

New Funding for Ocean Policy and Programs

Maintaining the economic and ecological viability of our oceans and coasts will require decision makers to have access to unbiased, credible, and up-to-date information to make informed decisions, a goal that can only be attained by increasing funding for ocean-related science, management, and education. Although Congress and the President have recently called for enhancing the budgets of ocean management agencies, much more needs to be done to compensate for years of a clear pattern of underfunding. Chronic underinvestment has left much of our ocean-related infrastructure in woefully poor condition, management programs struggling to meet the information demands of decision makers, ocean scientists competing for a smaller percentage of the federal research budget, and ocean science virtually absent from the education curriculum.

Guiding Principles for Establishing New Sources of Ocean Funding

Based on the findings and recommendations of the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy and the Pew Oceans Commission, the Joint Initiative urges our nation's leaders to approach funding for ocean and coastal programs in a manner consistent with the following principles:

- ***Provide Funding Commensurate to the Challenge.*** Current ocean and coastal funding is insufficient to address today's challenges or to begin to anticipate and plan for future challenges.
- ***Share Funding with Nonfederal Partners.*** Many of the actions necessary to improve the health of ocean and coastal waters will be initiated and implemented at the regional, state, and local levels. Federal funding should be available to assist nonfederal governments, as well as the academic community, in meeting these goals.
- ***Require Payment for the Use of a Public Resource.*** The use of a publicly-owned resource by the private sector in federal waters should be contingent on a reasonable return of some portion of the revenues to taxpayers in order to support programs that will help sustain the health and vitality of our nation's oceans and coasts.

Ocean Trust Fund

Upon the independent recommendations of the two Commissions, the Joint Initiative proposes that Congress create an Ocean Trust Fund in the U.S. Treasury to support ocean policy and programs. Based on the principle that the public should be fairly compensated by private industries that extract and use natural resources held in the national public trust, the fund would be supported by revenues from leases and other rents. Federal trust funds are not a new concept in American policy. There are a number of similar funds, including the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) and Highway Trust Fund. The LWCF receives virtually all of its money from the outer continental shelf oil and natural gas revenues to support federal (and some state) acquisition of land for conservation and recreational purposes. The Ocean Trust Fund would follow these trust fund models and provide money for ocean policy and management with a portion set aside for use by all coastal states. Establishing an

Ocean Trust Fund is one of the most important steps Congress could take to demonstrate its commitment to a new national ocean policy.

Develop an Integrated Budget for Federal Ocean and Coastal Programs

In addition to the Ocean Trust Fund, Congress must also allocate more base funding for core ocean and coastal science and management programs and develop an integrated ocean budget. The lack of a baseline for federally funded ocean, coastal, and Great Lakes programs and activities greatly hampers the capacity of the Administration and Congress to evaluate the status and progress of these programs. Although Congress attempted to enhance the Administration's reporting on spending of ocean funding, the information provided was broadly-based with little nuance and attention paid to multi-agency coordination and interdepartmental work on specific ocean policy issues. Coordination and collaboration through the budget process would greatly facilitate the transition toward ecosystem-based management.

See Also:

National Ocean Policy Reform

Regional and State Ocean Leadership

Oceans and Climate Change

Ocean Science, Research, and Education

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

Oceans and Climate Change Concept Paper