

January/February 2011  
Volume 42, Number 3

## Interagency Ocean Policy Task Force established

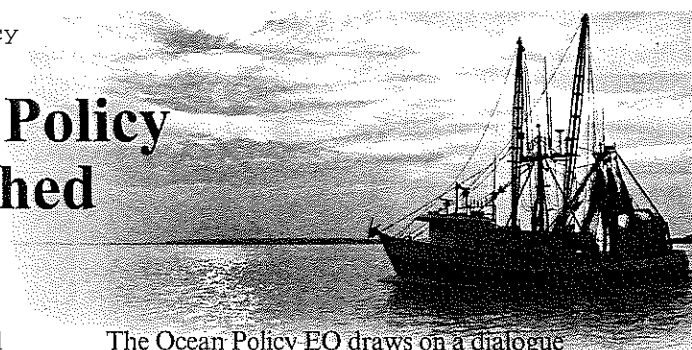
By J. BRETT GROSKO

On June 12, 2009, President Obama issued a memorandum calling on the heads of all executive departments to help create a unified national ocean policy. To achieve this goal, the president created an Interagency Ocean Policy Task Force (Task Force) to develop a recommended policy and frameworks for policy coordination to ensure ecosystem-based integration and collaboration and effective coastal and marine spatial planning. President Obama described the latter as a comprehensive approach addressing conservation, economic activity, user conflict, and sustainable use of ocean, coastal, and Great Lakes resources.

Over the next year, the Task Force received public comments and held public meetings, and, on July 19, 2010, issued its final recommendations. President Obama signed Executive Order 13,547 (Ocean Policy EO) adopting the Task Force's recommendations shortly thereafter. *See* 75 Fed. Reg. 43,023 (July 22, 2010). Among other actions, the Ocean Policy EO (a) for the first time, creates a national policy for the stewardship of the ocean, coasts, and the Great Lakes; (b) creates a National Ocean Council (NOC) for more coordinated planning and management among executive branch agencies; and (c) provides for the development of coastal and marine spatial plans.

The Ocean Policy EO's focus on coastal and marine spatial planning is especially notable. This section appears to draw on, among other things, Massachusetts' coastal and marine spatial plan statute, the Massachusetts Oceans Act of 2008. The act created a process for replacing piecemeal development of coastal resources with a more comprehensive ocean management plan. That process culminated in the issuance of the state's final plan in January 2010. On the national level, the EO calls for dividing the country into nine regions, each with a planning body, including state, local, and tribal authorities, that will create its own plan. The Task Force has set a 2015 deadline for each regional body to have a coastal and marine spatial plan written, certified by the NOC, and implemented.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) provides one example of how such planning might improve outcomes. On July 1, 2007, after analyzing the location of shipping traffic and whales in the Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary, NOAA and the Coast Guard slightly rotated marine traffic lanes going into Boston Harbor to avoid waters with high concentrations of whales. The shift only marginally increased travel time while improving safety; it is estimated to have reduced the risk of ship strikes to endangered right whales by 58 percent and to other large whale species by 81 percent.



The Ocean Policy EO draws on a dialogue occurring at the federal and state levels over the past several decades. In 1957, one month after the launch of Sputnik created a sense of urgency behind the need for greater focus on science policy, the National Academy of Sciences formed a Committee on Oceanography (NASCO) to assess the needs of the discipline. After completing its work, NASCO published a report in 1959 urging the government to double funding for basic research and oceanwide surveys. The report's effect was to spur greater interest in marine governance. This interest contributed to Congress's creation of the Stratton Commission in 1966. Among the Stratton Commission's duties was the formulation, for the first time, of "a comprehensive, long-term, national program for marine affairs designed to meet present and future national needs." The Stratton Commission's 1969 report made recommendations regarding development of ocean resources, threats to coastal environments, and reorganization of federal ocean programs. It also led to the creation of NOAA.

During the next three decades there emerged a consensus that the nation needed a more refined national ocean policy. Not only had President Reagan declared a 200 nautical mile exclusive economic zone and expanded the territorial sea from 3 to 12 nautical miles, the burdens on coastal resources had also increased as people moved by the millions to the coastal zone. After repeated attempts, Congress passed legislation in 2000 establishing a U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy to take a fresh look at federal policy. The Commission's 2004 report provided recommendations on improved ocean management and protection, specific management challenges, and implementation. The Ocean Policy EO built on these efforts as well as others by the Bush administration and a separate commission established by the Pew Charitable Trust.

In conclusion, the Ocean Policy EO is part of an ongoing evolution in thought regarding how best to manage our fragile marine resources. The debates giving rise to this evolution hearken back to the Stratton Commission's 1969 report. As part of this evolution, the Ocean Policy EO aims to institutionalize a more comprehensive and integrated ecosystem management approach, bringing greater focus to governance efforts.

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