dependent states. Recently, two national ocean commissions concluded that our oceans are in trouble and called for immediate, meaningful action at all levels of government to restore and maintain their health.

Charting a New Course

Washington, Oregon, and California recognize these challenges and are taking action to address the declining health of the ocean. All three states have developed world class expertise in ocean sciences and academics. In addition to this, each state has established a track record of innovation and leadership on ocean and coastal issues domestically and internationally. The growing understanding of our nation's relationship with the marine environment and its living and nonliving natural resources is leading the three states to explore ecosystem-based approaches to managing our coasts and oceans.

Today, state-level efforts provide forums for these important discussions such as: Washington's Puget Sound Partnership, State Ocean Caucus and Ocean Policy Work Group; Oregon's Ocean Policy Advisory Council; and California's Ocean Protection Council. Each body maintains an innovative framework in which government and tribal officials, managers, scientists, citizens, and other stakeholders employ an integrated approach to protecting and restoring our coastal watersheds, shorelines, estuaries, nearshore waters, as well as habitats in the open ocean.

Just as ocean and coastal conservation strategies benefit from coordination at the state and local level, so too can they be enhanced by coordination among the three states on the Pacific coast. This includes coordination with federal and tribal governments, as well as our sovereign neighbors north and south. We need to look no further than the offshore California Current to illustrate this need, as it cuts across political boundaries, sustaining marine wildlife populations, regulating climate, and providing myriad other ecosystem services relied on by our states, the nation, and the world.

Forging a Pacific Coast Regional Oceans Collaboration

As the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy and the Pew Oceans Commission acknowledged in their reports on the status of the ocean, improved coordination among governing bodies is needed, and oceans should be managed on an ecosystem level. Both commissions highlighted the importance of pursuing regional approaches to ocean management. While there are numerous organizations striving to implement these and other recommendations of the two commissions, the three states believe that more can be done, since ocean ecosystems do not coincide with jurisdictional boundaries.

Therefore, the Governors of Washington, Oregon, and California, launched a coordinated Pacific Coast collaboration to address critical ocean and coastal protection and management issues facing all three states. With this agreement, the three states committed to work together to identify measures that address critical ocean concerns at the regional level and to develop a coordinated set of actions in response. The three states will promote the effective implementation of ecosystem-based management as a tool to be widely applied to each of the following priority issue areas:

- Ensuring clean coastal waters and beaches.
- Protecting and restoring healthy ocean and coastal habitats.
- Reducing adverse impacts of offshore development.
- Increasing ocean awareness and literacy among our citizens.
- Expanding ocean and coastal scientific information, research, and monitoring.
- Fostering sustainable economic development throughout our diverse coastal communities.

The three states anticipate that the opportunities for collaboration on issues of regional significance will include:

- Supporting and enhancing existing governance, management, and planning structures where needed.

- Creating mechanisms to share lessons learned from local, urban, county, and statewide conservation and restoration programs, as well as the work of non-governmental organizations.
- Expanding cooperative scientific and educational efforts.
- Coordinating management strategies and approaches for shared coastal and marine resources.
- Jointly engaging the federal executive and legislative branches on ocean and coastal issues that warrant national-level attention and support.

The three states look forward to reviewing comments from the public regarding appropriate regional actions that could be undertaken as a part of the West Coast Agreement's action plan at Coastal Zone 07.

PRESENTATIONS:

Jessica Hamilton will present an overview of the West Coast Governors' Agreement on Ocean Health as well as discuss the goals of the Agreement. Further, Ms. Hamilton will present the Oregon context for implementation of the Agreement, including key state policy initiatives, such as the work of the Oregon Ocean Policy Advisory Council, (OPAC), development of regional approach to alternative ocean energy, and habitat conservation strategies.

Kathleen Drew will discuss Washington's role in the Governors' agreement, and provide updates on the Puget Sound Partnership and the implementation of the Washington Ocean Action Plan.

Brian Baird will provide an overview of the recommendations made by the California Ocean Protection Council (OPC) regarding important elements for the development of the action plan for the Governors' Agreement. These recommendations are based testimony and council discussion received at a workshop held in Monterey, California. The recommendations were adopted at the OPC's June 14th meeting in San Francisco and were forwarded to each of the governors for their consideration.

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