

# Ocean Policy Committee 2022-2023 Action Plan Summary

July 1, 2022

The Ocean Policy Committee (OPC) is a Congressionally mandated, Secretary-level interagency body that coordinates ocean science, technology, and management policy across the federal government. The OPC was codified by the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2021. Co-chaired by the Director of the Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) and the Chair of the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ), the OPC collaborates with the ocean community on ocean-related matters to advance ocean science and technology, identify priority ocean research and technology needs, and leverage resources and expertise to maximize the effectiveness of Federal investments in ocean research and ocean resource management. More information on OPC initiatives including ongoing work and public engagement opportunities, can be found on the [OPC website](#).

The OPC provides high-level direction to the Ocean Science and Technology (OST) and the Ocean Resource Management (ORM) subcommittees to address key priorities of the Biden-Harris Administration, including tackling climate change, racial equity, and the economy.

The following goals will guide the OPC in 2022-2023:

## **Goal 1: Maximize the environmental, economic, and social benefits that the ocean provides to all Americans.**

The ocean and coastal waters of the United States provide critically important resources and services to all Americans. By conserving our marine ecosystems through the sustainable use of its resources, we can protect and expand these benefits for current and future generations. To accomplish this goal, the OPC will seek input from Federal agencies, states, territories, Tribes, Indigenous communities, scientists, regional organizations, environmental partners, industry, the general public, and other stakeholders to ensure a collaborative approach that integrates broad and diverse expertise and perspectives.

The ORM will undertake the following actions to develop tools and practices that maximize the benefits of ocean use while ensuring responsible stewardship:

- Assess data availability and needs, identify existing best practices, and coordinate the development and improvement of tools and resources, including spatial data platforms, to support local, regional, and national ocean and coastal management decision-making.
- Building on prior evaluations, continue to engage with stakeholders to enhance the utility of existing spatial data tools (e.g., [Ocean Reports](#), [Marine Cadastre](#), regional ocean portals, offshore wind atlases) and identify and develop additional information on ocean uses and ecosystems and the information needed to understand and mitigate potential use and resource conflicts.
- Identify and advance best practices for local, state, territorial, Tribal and Federal consultation and engagement in planning and authorizing uses of the ocean.
- Advance a definition of Environmental Justice communities within the context of ocean policy and ocean co-use, and develop best practices for engaging with Environmental Justice communities that have been or may be affected by management and development activities in specific marine geographies.

The OPC Subcommittees will also develop a *National Strategy for a Sustainable Ocean Economy* (National Strategy) to guide the sustainable development of ocean and coastal resources informed by the latest scientific and technological advancements.

- This initiative results from the United States joining the [High Level Panel for a Sustainable Ocean Economy](#), and the attendant commitment to develop by 2026 a national sustainable ocean plan for the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone. The United States will first develop a National Strategy to help guide development of the sustainable ocean plan.
- The National Strategy will advance regionally defined interests, practices, capacities, and management mechanisms that support sustainability, for example through the work of fishery management councils, regional ocean partnerships, and other regionally oriented bodies.
- To develop the National Strategy, the OPC will engage Federal agencies with relevant equities and expertise. Additionally, the process will be informed by robust dialogue with, and input from, local, state, territorial, and Tribal governments, regional organizations, industry, environmental organization partners and constituencies, interested stakeholders, and the general public.
- The OPC plans to release a Federal Register Notice in Summer 2022 detailing opportunities for the groups listed above to provide input on the National Strategy.

**Goal 2: Develop an ocean-based climate plan to coordinate Federal agency actions on ocean-based climate solutions.**

In the face of climate change, the ocean can be a source of solutions that also provide co-benefits such as creating good-paying jobs, sustainable livelihoods and communities, and healthier ocean ecosystems that support future discovery and innovation. To accelerate the U.S. whole-of-government approach to climate action, the ORM and OST will develop an *Ocean-Climate Action Plan* to catalog ongoing and planned Federal ocean-based climate mitigation activities, identify gaps in climate change science and management capabilities, and recommend new or enhanced ocean science and policy actions to tackle climate change. The *Ocean-Climate Action Plan* will integrate environmental justice considerations into climate mitigation and adaptation solutions to pave an equitable path towards climate-resilient systems, resources, communities, and infrastructure.

The *Ocean-Climate Action Plan* will include:

- A review of the scientific basis for viewing the ocean as a climate solution, building on existing Federal interagency initiatives, like the National Climate Task Force and the U.S. Global Change Research Program.
- An assessment of current and planned agency mitigation and adaptation activities in sectors including green shipping, blue carbon, biodiversity conservation and protection, marine renewable energy, and other climate-related ocean actions.
- An analysis of the mitigation and adaptation potential of ocean-based solutions and their contribution to the Biden-Harris Administration's emissions reduction targets and climate resilience goals.
- Specific targets and timelines for agency actions on developing and delivering ocean-based mitigation of and adaptation to climate change and its effects.

**Goal 3: Strengthen the U.S. ocean science and technology enterprise by advancing ocean science, technology, innovation, and partnerships to address societal needs.**

To advance the U.S. ocean science and technology (S&T) enterprise, the OST will focus on increasing diversity and broadening participation, identifying and closing knowledge gaps, and building and strengthening partnerships with both Federal and non-Federal stakeholders to address societal needs:

- The OST will advance diversity, equity, inclusion, accessibility (DEIA), and environmental justice across the ocean enterprise to help ensure the equitable representation and meaningful involvement of people from diverse backgrounds. [A key priority for the OST](#) is the cultivation of a diverse, inclusive, and ocean-knowledgeable blue workforce that reflects the diversity of the U.S. population. Building on the [Environmental Justice Position Statement](#) that was released this spring, the OST and ORM will work together in 2022 to integrate environmental justice considerations into all of the work that OPC does, including ocean resource management.
- The OST will improve our understanding of the ocean to inform decision-making that balances ocean use and conservation, and enhances U.S. prosperity and security. Currently, only 48% of U.S. waters have been minimally mapped and even fewer have been explored or characterized. To close these data and knowledge gaps, the OST will be guided by the National Strategy for Mapping, Exploring, and Characterizing the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone ([NOMECS Strategy](#)) to advance Federal coordination and multi-sector partnerships, exploring and characterizing priority areas of the U.S. EEZ, and developing and maturing new and emerging science and technologies.
- The OST will build new and strengthen existing partnerships with Federal and non-Federal stakeholders to boost the ocean science and technology enterprise. One major component of this initiative is through U.S. engagement in the [Ocean Decade](#), which strives to generate the global ocean science needed to support the sustainable development of our shared ocean. Another key mechanism is the [National Oceanographic Partnership Program \(NOPP\)](#), which facilitates partnership development and funds public-private research projects to advance ocean science research and education.