



Great Lakes Commission des Grands Lacs

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June 4, 2004

U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy
1120 20th Street, NW
Suite 200 North
Washington, D.C. 20036

Dear Members:

On behalf of the Great Lakes Commission, it is my pleasure to respond to your invitation for comments on the Preliminary Report of the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy. In doing so, we applaud the Commission for its initiative in addressing the substantial challenges and opportunities associated with the marine and freshwater resources of this nation. The report is the product of thorough research and consultation, and reflects a sensitivity to the information and comments gathered at the many site visits and public hearings conducted around the country.

We at the Great Lakes Commission have taken an active interest in this initiative, participating in public hearings, offering testimony and consulting with the staff and membership of the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy. This interest reflects the central mandate of the Great Lakes Commission, as embodied in its enabling legislation, the Great Lakes Basin Compact: "to promote the orderly, integrated, and comprehensive development, use, and conservation of the water resources of the Great Lakes Basin." Our membership, comprised of senior state agency officials, state legislators and governor's appointees, pursues this mandate through communications, policy research and development, and advocacy activities directed at advancing the environmental and economic prosperity of the Great Lakes region. The Canadian provinces of Ontario and Québec participate as associate members. Ensuring that the Great Lakes are appropriately recognized as North America's "freshwater seas" is an ongoing priority and, consequently, we view the draft report as an opportunity to do just that.

We have reviewed the draft report in considerable detail, with an emphasis on the many areas that touch upon the mandate and current/ prospective work of the Great Lakes Commission. Presented below is a series of overarching comments – or themes – that resulted from the review.

The following is offered for your consideration as the draft report is finalized and implemented:

- ▶ **The waters of the Great Lakes- St. Lawrence River System must be fully and equitably addressed in any national ocean policy.** The Great Lakes-St. Lawrence system is recognized in U.S. federal law as the nation's "fourth seacoast" and, very recently, was referred to as a "national treasure" in the text of a new Executive Order titled "Establishment of Great Lakes Interagency Task Force and Promotion of a Regional Collaboration of National Significance for the Great Lakes." We were pleased to see periodic reference to this national status/ significance in the draft report narrative, but believe it needs to be strengthened to ensure full and equitable treatment of this nation's "freshwater seas" as report

Ensuring environmental and economic prosperity for the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence region through communications, policy research and development, and advocacy.

recommendations are finalized and implemented. Toward this end, we urge you, in the introductory section, to explicitly define "oceans" to accommodate the Great Lakes, and ensure that the lakes are appropriately and equitably referenced in chapter executive summaries, case studies and associated narrative. This must also be accommodated in any institutional arrangements that arise from report recommendations. Also, we had concerns at the study onset with the minimal Great Lakes region representation on the Commission itself, and urge that the Great Lakes be "given their due" should a National Ocean Council be established.

- ▶ **Any new approach to governance should recognize and build upon existing institutional arrangements.** The notion of a National Ocean Council and series of (voluntary) regional ocean councils has potential merit, but only if it ultimately leads to simplification and the elimination of unwarranted duplicative/ competing federal activities. Establishment should be preceded by a comprehensive review/ evaluation of all relevant institutions. As presently conceived, the National Ocean Council membership is exclusively federal and its authority is directed largely at coordinating the coordinators. State /regional representation on the Council- particularly from Great Lakes/ freshwater interests – should be considered, along with sufficient authority and resources to accomplish objectives. A role – perhaps as an associate member or Observer – should be provided for Canadian federal and provincial interests. At the regional level, institution building should move forward only with a full understanding of the relevance/ capabilities of the many existing public, multi-jurisdictional agencies with coordinative and policy development authorities. An additional layer of bureaucracy must be avoided at all costs, and we must first explore and exploit the full potential of existing entities.
- ▶ **Effective governance must recognize the primary stewardship role of the states.** We at the Great Lakes Commission recognize state governments as the primary stewards of our water and related natural resources. In partnership with many levels of government and a range of resource users and stakeholders, states are best positioned to assume leadership with restoration, protection and sustainable use initiatives. The draft report would be strengthened by recognizing this more explicitly. We believe that the regional ocean council approach- or existing regional institutions where applicable- can advance this stewardship role.
- ▶ **National ocean policy must be harmonized with current and prospective ecosystem restoration and protection initiatives.** In the last two decades, this nation has moved aggressively toward multi-jurisdictional, comprehensive and ecosystem-based approaches to resource management, with an emphasis on restoration, protection and sustainable use. The impetus for this evolution is found at many levels, and is evidenced in numerous regional activities presently underway. This is certainly the case in the Great Lakes basin, where recent years have seen a series of state, federal, regional and binational initiatives, including several federal legislative proposals, for such large scale undertakings. The Council of Great Lakes Governors has identified a comprehensive approach through nine priorities for restoring the Great Lakes. The Great Lakes Commission supports the Council's priorities.

Development of a national ocean policy – and any associated institutional arrangements and procedures – has the potential to serve as a coordinating framework for many national and regional initiatives. Any such policy should therefore be developed with a full understanding of the array of ongoing initiatives that address some aspect of marine and freshwater management.


- ▶ **The international dimension of our marine and freshwater resources must be fully addressed in a national ocean policy.** The U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy devotes an entire chapter of the draft report to U.S. participation in international policy. While we applaud the recognition that the nation must work in concert with global partners on shared issues, we note that the chapter, other than a single reference to the Boundary Waters Treaty in Table 29.1, makes no reference to U.S.- Canada relations and the fact that a strong partnership is imperative for successful implementation of any ocean policy. The U.S. and Canada have enjoyed well over 100 years' cooperation – via formal institutional arrangements and working relationships – in the shared waters of the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River system. In fact, this history of cooperation offers many lessons learned that can be applied to other current and prospective international partners. Consideration should be given to highlighting this relationship, and expanding both the text and the chapter recommendations to explicitly address U.S.-Canada needs in the system and build upon the existing arrangements that have served us well over the years. As noted above, consideration should be given to formalizing a Canadian (federal and provincial) role on the proposed National Ocean Council, perhaps through an associate member or Observer role. This should also be the case for the proposed Presidential Council of Advisors on Ocean Policy.

- ▶ **Ecosystem monitoring, surveillance and research must provide the foundation for policy development and associated governance.** The success of any national ocean policy initiative is largely a function of the quality and comprehensiveness of the science upon which decisions are made. Too often, decisionmaking is compromised by inadequate attention to, and funding support for monitoring, surveillance and research activities. We are pleased to see that chapters in the draft report, among others, call for a National Water Quality Monitoring Network, a national strategy for increasing scientific knowledge, and an Integrated Ocean Observing System (IOOS.) Current initiatives in the Great Lakes- St. Lawrence system are inadequately referenced, and the report fails to fully note that science needs and associated infrastructure must be tailored to the unique needs of individual watersheds/ systems, whether they be marine or freshwater. Consideration should be given to addressing these points, and to enhancing the findings and recommendations to emphasize that the design and adequate funding of monitoring, surveillance and research programs is essential to policy implementation. The Great Lakes Observing System (GLOS), a component of the IOOS initiative of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, would be an excellent case study. A business plan for GLOS is presently being developed by the Great Lakes Commission through a strong multi-agency, binational partnership.

- ▶ **The development and implementation of a national ocean policy must be guided by principles of environmental and economic sustainability.** We applaud the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy for its recognition of the multiple dimensions (e.g., environmental, economic, social, cultural) associated with the use, management and protection of marine and freshwater resources. The Great Lakes Commission believes that environmental and economic goals need not be mutually exclusive and, in fact, are inextricably linked. Sustainability must be the guiding force as we pursue opportunities for environmentally sound economic activity. As with other chapters, the report could be strengthened with Great Lakes case studies to demonstrate sustainability in action. Implementation of report recommendations, as well as the prospective institutional arrangements, should ensure that the various dimensions of resource use and management are well represented, and that environmental and economic sustainability goals guide all efforts.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment. We at the Great Lakes Commission consider the work of the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy to be of profound significance in shaping the nation's evolving approach to managing its water and related natural resources. We look forward to working with you as this process moves forward. Should you have any questions on our comments, please contact me at 614-265-6565, or Dr. Michael J. Donahue, Commission President/ CEO, at 734-971-9135, (or mdonahue@glc.org).

Sincerely,



Samuel W. Speck, Chair
Great Lakes Commission

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