

Ocean Stewardship through Marine Spatial Planning

WELCOME TO THE winter 2014 issue of *Currents*. I'm very pleased to have the opportunity to update you in this forum about the Department of Navy's (DON) interests and activities related to the United States policies on ocean health and planning.

The Navy has a long tradition of supporting initiatives to protect the world's oceans. We are a major contributor of scientific information such as bathymetry and ocean observations, global weather/storm predictions, ocean research, and infrastructure (ships, buoys and satellites). We are a worldwide protector of freedom of navigation and a major responder to emergencies and natural disasters worldwide. In addition, we are often the largest employer in local communities and a critical economic driver for many coastal communities.

To coordinate federal activities among Departments and to establish common principals for ocean management and

addressing these activities in some parts of the country, the National Ocean Policy represents a first attempt to conduct comprehensive, integrated planning that includes the federal family, states, tribes, and other stakeholders.

Our country is struggling with escalating costs, duplicative activities, and conflicting priorities on ocean use. A comprehensive planning process, working with all stakeholders, provides an important venue for the Navy to protect national security equities while jointly working with of our federal, tribal, state, municipal, and neighborhood partners to responsibly utilize, manage and protect our ocean and Great Lakes resources.



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conservation, President Obama in 2010 established the National Ocean Council and adopted a National Ocean Policy. In 2013, after extensive input from DON, the other National Ocean Council Departments and the public, the White House issued the National Ocean Policy Implementation Plan which lays out the steps federal agencies will take to achieve the National Ocean Policy. An important focus of the policy and the implementation plan is the development of marine plans in the nine eco-regions identified in the policy.

Marine Spatial Planning represents a new and unique opportunity for the Navy to engage with our communities, states, and regions and other ocean stakeholders early in this voluntary planning process. By increasing communications and focusing on identifying complementary and sustainable uses for these areas, we avoid conflicts, improve regulatory efficiencies, and increase ocean productivity/benefits. While there have been effective programs

DON represents the Department of Defense (DoD) on the National Ocean Council. We have established a formal executive steering group within DoD and the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) comprised of senior executives and flag officers to ensure that DoD leadership is kept abreast of developments and contributes to national ocean policy implementation. Our primary objective is to ensure that operational, training, research and development, test and evaluation, environmental compliance, and homeland/national security equities are considered in developing national ocean policy and throughout the marine spatial planning process.

The DoD, with special emphasis on the Navy and the unique role of the Army Corps of Engineers within the DoD, has interests in each of the nine Regional Planning Bodies (RPB). Accordingly, we have formally designated representatives for both the DoD and Joint Chiefs for each of the RPBs. These RPB representatives participate in planning activities and coordinate activities internally to ensure

consistency throughout the DoD. DoD and Navy leadership strongly support regional planning in the coastal and marine systems to both reduce spatial and temporal conflicts and to promote healthier and more resilient coasts and oceans. Additionally, the Navy has offered to serve as the federal co-lead for both the South Atlantic and the Gulf of Mexico RPBs given the level of Navy and other military service activities in the region. Together, these two RPBs largely coincide with the Area of Responsibility for our Southeast Regional Commander.

In 2013, important progress was made in several of the planning areas. RPBs were chartered in the Northeast, Mid-Atlantic, Caribbean, and Pacific Island regions. The Northeast and Mid-Atlantic RPBs also began to develop

activities. DON recognizes that ocean governance, environmental stewardship, and resource management are inherent in our mission to defend the nation and safeguard the seas. We have long associated our warfighting mission with our responsibility to protect the natural systems upon which our quality of life depends. A fundamental military philosophy is that the national defense mission includes natural resources protection.

From both operational and societal contexts, DON understands that proper planning maximizes positive outcomes, while failing to plan leads unavoidably to conflict and discord. Marine Spatial Planning provides the Navy and DoD an efficient and effective way forward to optimize offshore uses.

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regional priorities and goals. Discussions are ongoing in the Southeast Atlantic, Gulf of Mexico, and West Coast regions. Letters of invitation from the White House were recently sent out to the Southeast Atlantic states and tribes to identify representatives to that RPB. The Great Lakes and Alaska regions will use existing structures for coordinating planning activities with federal agencies.

At the national level, headquarters staffs are coordinating with the members of the DoD and JCS team and reporting to DoD and JCS leadership. We have representatives working on each of the nine Interagency Working Groups, at the Interagency Policy Committee level, and on the Steering Committee. In 2013, we supported the National Ocean Council effort to provide public access to federal data through the www.ocean.data.gov web site. There are large sources of data that have been produced by the federal government, including the Navy, and the www.ocean.data.gov web site provides an excellent mechanism for distributing these data products. The Navy Oceanographer has the lead for systematically reviewing and sharing much of the Navy's ocean data. We also have been working jointly with other Departments on the Arctic, climate change adaptation, offshore renewable energy and inventorying ocean observing systems. Together we are making progress on the implementation plan.

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The oceans remain our closest and most immediate frontiers, providing crucial resources for multiple sectors. They shelter, protect, and provide for the people of this country in ways that are sometimes identifiable, but just as often are immeasurable or even unrecognized. Oceans also connect us to the rest of the world through trade, commerce, and international security—all contributors to our maritime heritage. Demands on the ocean are intense and growing. We need to plan for joint, sustainable ocean uses for all sectors of American life, including the national defense. To this end, DON is positioned and committed to provide its full support to the National Ocean Council, the National Ocean Policy, and regional Marine Spatial Planning.

Finally, I am honored to introduce *Currents* readers to Mr. Dennis McGinn, the new Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Energy, Installations & Environment. He was appointed to this position on September 3, 2013. In this position, he develops policies, procedures, and strategic plans for both the Navy and Marine Corps and oversees all DON functions and programs related to installations, safety, energy, and the environment. Much more information about Mr. McGinn and insights into his priorities and perspectives are included in the spotlight interview starting on page 36 of this issue of *Currents*. [↕](#)

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