



JUNE 2024

Turning the Tide:

**Biden Administration Leadership on Ocean Climate Action
& Recommended Next Steps**

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

Supporting organizations may not have positions on all topics covered in this report.

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Executive Summary

The Biden Administration is turning the tide on ocean climate action, with the United States positioned like never before to leverage the ocean as a powerful source of climate solutions. Ocean climate action policy in the United States is advancing across a wide array of topics with a renewed commitment to environmental justice and public engagement. With an ambitious Administration, strong ocean climate leadership in Congress, and a relentless nationwide network of ocean advocates, our country is ushering in a new era of ocean climate action.

From the first days of the Administration, there has been a shift in America's course on climate change. The Administration joined a [network of nations](#) dedicated to a sustainable ocean economy and set ocean climate goals to [expand offshore wind](#); protect [30% of the ocean](#); advance [zero emissions shipping](#); and [eliminate the release of plastic](#) into the environment. The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) and the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) provided unprecedented funding for ocean climate action priorities such as offshore wind, clean ports, and coastal resilience. In 2023, the White House released America's first [Ocean Climate Action Plan](#) to coordinate ocean policy across the Federal government and the [Ocean Justice Strategy](#) to embed equitable and just practices for ocean, coastal, and Great Lakes communities.

This progress has occurred as climate impacts on the ocean continue to intensify rapidly. The ocean becomes [hotter](#) and [more acidic](#) each passing year, with soaring levels of ocean heat in the past year [breaking all previous records](#) and leading to the 2024 announcement of the [fourth global coral bleaching event](#). Extreme weather disasters including hurricanes and coastal flooding cost the US more than [\\$92 billion](#) in 2023. Meanwhile, the ocean has been [the least funded](#) of all the global [Sustainable Development Goals](#), though it covers over 70% of our planet and absorbs [90% of heat](#) from fossil fuels.

Now more than ever, it will be critical to build on the strong momentum for ocean climate action generated over the last several years and continue to take bold action to address the climate crisis. While the most recent offshore oil and gas drilling

plan offered the [fewest leases in history](#), we need to do more by ensuring actions on our public lands and waters are consistent with US climate goals and our [agreement at the 2023 United Nations Climate Change Conference \(COP28\) to transition away from fossil fuels](#). Additionally, US leaders should not invest in false solutions that ultimately increase or prolong fossil fuel development, such as offshore carbon capture and sequestration (CCS) used in connection with [enhanced oil recovery](#).

The potential benefits of continued ocean climate action are enormous: successful policies and targeted investments can help reach global climate goals; support US frontline communities; and increase the health and resilience of ocean ecosystems and the coastal economies that depend on them. This report highlights the ocean accomplishments of the Biden Administration to date and outlines priority actions to build on the collective momentum for continued progress for our ocean, climate, and communities nationwide.

“[W]e’re releasing the first-ever United States Ocean Climate Action Plan to harness the tremendous power of the ocean to help in our fight against the climate crisis.”

PRESIDENT BIDEN



RECENT HIGHLIGHTS OF

Ocean Climate Action

IN THE UNITED STATES

APRIL 2024

DOI approves its 8th commercial-scale, offshore wind energy project, marking approval of more than 10 gigawatts of clean energy from offshore wind projects.

FEBRUARY 2024

EPA announces \$3 billion in funding to reduce pollution and advance environmental justice in US ports.

DECEMBER 2023

- The US joins world leaders at COP28 committing to transition away from fossil fuels and triple renewable energy globally by 2030.
- The White House announces the first ever Ocean Justice Strategy to advance environmental justice for all and address historic inequities among ocean, coastal, Great Lakes and marine resource-dependent communities.
- The White House publishes the US Ocean Acidification Action Plan highlighting goals and necessary actions for mitigation, research, and adaptation.

OCTOBER 2023

The White House creates the Fast-Track Action Committee on Marine Carbon Dioxide Removal to evaluate and shape relevant policy and research on marine carbon dioxide removal.

JUNE 2023

NOAA announces a \$2.6 billion framework to build climate resilience, protect coastal communities, and restore marine resources.

MARCH 2023

The White House releases its Ocean Climate Action Plan to create a carbon-neutral future, accelerate nature-based solutions, and enhance community resilience.

AUGUST 2022

Thanks to tireless advocacy and strong congressional champions for the ocean, the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) is signed into law with unprecedented investments in offshore wind, coastal resilience, and clean ports and shipping.

JUNE 2022

- President Biden commits to developing and implementing America's first Ocean Climate Action Plan, incorporating robust public input.
- A coalition of ocean climate action advocates collaboratively develop and release a Blueprint for Ocean Climate Action with detailed recommendations to the Ocean Policy Committee to inform Biden's plan.

NOVEMBER 2021

The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law provides new investments in ocean, coastal, and Great Lakes habitat

restoration and funding for clean ports, providing a down payment for additional funding to come through the IRA.

OCTOBER 2021

A coalition of 118 organizations and businesses nationwide write President Biden and ask his Administration to design and implement an ambitious U.S. ocean climate action plan.

APRIL 2021

Over 1,000 ocean climate advocates mobilize from over 30 states and territories to share their Ocean Climate Action Plan and tell national policymakers: ocean-based climate solutions are key to solving the climate crisis.

JANUARY 2021

The Biden Administration sets new ocean climate action goals in its First 100 Days, including to generate 30 gigawatts of offshore wind by 2030; protect 30% of the ocean by 2030; and work toward zero emissions from international shipping by 2050.

The Biden Administration has positioned the United States as a global leader of ocean climate action.



Action Area

Expand Responsibly-Developed Offshore Wind and Phase Out Offshore Drilling

Background:

Our ocean should be a source of climate solutions, not climate problems. At COP28, the US was party to the first-ever international agreement to transition away from fossil fuels. Offshore drilling will continue to drive emissions and perpetuate the environmental injustices associated with fossil fuel infrastructure, particularly in the Gulf of Mexico, unless policies are changed. In contrast, responsibly-developed offshore wind energy presents a significant opportunity to transition away from fossil fuels and reduce emissions that are driving the climate crisis.

Biden Administration Goal:

The Biden Administration has committed to generating [30 gigawatts of electricity from offshore wind by 2030](#), and [15 gigawatts from floating offshore wind by 2035](#) while [protecting biodiversity](#) and promoting ocean co-use.

Progress to Date:

WIND:

- The Department of Interior (DOI) [approved](#) eight commercial-scale, offshore wind energy projects totaling more than 10 GW of renewable offshore power, enough to supply nearly 4 million homes.
- The Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) issued leases for over 1 million acres for new offshore wind development in the [New York Bight](#), [Carolina Long Bay](#), [Gulf of Mexico](#), and [California](#)—largely representing the first offshore wind leases ever issued in these regions—with plans underway to lease an additional 1.8 million acres in [Oregon](#), [Gulf of Maine](#) (both new regions for offshore wind development), the [Central Atlantic](#), and [Gulf of Mexico](#) before the end of 2024.
- BOEM issued the [Renewable Energy Modernization Final Rule](#) and a new [5-year offshore wind lease schedule](#), which includes up to [12 potential](#) offshore wind energy lease sales through 2028.
- The Administration established the [Floating Offshore Wind Shot™](#) program, advancing research and development through [funding](#) from the Department of Energy (DOE).
- The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and BOEM announced a final [North Atlantic Right Whale and Offshore Wind Strategy](#) to help ensure the protection of the critically endangered species while responsibly developing offshore wind.
- DOE announced \$4.75 million to establish a new [national center of excellence](#) with over 40 partners to accelerate reliable and equitable offshore wind energy deployment, focusing on workforce development, targeted research, and strategies to embed equity in offshore wind development.
- The Administration [established](#) federal-state commitments to develop the supply chain to support offshore wind construction with a focus on creating good-paying union jobs and promoting critical research and development and data-sharing.
- DOE published the [Pathways to Commercial Liftoff: Offshore Wind](#) report, outlining a clear roadmap to scale offshore wind technology, and [announced](#) \$48 million of funding for offshore wind research and development, including for infrastructure, domestic supply chain, and wildlife monitoring.
- BOEM expanded public engagement in the offshore wind siting process with [public comments](#) on draft wind energy areas and spatial modeling [reports](#).
- BOEM established a new regional approach to environmental reviews and protection for offshore wind development activities for the [New York Bight](#), with intentions to do the same for northern and central [California](#).

OIL AND GAS:

- The Administration imposed a [pause](#) on oil and gas leasing on federal lands and waters to review potential climate and other impacts associated with oil and gas activities.
- DOI [finalized](#) the 2024-2029 National Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) Oil and Gas Leasing Program with a schedule for three new offshore drilling leases in the Gulf of Mexico over the next five years, making it the smallest leasing plan in history.
- DOI [withdrew](#) 2.8 million acres in the Beaufort Sea from oil and gas drilling and [expanded protections](#) for 13 million acres of Special Areas in the Western Arctic, ensuring the entire United States Arctic Ocean is off limits to new oil and gas leasing.
- The Administration [finalized](#) the Risk Management and Financial Assurance for OCS Lease and Grant Obligations Rule to help ensure that industry bears the costs of cleaning up abandoned and idle platforms and wells, instead of taxpayers.

“We will continue to use every available tool to ensure America leads the future of the offshore wind industry. This is a win-win-win for workers, communities, and our ability to tackle the climate crisis.”

ALI ZAIDI,
ASSISTANT TO
THE PRESIDENT
AND NATIONAL
CLIMATE
ADVISOR



Critical Next Steps:

OFFSHORE WIND

- **Work with states and regional grid operators** to [collaboratively plan](#) for and implement transmission solutions that can improve efficiency, reduce costs, increase grid reliability, minimize environmental and community impact, and expedite the achievement of clean energy goals.
- **Implement conservation bidding credits** to [advance](#) conservation and recovery of—or provide net positive impacts for—threatened and endangered species and migratory birds.
- **Support more union agreements** like the one between [Ørsted and North America's Building Trades Unions](#).
- **Require critical mitigations for offshore wind** to **protect marine life**, with heightened urgency for North Atlantic right whales. The release of the [North Atlantic Right Whale and Offshore Wind Strategy](#) from NOAA and BOEM is a step in the right direction, but further funding and specificity is needed to manage possible impacts to marine species.
- **Establish regulations for enforceable environmental mitigation and monitoring requirements** at all stages of project development to provide consistency and certainty for offshore wind developers.
- **Support a large increase in the budget for BOEM's Environmental Studies program** to ensure sufficient ecological monitoring and best available science for adaptive management purposes.
- **Ensure a transparent and inclusive siting process.** Comprehensive environmental review that seeks to address development concerns early on, including identification of lower conflict areas for siting, will help offshore wind projects advance with stronger support from ocean stakeholders.
- **Support and help fund collaborative regional offshore wind research and monitoring** through the [Regional Wildlife Science Collaborative \(RWSC\) for Offshore Wind](#) and implement the framework provided in the [RWSC Science Plan](#). This will support regional monitoring and research that aids the advancement of environmentally responsible and cost-efficient offshore

wind power development activities in the US Atlantic waters. Similar entities should be established to coordinate research and monitoring efforts evaluating the effects of offshore wind development on the West and Gulf coasts.

- **Require meaningful Tribal consultation and inclusion** through every stage of project proposal, development, and implementation to ensure that Traditional Ecological Knowledge is included to minimize risks to marine habitats, cultural resources, and wildlife. Tribes and Tribal communities have stewarded the ocean since time immemorial and must continue to rely on it for subsistence, food security, and traditional ways of life and culture.

OIL AND GAS

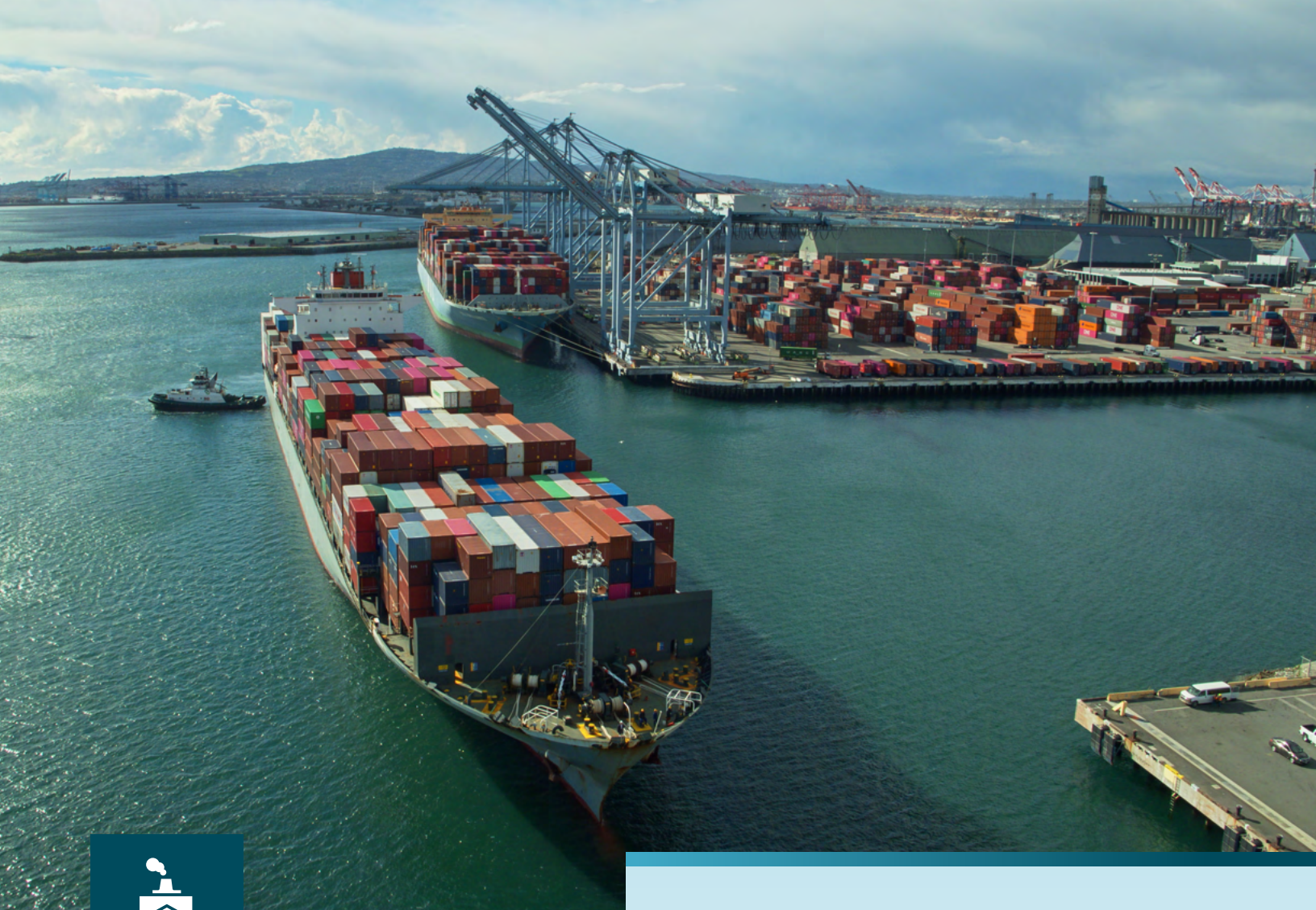
- **Accelerate the transition from fossil fuels to renewable energy and end offshore leasing that threatens our climate, communities, and wildlife.** This includes using any and all executive authorities and the flexibility in current law to end the expansion of offshore drilling, including limiting the scope of the oil and gas development resulting from the lease sales called for by the IRA. Support both the Senate and House versions of the Nonrestrictive Offshore Wind (NOW) Act, which would eliminate the IRA's ten-year requirement of tying offshore wind leasing to mandatory offshore oil and gas leasing.

- **Implement policies that generally limit impacts and fully internalize the environmental, social, and justice costs of offshore drilling.** This includes strengthening enforcement of decommissioning requirements as highlighted in the latest [Government Accountability Office \(GAO\) report](#); implementing a fitness to operate standard to prevent companies with safety and environmental violations from obtaining new leases or drilling permits; and properly measuring methane emissions to ensure accurate payment of the Waste Emissions Charge under the IRA while establishing methane emissions standards.
- **Provide economic opportunities to communities that have historically depended on oil and gas production,** including tax incentives for clean, renewable energy projects located in fossil fuel-dependent communities, and labor standards for clean energy tax credits that create job opportunities or facilitate career transitions from fossil fuel to renewable energy jobs.
- **Address historic environmental justice issues when considering future energy needs.** The US needs a responsible, rapid, and just energy transition that addresses the generational harms faced by Black, Indigenous and people of color and other disadvantaged fenceline communities to work toward multidimensional solutions to advance justice and equity throughout the energy transition.

“The Biden-Harris Administration is committed to ensuring offshore wind energy development is done in a responsible manner. That’s why we have increased our efforts to develop a strategy — based on the best available science — that will allow us to protect the North Atlantic right whale while meeting our offshore wind goals that are necessary to curb climate change and protect the environment.”

LIZ KLEIN, DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF OCEAN ENERGY MANAGEMENT





Action Area

Promote Green Shipping And Ports

Background:

The maritime ports and shipping sectors transport over 90% of traded goods but also emit 3% of global greenhouse gas emissions and pollutants, with devastating health impacts in communities adjacent to ports, predominantly low-income communities of color. Ports and shipping are one of the most complex and challenging sectors to decarbonize, but solutions already exist that can be deployed swiftly to promote energy efficiency, vessel quieting technologies, and slower ship speeds to reduce marine mammal impacts.

Biden Administration Goals:

The Administration has set goals to achieve electrification and decarbonization of port operations and [zero-emission shipping](#) and [freight](#) no later than 2050.

Progress to Date:

- DOE released the [National Blueprint for Transportation Decarbonization](#), an interagency framework to eliminate all emissions from the transportation sector by 2050. Though the Blueprint predates the release of the Ocean Climate Action Plan, there are currently more detailed sector specific decarbonization action plans in development. Additionally, the [Maritime Action Plan Preview](#) was released in December 2023.
- The International Maritime Organization (IMO)—an international regulatory body of which the United States is a member state—adopted a [revised GHG strategy](#) to reach the goal of net-zero emissions from international shipping by 2050, agreeing on striving for a 30% reduction in emissions by 2030 and 80% by 2040. Targets will be backed up with global regulatory measures that all ships must comply with, which are expected to enter into force in 2027.
- The Administration increased crucial domestic investments in grants for research, development, and demonstration of alternative fuels, electrification and greening of port infrastructure, and establishment of green shipping corridors between major (point-to-point) ports along the [Atlantic](#), [Pacific](#), and [Gulf](#) coasts.

- The Administration established substantial grant programs at the DOE, DOT, and EPA, most notably the [Clean Ports Program](#), the [Port Infrastructure Development Program](#), the [H2Hubs program](#), and the [ferry expansion and electrification program](#) — with a focus on environmental justice and creation of union jobs.
- The Department of Transportation's (DOT) Maritime Administration (MARAD) [announced](#) over \$653 million to fund 41 port improvement projects; selection criteria included consideration of addressing climate change and sustainability and advancing equity and the Administration's Justice40 Initiative.
- EPA announced \$3 billion in IRA funding for the [Clean Ports Program](#), which will incentivize technological innovation both for zero-emission equipment and climate and air quality projects at ports.
- DOT announced [\\$450 million](#) in BIL funding for the Port Infrastructure Development Program, for projects that will improve safety, efficiency, and reliability of the movement of goods through ports, including those with environmental mitigation measures and those that reduce or eliminate emissions.

Critical Next Steps:

- **Issue an Executive Order with specific time-bound actions that will unlock opportunities and innovation for decarbonizing and quieting the maritime sector,** as described in a coalition [letter](#) to the Administration. The following commitments should be considered: use existing Clean Air Act authority to establish a goal-based fuel standard for ships calling on US ports; use existing authorities to eliminate in-port ship emissions by 2030; immediately establish a monitoring, reporting, and verification mechanism to collect fuel consumption and emissions data from all ships that traverse US waters and use US ports; direct resources toward the electrification and quieting of the US federal ferry and harbor craft fleet; support US shipbuilders and maritime stakeholders to build low- and zero-emission and quiet marine vessels; support the development, demonstration, and value chains of zero-emission alternative fuels and technologies for the maritime sector; and phase out and ban the use of sulfur scrubbers on ships in US waters.

“We’re making \$3 billion available to install cleaner and more efficient technologies while cutting air pollution to protect the people who work at and live near ports.”

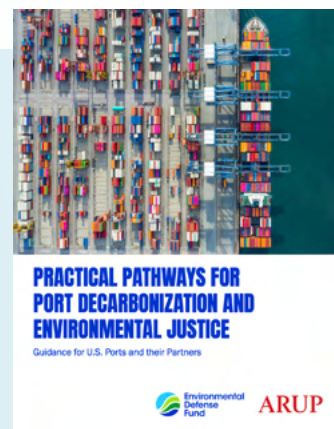
MICHAEL REGAN,
ADMINISTRATOR OF
THE ENVIRONMENTAL
PROTECTION AGENCY



- **Include the domestic fleet in green shipping initiatives** while participating in global efforts to reduce carbon and underwater noise emissions from shipping. The Administration has primarily focused on international shipping, with little funding or incentives to update the domestic fleet to run on renewable energy sources and to operate quietly.
- **Encourage collaboration between countries, industry, and ports** to ensure alternative fuel bunkering is available at ports around the world, and to identify the optimum fuel mixes ports should carry. This could follow [the agreement](#) between the Ports of Long Beach, Los Angeles, and Shanghai to create an international green shipping corridor and coordinate best management practices and supply of low- and zero-emission alternative fuels.
- **Promote environmental justice at ports** through leveraging funding through the Clean Ports Program. Incentivize ports to engage with port-adjacent communities to prioritize port enhancements that will address environmental justice and promote equity in port-adjacent communities.
- **Support market development of new technologies** and incentivize innovation by aligning regulatory requirements among federal agencies. For example, MARAD and EPA regulations should make decarbonization the highest priority for port improvements, and fund development of port-based blue hubs like the [AltaSea](#) complex at the Port of Los Angeles or the [Washington Maritime Blue Hub](#) at the Port of Seattle.
- **Co-locate at least one of the planned regional clean hydrogen hubs with a maritime port facility** to demonstrate the end-use of green hydrogen in the maritime transportation sector.
- **Include noise reduction goals alongside emissions reduction goals** to ensure new vessels are built to fulfill both purposes. This will optimize the design of new vessels and address two of the largest threats to marine animals simultaneously. Domestically, invest in MARAD's [Center for Maritime Innovation](#), which is intended to support research, development, and deployment of emerging technologies and practices that can support a transition to a carbon-free and quiet maritime industry. Internationally, advocate that the IMO revise the Carbon Intensity Indicator (CII) to focus on improving energy efficiency, reducing fuel burn, and reducing vessel noise; and advance efforts to implement the IMO's [Action Plan to Reduce Underwater Radiated Noise from Commercial Shipping](#).
- **Support ports and related initiatives to incentivize optimal energy efficiency and vessel quieting measures.** State projects, such as Washington State's [Quiet Sound Initiative](#), are leading local efforts to reduce underwater noise pollution from shipping. The Administration should scale these efforts to a national level by investing in the "Assistance to Ports" grant program authorized by the FY23 NDAA (Sec. 11302, PL 117-263), intended to reduce the impacts of vessel traffic and port operations on the marine environment.
- **Increase community access to funding** by lengthening the window for ports to submit grants. New grants currently give participants 90 days to submit an application, which may not be feasible for smaller ports in communities with limited capacity. The EPA should offer longer deadlines (up to 6 months), provide direct technical assistance, and direct support for grant submission to increase accessibility and equity.
- **Direct EPA to rapidly advance zero-emission solutions** by using Clean Air Act authorities to promulgate more stringent air pollutant regulations for marine vessels and include maritime fuels in the Renewable Fuel Standard Program to ensure incentives encourage truly zero emission fuels instead of false solutions like liquefied natural gas.

Additional Information:

PRACTICAL PATHWAYS FOR PORT DECARBONIZATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE





Action Area

Protect and Restore Blue Carbon

Background:

Blue carbon is captured from the atmosphere and sequestered by coastal and marine organisms and habitats. Coastal blue carbon ecosystems, such as mangroves, seagrasses, and salt marshes, contribute [about half](#) of all the carbon buried in ocean sediments, and can lock this carbon away for thousands of years if left undisturbed. Some marine and coastal ecosystems provide co-benefits by improving water quality and remediating local impacts of ocean acidification by absorbing carbon in the water column. However, coastal habitats are [threatened](#) by sea level rise, extreme weather, warmer temperatures, changing ocean chemistry, and coastal development. Integrating blue carbon into state and national climate mitigation strategies would offer long term, nature-based solutions to capture greenhouse gases, keep carbon stores locked away, advance coastal resilience and local adaptation, and protect biodiverse ecosystems and frontline communities.

Biden Administration Goal:

To date, the Administration still has no specific numeric goal or target for blue carbon sequestration, but the [Ocean Climate Action Plan](#) identifies the protection, conservation, restoration, and sustainable management of blue carbon as a key element of ocean conservation and climate mitigation goals.

Progress to Date:

- The US Geological Survey incorporated tidal wetlands in its [Restoration and Conservation Opportunity Maps](#), supporting research, exploration, and mapping of blue carbon coastal and marine ecosystems.
- The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation announced over [\\$140 million](#) in grants through the America the Beautiful Challenge, identifying the conservation and restoration of wetlands and watersheds that sequester carbon as a priority.
- EPA announced a [notice of funding opportunity](#) for states, territories, and Tribes to mitigate climate impacts through the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, specifically highlighting policies to enhance carbon stocks in coastal estuaries, such as wetlands and mangroves.

Critical Next Steps:

- **Make blue carbon a priority** by setting clear benchmarks and deadlines and identifying agencies responsible for implementing them for the full range of blue carbon-related activities outlined in the Ocean Climate Action Plan.
- **Establish an Interagency Working Group on coastal blue carbon** to create a unified vision and coordination among agencies in setting and implementing federal goals for ecosystem mapping, carbon sequestration, and storage by blue carbon.
- **Establish a national goal of net ecosystem gain for blue carbon habitats.** Agencies have expressed interest in prioritizing blue carbon, but are looking to the Administration to set precise targets and dates.

- **Support critical mapping and other datasets to assess current and potential blue carbon resources** including the National Wetlands Inventory and NOAA Coastal Change Analysis Program. Facilitate and expand access by states and regional entities to EPA's disaggregated National Greenhouse Gas Inventory data, and create two-way flow between states and the EPA to allow state data to further refine the Inventory.
- **Develop a national blue carbon “heat map” and associated protection and restoration opportunities.** NOAA could lead this work, pulling from already existing areas of work, including the USGS Restoration and Conservation Opportunity Map and assessments of [coastal methane reduction opportunities](#).
- **Strengthen accounting for the multiple climate mitigation or adaptation benefits** provided by blue carbon (e.g., for flood protection and fish habitat) and other marine or coastal ecosystems, such as salt marshes, seagrass meadows, mangroves, and kelp beds, including their potential for inclusion in national mitigation and adaptation goals.
- **Facilitate permitting for projects that protect blue carbon ecosystems**, and assist state, territorial, and municipal governments to fund permitting applications for blue carbon projects, including regional inventories.

“America’s coastal communities are on the frontlines of climate change. We can tap into the power of nature to reduce the impacts of sea level rise, storms, and erosion.”

ARATI PRABHAKAR, DIRECTOR OF THE WHITE HOUSE OFFICE OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY POLICY



- **Support the continuation of the Smithsonian Environmental Research Center's Coastal Carbon Atlas**, including providing dedicated funding, encouraging incorporation of coastal carbon data from federal and federally-supported research projects into the Atlas.
- **Include monitoring and measurement of blue carbon as eligible activities as part of broader federal IRA and BIL grants** to support coastal habitat conservation and restoration, coastal resilience, and ocean acidification mitigation, similar to efforts in [Puerto Rico](#).
- **Advance and disseminate research** on mapping and carbon estimates into the climate mitigation potential of temperate tidal forested wetlands.
- **Help states, localities, and community groups access conservation finance** (e.g., resilience bonds, carbon credits), including enabling restoration in agricultural areas that were once coastal wetlands but are now losing productivity due to salt water intrusion.
- **Protect upland areas adjacent to coastal wetlands** to allow them to migrate as sea levels rise. Work with states to develop tools (e.g., carbon calculators, sea level rise modeling) and maps to prioritize management actions in coastal landscapes to protect existing carbon stocks.
- **Account for carbon variability in the Wetland Mitigation Banking Program**, as many coastal wetlands have greater potential for carbon sequestration than inland wetlands. The true carbon sequestration potential of all lands involved in wetlands banking should be accurately reflected in all transactions.



SPOTLIGHT

“The ocean is a life source for us all, but because of historic injustices and underinvestment, some communities are hit harder by devastating climate change impacts. The Biden-Harris Administration’s new Ocean Justice Strategy will help to address historic inequities, improve the well-being of people in communities connected to the ocean, and safeguard a healthy ocean for everyone.”

BRENDA MALLORY, CHAIR OF WHITE HOUSE COUNCIL ON ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY



White House Delivers First-Ever Ocean Justice Strategy

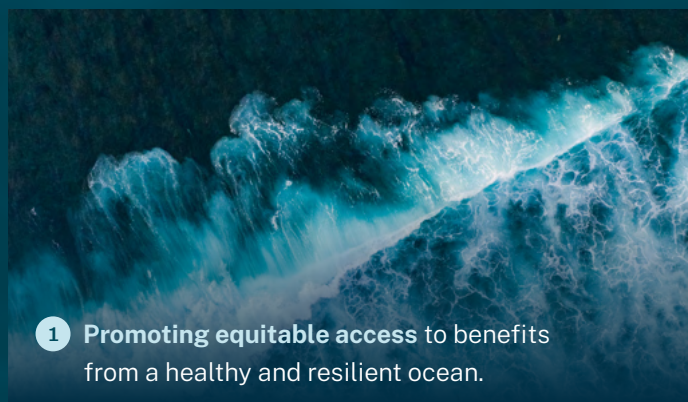
Ocean justice communities include those that have been systematically excluded from power, under-resourced, under-served, marginalized, and/or over-burdened with the health and environmental burdens of industrialization and development as a result of racism and colonialism. The Ocean Climate Action Plan recognized the need to address long-standing inequities, historic underinvestment, and disproportionate climate impacts faced by ocean justice communities with an ocean-related environmental justice strategy.

In December 2023, the White House announced the first ever **Ocean Justice Strategy**, informed by a series of public engagement opportunities—including Tribal consultations; roundtable discussions with Territorial Governments, people of the US Territories, and Native Hawaiian Organizations; and public comment periods and formal requests for information.

The Strategy outlines a framework for federal actions relating to the ocean, coasts, and Great Lakes to advance environmental justice for all and provides the first-ever federal definitions for “ocean justice” and “ocean justice communities.”

Federal government processes, programs, and data products will benefit from more just ocean policies informed by the Strategy. Ocean justice leaders from environmental and climate justice, community, Indigenous, and national non-profit organizations **recognized** the Strategy as a significant step forward for advancing ocean-related environmental justice and setting a strong foundation for implementing more just ocean policies in government decision making.

Priorities outlined by ocean justice and frontline communities in the Strategy included:



- 1 **Promoting equitable access** to benefits from a healthy and resilient ocean.



- 2 **A vision for meaningful engagement** of all communities in federal ocean activities.



- 3 **Recognition of the value of engagement** with Tribal Nations and Indigenous Peoples and the importance of including their knowledge in ocean decision making and research.



Action Area

Reduce Plastic Pollution & Emissions

Background:

Tackling the plastic pollution crisis is an opportunity to address two major Administration priorities: reducing emissions and advancing environmental justice. Plastics threaten the clean energy transition by locking in fossil fuel production for decades; on their present trajectory, global emissions from plastics could be equivalent to [more than 295 coal plants by 2030](#). Plastic production is a growing source of both greenhouse gas and toxic emissions, with communities near plastic facilities facing [severe health consequences](#) including cancer, asthma, developmental disorders, and heart disease. From extraction and production to disposal, plastics are bringing significant harms to our communities, ocean, and climate.

Biden Administration Goal:

The Administration aims to [eliminate the release of plastic](#) into the environment by 2040.

Progress to Date:

- The US renewed its involvement on plastics at the global level by approving a historic [resolution](#) at the United Nations Environment Assembly to [end plastic pollution](#), potentially leading to an international legally binding agreement by the end of 2024.
- President Biden [signed](#) Executive Order 14096, “[Revitalizing Our Nation’s Commitment to Environmental Justice for All](#),” increasing requirements related to toxic pollutant releases in fenceline communities, directing agencies to advance research on cumulative impacts, and expanding interagency coordination across a suite of environmental justice issues.
- EPA issued a [Draft National Strategy to Prevent Plastic Pollution](#) to reduce, reuse, collect, and capture plastic waste; and [proposed amendments](#) to the Petroleum Refineries National Emissions Standards for Hazardous Air Pollutants.
 - ▶ EPA [proposed to list](#) several chemicals associated with plastics as toxics under the Toxic Substances Control Act.
 - ▶ EPA [withdrew rulemaking](#) on pyrolysis/gasification, ensuring those high emitting technologies are regulated as incinerators.
- The Administration allocated over \$1.1 billion to combat plastic pollution and marine debris over the years [2021](#), [2022](#), [2023](#), and [2024](#), including \$48 million for [USAID Clean Cities Blue Ocean](#) program to prevent ocean plastic pollution by building capacity for local institutions to reduce, reuse, and recycle.
- DOI issued a [Secretarial Order](#) to phase out single-use plastic across all 12 Interior Department offices and bureaus; and the General Services Administration (GSA) released a [proposed rule](#) outlining a voluntary approach to identifying single-use plastic free packaging in federal procurement.
- EPA provided \$275 million from the BIL for Solid Waste Infrastructure for Recycling grants.
 - ▶ EPA [announced](#) \$100 million from BIL funding towards grants for 25 communities, representing EPA’s largest recycling investment in 30 years. Approximately 76% of the funding for the newly created Solid Waste Infrastructure for Recycling program of the total funding for communities will go toward projects that benefit disadvantaged communities.
- The State Department [launched](#) the End Plastic Pollution International Collaborative (EPPIC) with \$14.5 million in initial US funding.



Critical Next Steps:

- **Increase US ambition in global negotiations and commitments.** The [US opening position](#) in 2023 at the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee for a legally binding instrument on plastic fell far short of the enforceable cuts to plastic production called for by the 60+ countries in the High Ambition Coalition. Over a year, and three negotiating sessions later, the US position has largely remained the same. Though the US has supported demand-side reduction through procurement, and product redesign, the US must do more to shift its position to one that prioritizes environmental justice. In March 2024, 33 Members of Congress sent a [letter](#) to the US Department of State advocating for an ambitious agreement that includes binding production limits and adopts rules of procedure that stop a small number of plastic-producing countries from undermining the rest of the world's efforts to address the plastic production crisis.
- **Expand EPA's efforts to tackle the dual climate and environmental justice impacts of plastic** as [outlined](#) by Members of Congress, including addressing the environmental and health impacts from toxins in plastic packaging through a rulemaking under the Toxic Substances Control Act to review chemical additives; prohibiting the discharge of pre-production plastic pellets by establishing limitations for wastewater, spills, and runoff; and removing highly polluting chemical recycling technologies from EPA's national recycling strategy, ensuring they are not classified as recycling through the Plastic Waste Partnership of the Basel Convention.
- **Reduce plastic use within the US government** by issuing strong, holistic regulations. This includes strengthening GSA's proposed rule to include reduction targets for plastic packaging and products and eliminating problematic plastics from government procurement; supporting the expansion of reuse and refill systems; instituting mandatory reporting, transparency, and third party verification; swiftly implementing a strong plan for measurable plastic reduction in the National Park Service and other DOI bureaus; and supporting full implementation of the Federal Sustainability Plan.
- **Prohibit the export of plastic waste to other nations** without the documented means and infrastructure to sustainably manage the materials, and ratify the Basel Convention with a full ban on exports, including Basel Annex II wastes, such as the new listings of mixed and dirty plastic waste, household waste, and incinerator ashes. Close loopholes on implementation of the Basel Convention trade agreements by requiring reporting mechanisms for unlawful trade of toxic plastic waste.
- **Improve recycling** by requiring upstream design for recyclability; standardizing recycling and composting collection across communities and states; developing new data collection methodologies; shifting more responsibility for recycling to producers; and looking for best practices from state-based models such as California, Oregon, Colorado, and Maine.
- **Ensure accountability for the climate impacts of plastics through emissions** by supporting implementation of the [SEC Climate Risk Disclosure Rule](#), [FAR Council Supplier rule](#), and accounting for the social cost of plastics in procurement.
- **Invest in refillable and reusable pilot businesses** such as [EPA's investment](#) in an Innovative Reuse and Refill Program in Hilo, Hawaii. Establish a competitive grants program for refill and reuse businesses at the Small Business Administration that prioritizes small businesses, minority-led initiatives and enterprises, and programs to serve environmental justice communities.

Additional Information:

- [Existing US Federal Authorities to Address Plastic Pollution: A Synopsis for Decisionmakers](#)
- [Neglected: Environmental Justice Impacts of Plastic Pollution](#)
- [Choked, Strangled, Drowned: The Plastics Crisis Unfolding in Our Oceans Reckoning with the US Role in Global Ocean Plastic Waste](#)
- [To Succeed, the Clean Energy Transition Needs Less Plastic](#)
- [Minderoo-Monaco Commission on Plastic and Human Health](#)

SPOTLIGHT

Ocean Heat Signals Urgent Need for Action

Ocean temperatures are continuing to exceed historical records, with the last 12 months shattering all records, but the Ocean Climate Action Plan does not outline specific actions that federal agencies will take to better understand ocean warming and mitigate impacts where possible. While ocean surface temperatures have increased on average by 0.6°C since 1980, the entire US coastline is experiencing warming at different rates. Maine, Florida, and California have each experienced dramatic warming in recent years. As warming continues, impacts will become more severe, underscoring the urgent need for the Administration to better understand ocean warming and identify and implement needed response actions to address the impacts of warmer waters on marine ecosystems, coastal communities, and the marine economy.

Warming waters are expected to have diverse impacts which can vary under different warming scenarios, including: a decrease in global biomass of marine animals due to warming and a decrease of maximum fisheries catch potential; 12.5% revenue loss to the North American fishing economy; geographic shifts in fisheries, disrupting local economies; and rising sea levels and more severe coastal storms resulting in flooding of coastal communities. As with many other impacts of climate change on the ocean, the single best action to address ocean temperature increases is to rapidly reduce greenhouse gas emissions and limit warming beneath 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels. At the same time, the Administration should address ocean heat specifically with the following recommendations.

“We view the climate crisis much the same way as damage control efforts on a stricken ship. This is an all-hands-on-deck moment.”

CARLOS DEL TORO, SECRETARY OF THE NAVY



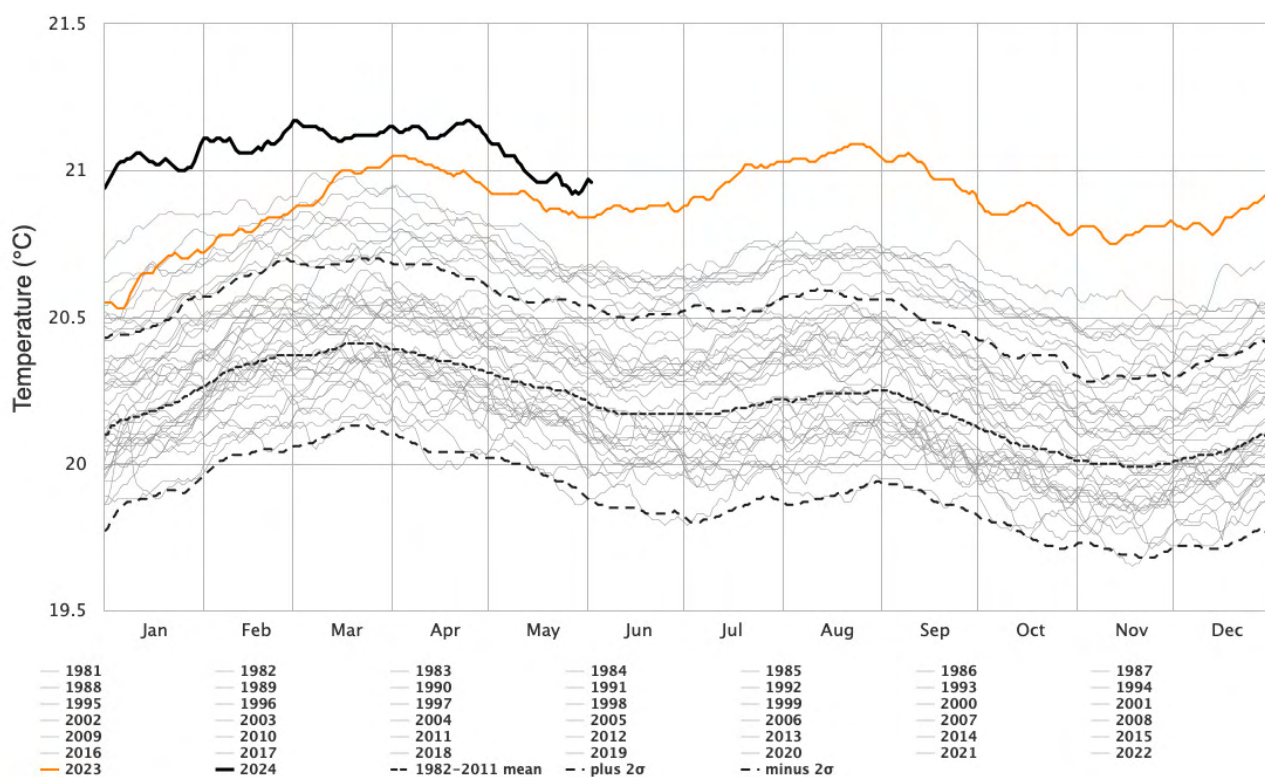
SPOTLIGHT Ocean Heat Signals Urgent Need for Action (cont.)

Critical Next Steps:

- **Improve ocean temperature sensing capacity.** Identify and implement measurement to improve sea surface and ocean heat content.
- **Improve models for prediction of ocean temperature changes.** Assess existing models for predicting ocean temperature change and improve the accuracy and regional scale of reporting of models.
- **Improve scientific understanding of ocean warming impacts.** Develop and implement research plans to investigate ocean warming impacts on ecosystems and economic capacity, including improving understanding of tipping points for coral reefs, fisheries, food chains, storms, and sea level rise.
- **Improve public awareness of ocean warming impacts.** Engage state and local governments and stakeholders to improve awareness of ocean warming impacts and develop informational tools to build understanding of ocean warming consequences.
- **Identify and implement response strategies.** Collaborate with state and local governments and stakeholders to identify and implement practical actions that can mitigate impacts of ocean warming.
- **Supplement the Ocean Climate Action Plan.** Add ocean warming as a topic to the next iteration of the Ocean Climate Action Plan and describe federal agency response actions.
- **Initiate an “Ocean Temperature Increase Program” at NOAA.** A new Ocean Warming Program at NOAA, modeled on the Ocean Acidification Program, would provide a trusted source of information and focus response efforts.
- **Develop a report on ocean warming impacts** in collaboration with the National Academy of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM).

Daily Sea Surface Temperature, World (60°S-60°N, 0-360°E)

Dataset: NOAA OISST V2.1 | Image Credit: ClimateReanalyzer.org, Climate Change Institute, University of Maine





Action Area

Enhance Coastal Resilience And Adaptation

Background:

The combination of more severe storms and rising seas driven by climate change requires comprehensive and costly adaptation of the nation's coasts to address both short-and long-term threats to coastal communities, ecosystems, and infrastructure. Coastal storms are the single largest cause of billion dollar disasters [reported by NOAA](#), generating 54% of all billion-dollar storm damages over the past forty years and almost half the deaths (6,890 people). Risk of [extreme weather](#) events is only increasing, with hurricanes and other climate hazards becoming more frequent and severe. At least [56%](#) of coastal communities rely on data that underestimates sea level rise, often using risk assessments that are inconsistent with the latest climate science. These communities are home to [123 million people](#), many of whom may be displaced from their homes by the end of the century. Resilience is also an issue of justice, as climate impacts are [disproportionately borne](#) by historically disadvantaged communities.

Biden Administration Goal:

The National Climate Task Force, created under [Executive Order 14008](#), established the [Coastal Resilience Interagency Working Group](#) to meet [key goals](#) including: 1) align major federal involvement in coastal resilience activities; 2) develop equitable grantmaking and data; and 3) facilitate the use of the federal government's data and mapping to improve coastal resilience investment decision making.

Progress to Date:

- The Administration identified several important new initiatives for coastal resilience including supporting community-driven relocation from flood risk areas and identifying pathways for the migration of coastal ecosystems, such as beaches and marshes, as sea level rises.
- As part of its [\\$3.3 billion framework](#) funded by the IRA to build a climate-ready nation, NOAA [announced](#) over \$1.3 billion supporting coastal resilience projects across the [US and territories](#), including support for the [Climate Resilience Regional Challenge](#), coastal management [programs](#) and national estuarine research reserves, and [habitat restoration](#) projects, with [dedicated funding](#) for Tribes and underserved communities.
- The Administration established the White House Coastal Flood Resilience Workgroup which provides a mechanism for federal agencies to collaborate on design and implementation of coastal resilience programs and projects. Key projects overseen by the Workgroup include updating of sea level rise projection [scenarios](#) and supporting [users' guide](#) and development of a [roadmap](#) for expanding use of nature-based solutions.
- The Administration allocated significant new funding for coastal resilience programs in the BIL and IRA. Examples include increased funding for the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) (e.g., doubling funding for the [Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities Program \(BRIC\)](#)),

increased funding for NOAA (e.g., the [National Coastal Resilience Fund](#)); and increased funding for the Army Corps of Engineers (e.g., funding for cost storm risk management projects).

- The Administration initiated regulatory revisions for coastal resilience that are critical to successful adaptation of coastal areas. Examples include the Army Corps of Engineers regulations for water resources “Principles and Requirements” and FEMA regulations updating standards for local ordinances adopted as part of the National Flood Insurance Program.
- FEMA re-established the Federal Flood Risk Management Standard (FFRMS) that directs federal agencies to avoid locating investments in areas at risk of flooding and rising seas and to elevate structures in the event that siting a new investment in a risky area is unavoidable.

Critical Next Steps:

- **Aggressively Implement Coastal Resilience Elements of the Ocean Climate Action Plan**, including; developing a national framework of policies and programs to support communities that seek technical and financial assistance to relocate homes, businesses, and other assets to higher ground;¹ identifying migration pathways needed to sustain ecosystems as sea levels rise; supporting expanded use of nature-based solutions to coastal risks; developing standards for “living shorelines”; and focusing technical assistance on marginalized, underserved, and rural communities.

¹ The federal government could work through the Coastal Resilience Interagency Working Group to make progress on this recommendation.

“We are investing in America and empowering communities to understand and take action to address their risks to climate change and ensure they continue to thrive now and in the future.”

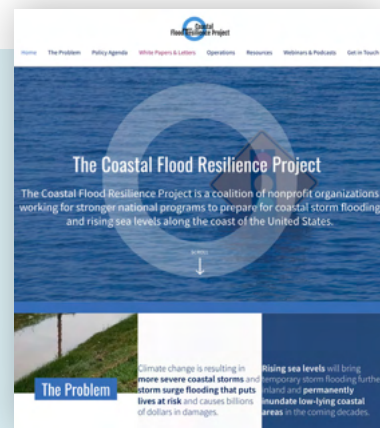
RICK SPINRAD, UNDER SECRETARY OF COMMERCE FOR
OCEANS AND ATMOSPHERE & NOAA ADMINISTRATOR



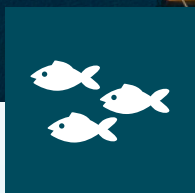
- **Complete Critical Coastal Resilience Rulemaking and Allocate New Funds.** Prioritize final promulgation of the draft regulations for applying the interagency “Principles and Requirements” to Army Corps of Engineers water resources projects (proposed on February 15, 2024). FEMA should promptly propose regulations for local flood management ordinances adopted under the National Flood Insurance Program.
- **Expedite Implementation of FFRMS.** Although the [FFRMS](#) is re-established in regulations, federal agencies still need to develop procedures for implementing it and this work should be expedited.
- **Map Areas at Risk of Rising Sea Levels.** Relying on the new sea level rise scenarios [published](#) in early 2022, NOAA and FEMA should cooperate on establishing maps of US land areas expected to be permanently inundated because of higher sea levels by 2050, 2100, and 2150 under the “Intermediate High” scenario. These sea level rise risk area maps will provide a critical foundation for other measures to improve public information, risk disclosure, and planning related to sea level rise.
- **Develop National Plans to Relocate Critical Infrastructure to Higher Ground.** Federal agencies should identify specific, large-scale critical infrastructure assets that support the normal operation of society and are at risk of storm surges and permanent inundation by rising seas. Once identified, federal agencies should work with state and local governments to develop long term plans to relocate these assets to higher ground giving priority to transportation (e.g., federal highways, railroads, bridges, and airports) and water treatment facilities (e.g., drinking water and wastewater treatment facilities).

Additional Information:

See resources from the [Coastal Flood Resilience Project](#).



- **Allocate Existing IRA and BIL Funds Efficiently and Transparently.** Federal agencies should conduct an internal evaluation to identify opportunities within existing funding streams, including those afforded by the IRA and BIL, to maximize transparent, efficient, and just coastal resilience programming. Identifying barriers, bottlenecks, and inefficiencies in programs will allow the federal government to address systemic inequality issues and shorten duration between application and funding distribution.
- **Launch New Federal Sea Level Rise Website.** Multiple federal agencies have developed websites addressing the causes and consequences of rising sea levels along the US coast. These sites, however, present different information about rising seas and are not well-coordinated. Coastal program managers, planners, and property owners would benefit from a better integrated presentation of sea level rise data and information. Recognizing this need, federal agencies are working to develop a website dedicated to sea level rise data and information. Launching this new, integrated sea level rise website in 2024 should be a high priority.



Action Area

Support Climate-Ready Fisheries

Background:

Climate change is altering marine environments and [threatening the people and fisheries](#) that depend on healthy marine ecosystems. Fish stocks are shifting away from traditional grounds and changing in productivity and abundance. These changes are testing existing fishery management regimes as well as impacting coastal economies and [Indigenous communities and cultures](#) that are already vulnerable to climate change. Ocean modeling and decision support systems are at the center of NOAA's Climate, Ecosystems, and Fisheries Initiative (CEFI), which, if fully implemented, would empower fishery managers to take action to adapt management to changing conditions and incorporate climate-ready approaches into decision making.

Biden Administration Goal:

The [Ocean Climate Action Plan](#) identifies the advancement and implementation of climate-informed management of fisheries as a priority, including providing fishery managers with the science and information they need to assess risks and enabling them to incorporate climate-ready approaches into decision making.

Progress to Date:

- NOAA allocated \$349 million from the IRA to support climate-ready fisheries, including \$40 million to support the [CEFI with pilot projects in six regions](#).
- NOAA committed \$20 million in IRA funding for the Regional Fishery Management Councils for the development and advancement of climate-ready management and implementation efforts. This funding has the potential to leverage existing tools, such as the [climate vulnerability assessments](#) that have been conducted for major fish stocks and protected species in most regions of the country, to change on-the-water management of fisheries in response to climate impacts.
- NOAA Fisheries released updated [Regional Action Plans](#) that describe how it will implement the Climate Science Strategy. The plans identify regional needs and actions to develop the tools and information to fulfill near-term needs. The update included a new plan for NOAA Fisheries at the headquarters level to support regional efforts for climate-resilient fisheries.

Critical Next Steps:

- **Prioritize strong implementation of core conservation requirements of the law.** Science has made clear that healthy stocks have the best chance of adapting and thriving in a changing climate. NOAA Fisheries should enact more precautionary management given that [47 stocks](#) are considered overfished—reversing recent trends of improvement—with consequences for fisheries and the communities that depend on them.
- **Establish climate adaptation as an enduring priority for fisheries and provide targeted guidance to managers.** A [GAO report](#) found several challenges to enhancing resilience in fisheries, including insufficient collaboration between NOAA Fisheries and fishery managers, hindering adaptive management. The agency should make climate change a priority in fisheries science and management policies, plans, and actions and provide tangible management guidance to implement the goal in their strategic plan, enabling Councils and regional offices to operationalize climate-ready approaches and decision making. For example, NOAA Fisheries should consider adopting the Marine Fisheries Advisory Committee [recommendation](#) for the development of a climate-ready fisheries policy.



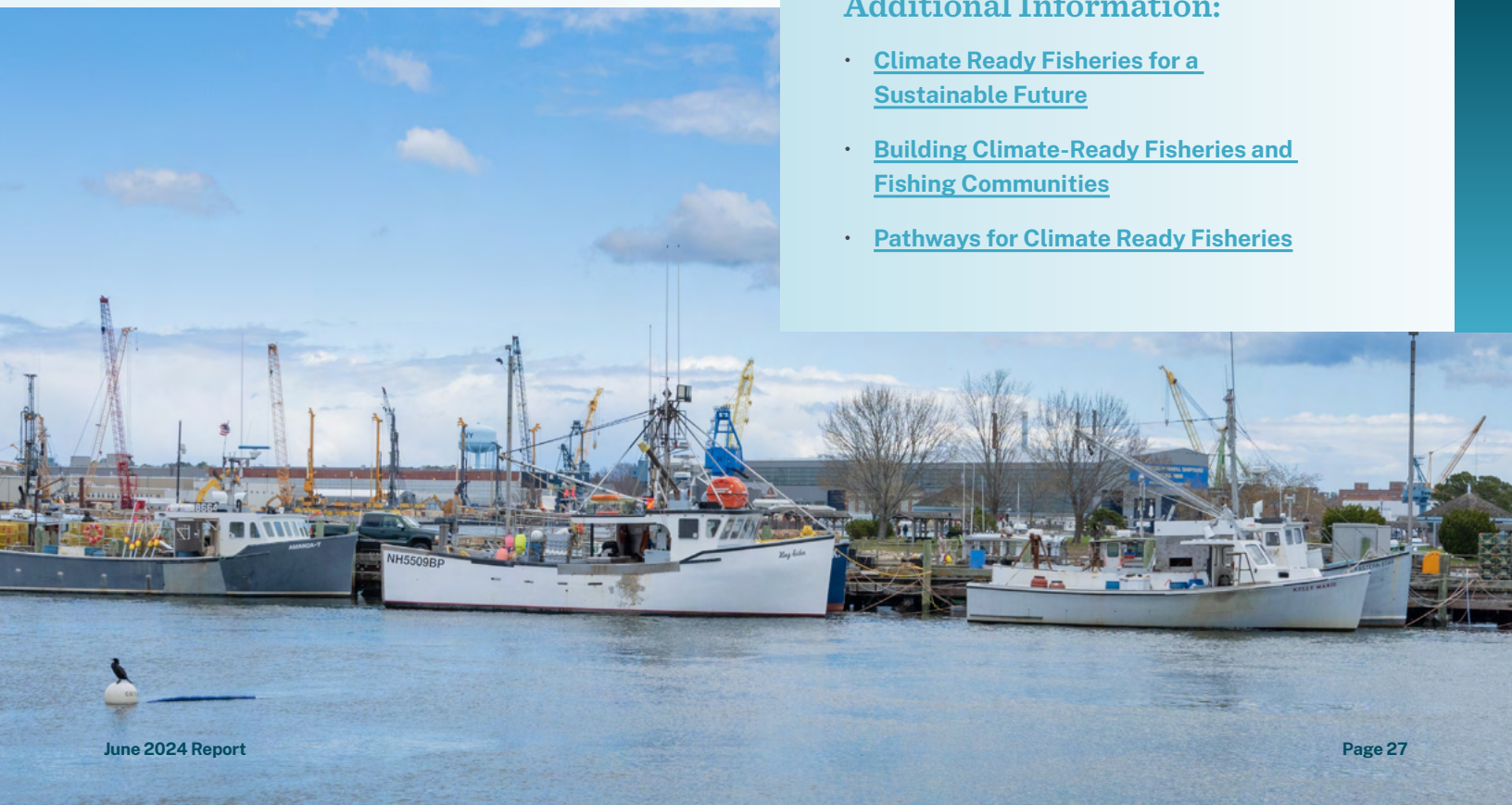
- **Fully fund the scientific infrastructure that supports fishery management and effectively leverage IRA funds.** The GAO report also found that limited data and modeling information hamper NOAA Fisheries' ability to measure future changes and predict fish stock behavior under changing conditions in order to make management decisions in response. The agency should meet these challenges with investments in fisheries science infrastructure and continuously use the results in the management process. IRA investments in CEFI will be critical, but significant, long-term funding will also be needed. More broadly, NOAA Fisheries should ensure that IRA funding is used to effectively drive on-the-water changes through both delivery of science advancements and uptake of climate-ready management approaches by fishery managers like the Councils.
- **Integrate equity and justice priorities into climate-ready management.** NOAA Fisheries must advance equity in fisheries, including via meaningful consultation and engagement with Tribes, considering Traditional Knowledge in all aspects of federal fishery management, and ensuring a meaningful Tribal

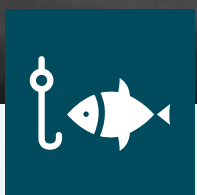
role on federal fishery management bodies. While NOAA released an [Equity and Environmental Justice Strategy](#) and is in the process of implementing the plan in each of its regions, it must now turn those commitments into action in order to achieve much-needed change.

- **Expand testing and commercial use of on-demand fishing gear.** Climate change has led to the increased co-occurrence of endangered marine species with several fixed-gear fisheries, leading to unsustainable numbers of entanglements of whales and sea turtles. Entanglements may result in fishery closures, regulatory change, and economic uncertainty. By removing persistent vertical buoy lines from the water, on-demand fishing gear greatly reduces entanglement risk and represents an important tool for fishery climate resilience. NOAA should build on work to date and finalize and implement the [Roadmap to Ropeless](#), and dedicate sufficient resources to advance the use of on-demand fishing gear in the US Northeast, Southeast, and West Coast regions.

Additional Information:

- [Climate Ready Fisheries for a Sustainable Future](#)
- [Building Climate-Ready Fisheries and Fishing Communities](#)
- [Pathways for Climate Ready Fisheries](#)





Action Area

End Illegal, Unreported And Unregulated Fishing & Human Rights Abuses In The Seafood Sector

Background:

Illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing is one of the greatest environmental threats to ocean health. It is undermining national and food security, perpetuating forced labor and human rights abuses, and significantly exacerbating the impacts of climate change on ecosystems and communities. Effectively combating IUU fishing and forced labor in global seafood supply chains requires traceability of all seafood and transparency of fishing activity at sea to ensure effective enforcement. As one of the world's largest seafood importers and consumers, the US should use its market power to play a pivotal role in ending IUU fishing and human rights abuses in the seafood supply chain. While the Administration has acknowledged the importance of addressing IUU fishing, the US must play a stronger leadership role and reverse course on recent actions that hinder progress on seafood traceability and preventing forced labor in seafood supply chains.

The Administration's Ocean Climate Action Plan did not include this critical issue, but addressing illegal fishing is key for sustainable fisheries and managing our ocean in a changing climate. Investigations by [The Outlaw Ocean Project](#), [AP](#), [Corporate Accountability Project](#), and others continue to find severe human rights and environmental abuses in fishing at sea, seafood farming, and processing.

Biden Administration Goal:

President Biden issued a [Memorandum on Combating Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated Fishing and Associated Labor Abuses](#) that states a strong US policy on IUU fishing and elevates the importance of combating labor abuses.

Progress to Date:

- The US Interagency Working Group on IUU Fishing released a five-year [action plan](#) to combat IUU fishing, as required by Congress.
- The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) issued a [final rule on food traceability](#) that requires companies in the seafood supply chain to maintain records on key data elements related to the chain-of-custody for the majority of seafood sold in the US. However, the Food and Drug Administration will not enforce compliance until 2026.
- The Department of Treasury announced the [first US sanctions under E.O. 13818](#) and the Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act for forced labor abuses, targeting two Chinese companies, their leadership, eight affiliated entities, and 157 fishing vessels controlled by these entities.
- US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) issued [“withhold release orders”](#) (WROs) to [block seafood imports](#) from one Chinese company and four individual vessels using forced labor.

Critical Next Steps:

- **Expand and strengthen the Seafood Import Monitoring Program (SIMP)** to ensure that all imported seafood is safe, legally caught, responsibly sourced, and honestly labeled. NOAA should provide a detailed timeline and greater transparency for the current review of SIMP, including a commitment to expand the catch documentation and traceability requirements

of SIMP to all seafood and build in mechanisms to address forced labor and other human rights abuses. While NOAA issued a [proposed rule](#) to expand SIMP to eight additional species or species groups, they then [withdrew the proposal](#), despite urgent need for expansion.

- **[Finalize the proposed rule](#) expanding the definition of IUU fishing to include forced labor** under the High Seas Driftnet Fishing Moratorium Protection Act.
- **[Issue WROs to block seafood produced with forced labor](#)**. Although recent non-governmental investigations have provided detailed evidence of forced labor in the seafood industry, CBP has not issued a seafood-related WRO since August 2021.
- **Strengthen automatic identification system (AIS) and transparency requirements to improve transparency of fishing activity**. As a condition of seafood import, the US should require the use of AIS tracking information, a unique mobile maritime service identity, and the reporting of information on the beneficial ownership of vessels.
- **Ensure comparable transparency requirements exist for the US fishing fleet**. Commercial fishing vessels from 49-65 feet in length should be required to carry AIS, as vessels over 65 feet are already required to do.
- **Ensure relevant federal agencies are sharing and analyzing data** to enable effective enforcement against IUU fishing and forced labor, including through the Tariff Act, the Magnitsky Act, High Seas Driftnet Fishing Moratorium Protection Act, and other

“NOAA is committed to strengthening the suite of tools we use to combat all forms of IUU fishing and counter the use of forced labor in the seafood supply chain.”

JANET COIT, ASSISTANT ADMINISTRATOR FOR NOAA FISHERIES



authorities. Use automated import screening tools similar to FDA's [PREDICT](#) to ensure more effective use of import data.

- **Strengthen NOAA's proposed definition of IUU fishing**, which still falls short by omitting forced labor taking place in fisheries in areas of national jurisdiction and IUU fishing in areas covered by international fishery management organizations to which the US is not a party.
- Implement provisions enacted in the Fiscal Year 23 National Defense Authorization Act that strengthen **NOAA's ability to sanction nations for failing to address IUU fishing**.
- **Increase cooperation among major market states**, through a new or updated formal agreement (e.g. the agreement among US-EU-Japan) and increase membership and effectiveness of the [IUU Fishing Action Alliance](#).

Additional Information:

- [AP finds grueling conditions in Indian shrimp industry that report calls 'dangerous and abusive'](#)
- [India Shrimp: A Growing Goliath](#)
- [Hidden Harvest: Human Rights and Environmental Abuses in India's Shrimp Industry](#)
- [The Crimes Behind the Seafood You Eat](#)
- [Seafood Obtained via Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated Fishing: US Imports and Economic Impact on the US Commercial Fisheries](#)
- [Reeling in Abuse: How Conservation Tools Can Help Combat Forced Labor Imports in the Seafood Industry](#)
- [Transparency and Traceability: Tools to Stop Illegal Fishing](#)
- [Strengthening US Leadership to Deter Illegal Seafood: Implementation Challenges and Recommendations for the Seafood Import Monitoring Program](#)
- [Tools Left Unused to Combat Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated Fishing](#)





Action Area

Advance Marine Protected Areas

Background:

Marine protected areas (MPAs)—areas of the ocean with the primary purpose of long-term biodiversity conservation—offer a nature-based solution for climate change adaptation and mitigation while delivering valuable benefits to people and communities. MPAs can enhance ocean and coastal ecosystem resilience in the face of climate change by preventing damaging activities that degrade habitats and wildlife populations; providing refuge to wildlife; and protecting genetic diversity that supplies raw material for adaptation. Protecting blue carbon habitats in MPAs can prevent carbon emissions and allow for continued sequestration, contributing to climate change mitigation.

Biden Administration Goal:

In its America the Beautiful initiative, the Administration has committed to improving biodiversity protection, building up climate resilience in our natural systems, and increasing equitable access to nature, including by setting the goal to conserve and protect at least 30% of US lands and waters by 2030 (30x30).

Progress to Date:

- DOI released [Conserving and Restoring America the Beautiful](#), a report recommending steps to achieve the 30x30 goal; created an Interagency Working Group to develop an American Conservation and Stewardship Atlas (Atlas), [gathered public input](#) to inform its development, and launched the resource on [conservation.gov](#); held a [series of listening sessions and a public comment period](#) to inform NOAA's work on America the Beautiful; and committed to a renaming process on the Pacific Remote Islands Marine National Monument.
- The Administration [restored monument protections](#) to the Northeast Canyons and Seamounts Marine National Monument; released the draft management plan for the Monument; and implemented its fishing regulations.
- NOAA established a new [Connecticut National Estuarine Research Reserve](#).

“The Interior Department is committed to tackling the climate crisis through nature-based solutions that will preserve biodiversity, strengthen resilience against disasters, and support climate adaptation while benefiting both people and nature.”

DEB HAALAND,
SECRETARY OF
THE INTERIOR



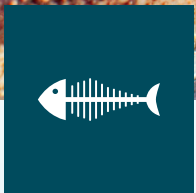
- The Administration allocated \$30 million in IRA funds to support sanctuary designations, representing the single largest investment in sanctuary designations in the 50-year history of the sanctuary program, and \$50 million to sanctuary infrastructure.
- The Administration launched the [America the Beautiful Challenge](#), to fund large landscape scale and/or cross-jurisdictional projects that advance existing conservation plans or are informed by Indigenous Traditional Knowledge.
- NOAA established the [Marine and Coastal Area-Based Management Federal Advisory Committee](#) and held the first meeting in February 2024.
- NOAA introduced a revised draft management plan and proposed rule for the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary (NMS), together as the [Restoration Blueprint](#).
- NOAA's Office of National Marine Sanctuaries accepted the nomination of the proposed [Alaḡum Kanuux̂ National Marine Sanctuary](#).
- NOAA initiated designation of the [Papahānaumokuākea NMS](#) in Hawaii; the [Hudson Canyon NMS](#) off New York; (following a [memorandum by President Biden](#) calling on the Secretary of Commerce to consider initiating designation of a National Marine Sanctuary); the [Pacific Remote Islands NMS](#) in the US Pacific territories; and established a Sanctuary Advisory Council for the proposed Hudson Canyon NMS.
- NOAA published the draft management plan for the first Tribally-nominated national marine sanctuary, [Chumash Heritage NMS](#), off California. The public comment period for the Chumash Heritage NMS closed with over 110,000 comments and 99% support for the sanctuary's designation.
- The Administration seated the [Mariana Trench Monument Advisory Council](#), which is reviewing final management plans for the monument in 2024.
- NOAA released the draft designation documents and initiated a public comment period for the [Papahānaumokuākea NMS](#).

Critical Next Steps:

- **Designate and advance new, expanded, and enhanced place-based conservation** by finalizing the designations of the Chumash Heritage NMS, Papahānaumokuākea NMS, and Lake Ontario NMS; making available for public comment draft management plans for Hudson Canyon NMS and the Pacific Remote Islands NMS; releasing final management plans for the Northeast Canyons and Seamounts, Mariana Trench, and Pacific Remote Islands Marine National Monuments; advancing a management plan and protections in the Florida Keys NMS at levels sufficient to address poor and declining sanctuary conditions; committing funding and technical expertise to support the visions of the Gullah/Geechee Nation and South Atlantic Salt Marsh Initiative in advancing coastal protections; and advancing marine conservation in the Pribilof Islands, Alaska.
- **Ensure the effective management, implementation, and funding of MPAs.** NOAA funding should be increased for the National Marine Sanctuary Program to support science, management, and outreach regarding Marine National Monuments and National Estuarine Research Reserves. USFWS funding should also be increased for Marine National Monuments. Additionally, the IRA spending plan should be implemented to support ocean conservation and provide funding for marine protected areas and the implementation of the National Marine Sanctuaries Act should be strengthened.
- **Continue to involve Indigenous leaders throughout the sanctuary designation process** to promote equitable, inclusive co-management of protected areas alongside Tribal governments and Indigenous communities. The Chumash Heritage and Pacific Remote Island NMSs are well-positioned to set precedents for collaborative management models, but the Administration should ensure that Indigenous knowledge and ways of existence are consistently respected throughout the process.
- **Support the designation of geographically representative, ecologically connected, and climate-resilient protected areas**, including those that are highly and fully protected as biodiversity hotspots, vital to blue carbon initiatives such as estuaries, oyster beds, tropical coral reefs, mangroves, kelp forests, and seagrass beds, and those that are underrepresented in current protections such as seamounts and deep-sea coral reefs.
- **Evaluate and revise the Atlas using [The MPA Guide](#)**—a clear, science-based framework to categorize, plan, and track MPAs, and to assess their anticipated outcomes for both biodiversity and human well-being—to ensure an accurate baseline of the protections to safeguard ocean biodiversity and evaluate US leadership and progress on global goals.
- **Support the United States' ratification of the [High Seas Treaty](#)** to promote the protection of biodiversity beyond national jurisdiction.

Additional Information:

- [Year Three Report: America the Beautiful](#)
- [Delivering on Ocean Conservation Priorities Across the U.S.: Tribal, Indigenous, and community-led recommendations to advance the America the Beautiful Initiative](#)
- [U.S. Ocean Biodiversity Protection Gap Analysis](#)



Action Area

Minimize And Address Ocean Acidification

Background:

The ocean has absorbed 28% of CO₂ generated by human activities since the start of the Industrial Revolution, resulting in more acidic sea water and threatening communities that rely on a healthy ocean for commercial, cultural, or other values. Ocean acidification (OA) has significant implications for marine life, particularly for shellfish, corals, and species that make skeletons and shells from calcium carbonate. The rate and magnitude of OA threatens marine species and ecosystems, jeopardizing marine industries, coastal communities and economies across the US. The US federal government and coastal states have played a [key role](#) in documenting and responding to OA, generating best practices and learnings domestically and internationally. Advancing domestic OA action will better inform decision making about national mitigation, adaptation, and resilience goals.

Biden Administration Goal:

The Administration outlined several actions related to minimizing and addressing OA domestically and internationally in the US Ocean Acidification Action Plan (OA-AP) including:

- 1 Mitigate OA through reducing CO₂ emissions, taking local actions to remediate OA, and investing in research on marine carbon dioxide removal (mCDR).
- 2 Increase monitoring and research to understand the impacts of OA across marine species and ecosystems.
- 3 Prioritize building resilience and adaptation strategies for coastal communities at home and abroad affected by OA.
- 4 Collaborate sub-nationally and internationally to better integrate OA knowledge across multiple levels of climate policies and marine management, encourage the expansion of OA Alliance membership, and mobilize the development of OA-APs.

Progress to Date:

- The State Department released the [US OA-AP](#), providing a US deliverable of the UN Ocean Decade Project ‘[Understanding and Addressing OA and Changing Ocean Conditions Through the Development of OA Action Plans](#)’ and supporting implementation of the [Ocean Acidification Research For Sustainability \(OARS\)](#) UN Decade Endorsed Programme.
- The US joined the [International Alliance to Combat Ocean Acidification](#) and called upon other national governments to take domestic OA actions by joining the [National OA Action Planning Leadership Circle](#) in 2024-2025.
- Interagency partners continued leadership of the [Interagency Working Group on Ocean Acidification](#) which advises and assists the Subcommittee on Ocean Science and Technology on matters related to OA, including coordination of federal interagency activities as outlined in the Federal Ocean Acidification Research and Monitoring Act of 2009.
- NOAA invested [\\$17 million in 2023](#) to directly support its Ocean Acidification Program (OAP) and
- [\\$24.3 million](#) in a marine carbon dioxide removal grant program to advance research and development for large scale carbon removal and local scale OA mitigation research.
- The US invested in and supported bi-lateral and & international efforts to build capacity for OA knowledge, mitigation and response on OA including: (1) [US NOAA/ Canada DFO OA research and communications project](#); (2) the [Global Ocean Acidification Observing Network](#), including nine regional hubs building capacity to inform responses to climate change impacts; (3) critical international OA capacity building through the International Atomic Energy Agency’s [International Coordination Centre on OA](#); (4) the [Pacific Islands Ocean Acidification Centre](#); and (5) the [OA Alliance](#).
- NOAA’s Ocean Acidification Program advanced domestic climate-ocean communications through the collaborative project, “[Exploring Our Changing Ocean: Impacts and Response to Ocean Acidification in the U.S.A.](#),” supporting education, outreach and calls to action that associated aquarium partners and science institutions can utilize across larger climate change narratives and outreach efforts.



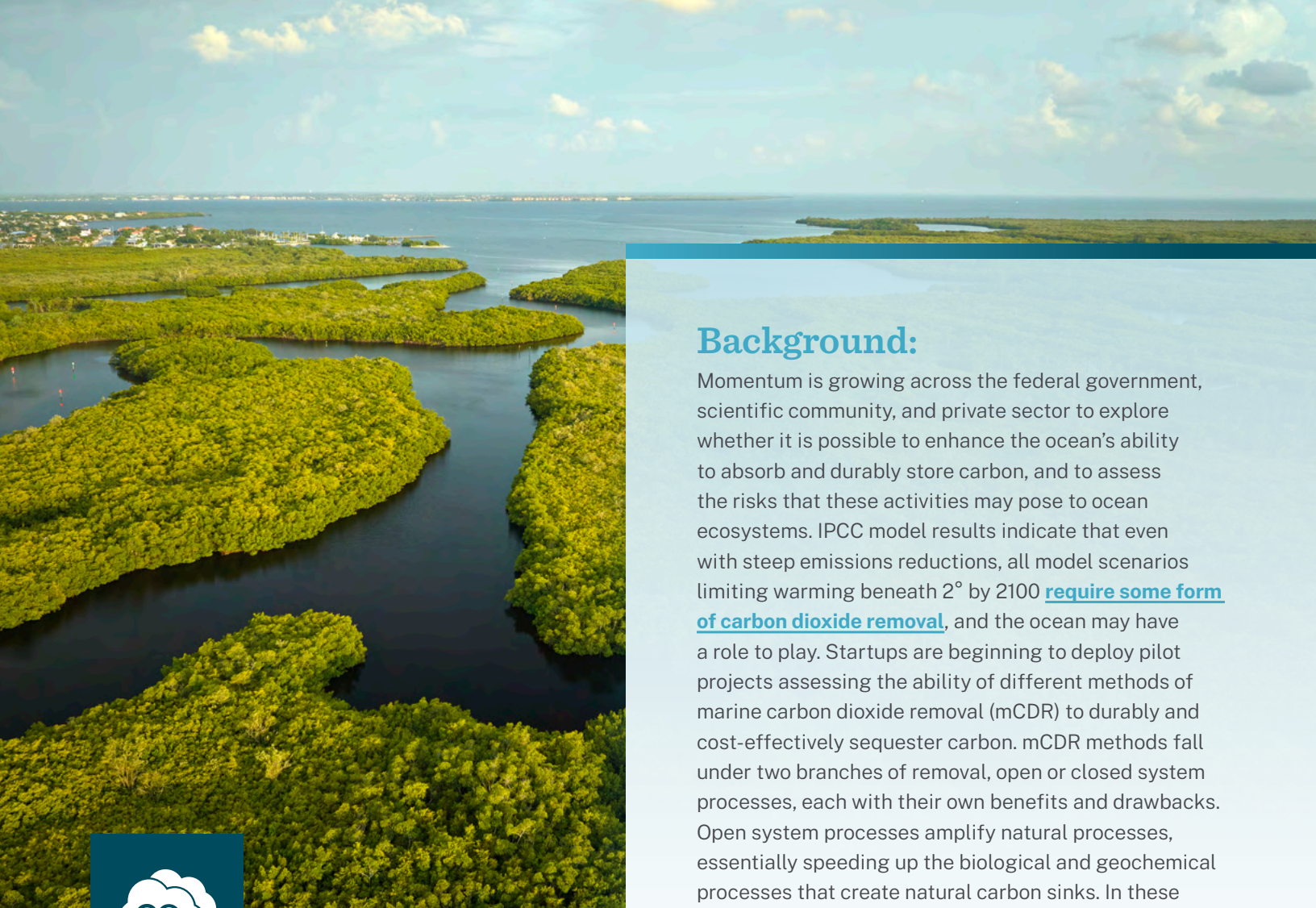
Critical Next Steps:

- **Host an annual meeting of US subnational governments** that have developed OA Action Plans, beginning in December 2024.
- **Increase and align federal funding opportunities** that are multi-disciplinary, multi-sectoral, and multi-jurisdictional to help implement Plan actions. Efforts should produce climate-ocean knowledge for local scale management and decision making.
- **Harmonize climate-ocean monitoring and data management** by integrating OA information from [NOAA's Ocean, Coastal & Great Lakes Acidification Research Plan](#) across Administration goals including those for climate-ready fisheries, climate-smart conservation, coastal resilience and habitat restoration, effective upgrades of wastewater infrastructure, and evaluation of marine carbon dioxide removal strategies. This includes enhanced [OA monitoring and guidelines](#) across EPA's National Estuary Program and National Coastal Condition Assessment.
- **Support the development of biological and chemical OA indicators** that support marine resource management and water quality evaluation at different scales.
- **Leverage clean water criteria** for detecting and managing harmful pollution that exacerbates coastal acidification, hypoxia, and deoxygenation; support proposals to upgrade and modernize wastewater and stormwater systems to reduce these pollutions.
- **Increase international and domestic climate financing for OA activities.** This includes supporting federal and US State and Tribal government ocean acidification programs; implementing UN [Sustainable Development Goal 14.3](#) "to minimize and address OA"; and providing financial support for the Global Ocean Acidification Observing Network and similar international OA coordinating bodies that are catalyzing uptake of domestic and global solutions for responding to climate-driven ocean changes.
- **Serve on the Executive Committee of the International Alliance to Combat Ocean Acidification (OA Alliance)** and support increased OA Action Planning efforts internationally and domestically.
- Call upon more national governments to join the [National OA Action Planning Leadership Circle](#) and develop domestic OA Action Plans by the UN Ocean Conference 2025 to support implementation of SDG 14.3.

"The work we are doing to protect the oceans is of dramatic importance that will define the future of our planet. The ocean sustains all life on Earth, providing food and livelihoods for billions of people and regulating our climate and weather."

J.R. LITTLEJOHN, ACTING ASSISTANT SECRETARY, BUREAU OF OCEANS
AND INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL AND SCIENTIFIC AFFAIRS





Action Area

Evaluate Marine Carbon Dioxide Removal

Background:

Momentum is growing across the federal government, scientific community, and private sector to explore whether it is possible to enhance the ocean's ability to absorb and durably store carbon, and to assess the risks that these activities may pose to ocean ecosystems. IPCC model results indicate that even with steep emissions reductions, all model scenarios limiting warming beneath 2° by 2100 [require some form of carbon dioxide removal](#), and the ocean may have a role to play. Startups are beginning to deploy pilot projects assessing the ability of different methods of marine carbon dioxide removal (mCDR) to durably and cost-effectively sequester carbon. mCDR methods fall under two branches of removal, open or closed system processes, each with their own benefits and drawbacks. Open system processes amplify natural processes, essentially speeding up the biological and geochemical processes that create natural carbon sinks. In these approaches, relatively lower control over the process and certainty about the amount of carbon removed accompany higher potential for scalability. Closed system approaches, such as direct water capture of carbon dioxide, have precise carbon accounting but can face far greater energy or infrastructure costs, which may limit scalability. Research on emerging mCDR methods is necessary to determine which, if any, mCDR processes are feasible and ethical at scales meaningful for addressing climate change.

Biden Administration Goal:

The [Ocean Climate Action Plan](#) specifies that the US should:

- 1 By 2030, build sufficient knowledge about the efficacy and tradeoffs of different methods of mCDR and use it to guide deployment decisions.
- 2 Develop a robust regulatory framework for research and possible later deployment to protect human health, the marine environment, and potentially affected communities, and ensure safe and effective long-term carbon dioxide removal.

Progress to Date:

- The Administration [launched](#) a new [Fast-Track Action Committee](#) on mCDR co-chaired by the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) and NOAA, and announced a [Request for Information](#) on a national mCDR Research Plan.
- The Administration has broadly advanced CDR research, including DOE's issuance of a Request for Information on "technologies ready to be demonstrated" and the announcement of the "[Carbon Negative Shot](#)" to develop technology that will capture CO₂ from the atmosphere and store it at gigaton scales for less than \$100/net metric ton. NOAA has developed a [draft research strategy](#) on CDR as an element of its climate mitigation portfolio.
- The Administration provided, on behalf of multiple partners, [\\$30 million](#) for cross-sectoral scientific work on mCDR, to "assist in the verification or invalidation of hypotheses regarding mCDR, in order to make informed decisions regarding a potential scaled negative carbon ocean industry."
- The Department of Commerce and NOAA [announced](#) \$24 million for research projects on mCDR strategies that will inform key questions related to this emerging field.
- DOE [announced](#) \$36 million of funding for 11 projects across 8 states to accelerate the development of mCDR capture and storage technologies. Funded through the Sensing Exports of Anthropogenic Carbon through Ocean Observation (SEA-CO₂) [program](#), these projects will

support novel efforts to measure, report, and validate mCDR and identify cost-effective and energy efficient carbon removal solutions.

- DOE declared the intent to launch a [Responsible Carbon Management Initiative](#) to engage the public on mCDR research.
- EPA [clarified](#) the permitting process for proposed mCDR projects under the Clean Water Act or Ocean Dumping Act.

Critical Next Steps:

- **Direct DOE and NOAA to jointly fund research to validate the existing set of possible mCDR techniques.** In development of DOE's "Carbon Negative Shot" Earthshot goal to remove gigatons of CO₂ from the atmosphere and store it for more than a century for less than \$100/ton of net CO₂-equivalent, DOE and NOAA should set an explicit numerical and temporal (e.g. storage duration) goal for what constitutes success in mCDR.
- **Adopt a universal code of conduct (that allows for periodic revisions as well as regular input and reevaluation)** for mCDR research and development to ensure that such activities are conducted responsibly, with robust input from affected communities and other stakeholders, and in a manner that does not add additional burdens to already-overburdened frontline communities. The code of conduct should also ensure that researchers fully assess potential environmental impacts of mCDR activities and establish protocols to

"Reaching President Biden's ambitious decarbonization goals and avoiding the worst impacts of climate change will require a wide range of innovative climate solutions, from common-sense approaches like improving energy efficiency to novel applications like utilizing the ocean's natural carbon removal abilities to reduce greenhouse gas pollution from the atmosphere."

JENNIFER GRANHOLM, SECRETARY OF ENERGY



avoid, minimize, mitigate, and monitor those impacts. Recipients of federal funding should be required to abide by the code of conduct. The Aspen Institute, working with global experts, released a code of conduct in fall 2023, and the code's authors plan to continue reviewing and improving it. This document could inform a federal equivalent.

- **Clarify agency authority to prioritize key research questions and close research gaps.** There is currently a lack of clarity of authority for federal agencies to engage in research or other investigation of the potential for mCDR to contribute to carbon dioxide drawdown. For example, DOE can currently fund work on macroalgae cultivation to create biofuels, but there is no directive for such programs to apply to understanding macroalgal cultivation as a potential mechanism for CDR. The Administration should clarify how agencies can engage in mCDR research, and integrate it into existing actions to eliminate regulatory uncertainty and prioritize needed research on this topic. NOAA should lead on research and coordination, given the findings in its white paper, "[Strategy for NOAA Carbon Dioxide Removal Research](#)."
- **Develop a robust and precautionary regulatory framework for mCDR activities.** Because there is no single law or set of regulations that applies to mCDR research, governance is left to a patchwork of existing authorities designed to regulate issues like ocean dumping and impediments to navigation. The Administration should advance regulatory reform, either through legislation or regulation, to create a standardized permitting and application process for mCDR research and possible later deployment that will protect human health, the marine environment, and potentially affected communities, and ensure safe and effective long-term carbon dioxide removal.

- **Create an "Oceanshot" program** to fund oceanographic, governance, and social science research at appropriate scales jointly funded by DOE, the National Science Foundation (NSF), and NOAA. This program would investigate carbon storage efficacy and social and environmental effects of proposed mCDR techniques, as outlined by the National Academies' [research strategy](#), including establishing the baselines from which additional carbon removal could be measured. The National Academies report suggests an investment of \$125 million for these "Foundational Research Priorities." The initial investment proposed in the [NOFO](#) is a good start, but at \$30 million, it will be unable to answer all the necessary questions.
- **Direct DOE and NOAA to create and implement pilot programs** to develop standard validation protocols for mCDR, and decide who can carry them out to verify the outcomes of publicly or privately funded CDR activities. Initial support for this work was provided through ARPA-E awards totalling [\\$36 million](#), which supported projects focused on Measurement, Reporting and Verification technology development. Future investment will be necessary to ensure robust verification.

Additional Information:

- [A Research Strategy for Ocean-based Carbon Dioxide Removal and Sequestration](#)
- [Guidance for Ocean-Based Carbon Dioxide Removal Projects](#)
- [Developing Model Federal Legislation to Advance Safe and Responsible Ocean Carbon Dioxide Removal Research in the US](#)
- [Executive Actions to Ensure Safe and Responsible Ocean Carbon Dioxide Removal Research in the United States](#)
- [A Code of Conduct for Marine Carbon Dioxide Removal Research](#)

SPOTLIGHT

Critical Concerns and Challenges with Offshore Carbon Capture and Sequestration

The ocean is full of climate solutions, but research shows that offshore carbon capture and sequestration (CCS) may in many cases result in increased emissions. In reference to the BIL's requirement to establish an offshore CCS program, the Ocean Climate Action Plan noted that “to protect the health and safety of local communities and minimize risks to the marine environment while supporting long-term CO₂ storage, these Congressionally-mandated regulations must be robust, effective, science-and evidence-based, and must not disproportionately burden communities.”

This is especially critical given offshore CCS's dubious status as an effective ocean-based climate solution. While CCS is often pitched as a mechanism for long-term carbon storage, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's 2022 [report](#) ranked CCS among the costliest and least effective options for reducing emissions. Capturing and storing CO₂ from air is [50 times](#) more expensive

than planting trees per ton of CO₂ taken up. More alarmingly, CCS funding often ends up subsidizing more fossil fuel extraction. The Congressional Budget Office [noted](#) that 13 of the 15 existing CCS projects in the US are used to assist in extracting more oil, a trend that is likely to continue. [Over 70%](#) of carbon capture projects worldwide are used for a process known as “Enhanced Oil Recovery”—essentially using the pressure of injected CO₂ to increase oil yield of existing wells. Instead of meaningfully reducing emissions, CCS is largely used by oil and gas producers to subsidize extraction and continue fossil fuel operations under the premise of climate action.

Companies receiving 45Q tax credits for CCS routinely fail to comply with EPA guidelines. From 2010-2019, projects claiming [\\$894 million](#) in credits had ignored EPA guidelines. Despite these failings, the IRA increased and extended the 45Q tax credit for CCS operations. As a result, 45Q CCS credits are estimated to

cost American taxpayers nearly [\\$5 billion](#) over the next five years.

In addition to being a costly and ineffective climate solution, the buildout of CCS infrastructure presents serious health, safety, and environmental risks, particularly to communities that are already overburdened by industrial hazards. The residents of Sattartia, Mississippi are still suffering from health impacts related to a terrifying [ruptured CO₂ pipeline in 2020](#) that sent dozens of residents to the hospital and prompted the evacuation of hundreds more.

US leaders must recognize that offshore CCS can be costly, risky, and potentially deadly to communities that are already burdened by the environmental and health impacts of fossil fuel infrastructure. Federal climate investments must be directed towards rapid decarbonization and should not be used to increase fossil fuel extraction or increase risk and environmental burden to frontline communities.

Appendix I: For Additional Information

Expand Responsibly-Developed Offshore Wind and Phase Out Offshore Drilling

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- Brad Sewell, Director, Oceans Division (bsewell@nrdc.org) and Valerie Cleland, Senior Oceans Advocate (vcleland@nrdc.org), Natural Resources Defense Council
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- Connor Fagan, Federal Policy Manager, Oceana (cfagan@oceana.org)
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End Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing and Human Rights Abuses in the Seafood Sector

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- Dr. Max Valentine, Director, Illegal Fishing and Transparency Campaign (mvalentine@oceana.org)

Advance Marine Protected Areas

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Evaluate Marine Carbon Dioxide Removal

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An aerial photograph of the ocean surface, showing a dense pattern of small, white-capped waves. The water is a deep teal color, and the overall texture is highly detailed and dynamic.

For more information visit:
OceanClimateAction.org

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