

SUMMIT 2011  
State of the Gulf of Mexico

POLICY IMPLICATIONS FOR COASTAL AND OCEAN MANAGEMENT  
IN THE GULF OF MEXICO

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This session is intended to explore the opportunities and challenges of applying certain National Ocean Policy (NOP) components to the coastal and marine ecosystems of the Gulf of Mexico. How can the NOP improve the way we do business in the Gulf region; what changes, if any, need to be made in response to the NOP; and how the NOP may inform decisions related to protection and restoration of ecosystems in the Gulf.

Our panel is instructed to focus on such components of NOP as coastal and marine spacial planning and ecosystem based management and their applicability for a more sustainable future for the Gulf of Mexico. Since the concept of coastal and marine spacial planning (CMSP) has stirred a great deal of interest in this region, let me begin with some thoughts on that subject.

The National Ocean Council (NOC) is currently working with regional, state, and tribal partners to support the development of CMSP in the regions. Here in the Gulf, the effort is to be conducted by the Gulf of Mexico Alliance of all five states with the general purpose being to identify the best areas for existing and future uses. CMSP is a concept not well known to many in the United States. In workshops and other forums organized for educational purposes, examples given included CMSP areas in Northern European countries, and in New England States such as Massachusetts and Rhode Island where the perception in some circles has been that they have been used by policy makers in those places primarily to resolve conflicts over the location of offshore wind developments.

It has been difficult so far to achieve complete “buy in” here in “America’s Shining Sea” of the notion that the CMSP concept is transferable to a five state area encompassing thousands of square miles of tremendously rich, diverse and productive marine activities and where so far people involved in all these activities have gotten along pretty well with each other and successfully resolved conflicts when necessary. The offshore oil and fishing industries, for example, have been concerned that CMSP could be used as a means to limit their productive activities.

Both Nancy Sutley, Chair of the White House Council on Environmental Quality and National Ocean Council Co-Chair, and Dr. Jane Lubchenco, Under Secretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere, NOAA Administrator and National Ocean Council member, have been quoted as saying that CMSP is not ocean zoning, bur rather a

planning process. At the same time, however, the U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEMRE) has said, "... {CMSP} has emerged as a new paradigm and planning strategy for coordinating all marine and coastal activities and facility constructions within the context of a national zoning plan." In another statement, BOEMRE has said, "It is anticipated that the {coastal and marine spatial} plans will serve as an overlay for decisions made under existing regulatory mandates." Such statements have alarmed the offshore petroleum industry, particularly in the context of what they mean for outer continental shelf leasing in federal waters outside the Gulf of Mexico and even frontier leasing in the Gulf.

The Joint Ocean Commission Initiative has taken up this issue in a report we published last June, "America's Ocean Future: Ensuring Healthy Oceans to Support A Vibrant Economy," In that report we remind the reader that the framework for CMSP set out in the President's Executive Order makes it clear that CMSP creates no new authority and is not an additional layer of review, nor is it, as some have described, "ocean zoning" through a top-down federal process. Rather, CMSP can be a decision support tool and planning process that can provide a platform for gathering the best information available and ensuring greater transparency. Here we were taking the National Ocean Council and NOAA at their word.

CMSP can provide a framework for engaging stakeholder groups and the public to analyze human activities, facilitate coordination and participation, and take an ecosystem-based, future-oriented, and adaptive approach to decision-making about activities taking place on the Gulf of Mexico coast and ocean. One example that comes to mind is dealing with the tremendous population growth projected for the Gulf States during the rest of this century. The estimates given to us yesterday by Laura Huffman of the TNC on the projected growth of the population in Texas alone with its impact on fresh water supply are sobering. How will we make decisions concerning the conservation of water and wetlands and green spaces amidst ever growing residential and commercial and industrial developments?

Following leadership provided by the Gulf of Mexico Alliance, the NOP can help provide a path to solutions for problems like this. Here also, data, mapping, and integration of knowledge and information will be essential to make progress. NOAA with its great capabilities in these fields can collaborate with regional bodies such as the Gulf of Mexico Ocean Observing System (GOMOOS).

The key to success in all these matters will be to involve various levels of government from counties on up and collaboration with industry, the academic community, conservation and other stakeholders to meet the Gulf region's economic, environmental, and security objectives in the years ahead. Let's make "partnerships" and "collaboration" our watchwords.

Thank you very much.