

NEW YORK STATE



DEPARTMENT OF STATE

# ADDRESSING OCEAN AND GREAT LAKES ECOSYSTEM CHALLENGES IN NEW YORK

MARCH 2010

## The Department of State Ocean and Great Lakes Program EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Department of State's (DOS) Ocean and Great Lakes Program ensures activities in and uses of coastal ecosystem are sustainable, maintain ecological health and integrity of coastal ecosystems, enhance understanding of coastal ecosystems, and integrate good science into decision-making.

By embracing an ecosystem view to managing coastal ecosystems, the Department of State has initiated a fresh approach, with many partners, to examine how human activities that affect ocean and Great Lakes ecosystems are managed and to find new ways to address the need to protect New York's environment, economy, and communities.

### LAUNCHING A BOLD PROGRAM

Supported, in part, through the Environmental Protection Fund, the Department's Ocean and Great Lakes Program has made New York a leader in establishing and implementing ecosystem approaches to tackle today's pressing issues that cut across disciplines and jurisdictions. Achieving sustainability in economies, communities, and natural environment requires rethinking traditional, fragmented approaches to managing complex and interrelated problems.

The Department of State's expertise in local government partnerships, land use planning, and policy development provides the backdrop for the accomplishments that follow:

**Ensure coordinated and effective implementation of the Ecosystem Conservation Act** - DOS serves as Executive Director, member agency and staff to the New York Ocean and Great Lakes Ecosystem Conservation Council created in statute to better coordinate State programs responsible for managing human activities affecting coastal ecosystems. DOS established an integrated management approach to meet the needs of New York's ocean and Great Lakes coastal ecosystems and delivered a bold and forward thinking report, *Our Waters, Our Communities, Our Future*, proposing practical actions grounded in science and supported by a broad base of stakeholders to enhance and protect the coastal environment, economy, and communities.

**Organize, convene and advise** – DOS provides leadership and support for the eight partner State agencies, federal agencies, and a broad base of stakeholders to address ocean and Great Lakes ecosystem issues.

**Establish new partnerships for increased regional influence** - DOS led the creation of federal and interstate partnerships to advance regional coastal management. This includes convening the five Governors of the Mid-Atlantic region to form the Mid-Atlantic Regional Council on the Ocean, acting as State lead agency for an offshore renewable energy task force with Department of Interior's Minerals Management Service, coordinating with the White House Council on Environmental Quality and reaching out to the Mid-Atlantic region's stakeholders to build awareness and support for New York's ocean priorities.

**Develop ecosystem approaches for statewide application and tackling pressing local ecosystem needs** - DOS worked to address known ecosystem problems in the Lake Ontario Sandy Creeks Watershed and the Long Island Great South Bay Demonstration Areas while simultaneously framing a process that will be transferable to other regions of the State, maximizing knowledge gained from these 'learning laboratories.'

**Supply current and accessible data for decision-makers** - DOS designed and launched the New York Ocean and Great Lakes Atlas to ensure that agency decision-makers and the public have easy access to the best available geographic information.

Evolve traditional approaches to State agency decision-making - DOS developed an analytical process and template to help state agencies identify, assess and enhance their programs that manage human activities affecting coastal ecosystems. DOS has led the agencies to successfully incorporate more holistic approaches into day-to-day decision-making and activities for selected programs areas that affect ocean and Great Lakes coastal ecosystems.

# Addressing Ocean and Great Lakes Ecosystem Challenges In New York

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## THE NEW YORK OCEAN AND GREAT LAKES ECOSYSTEM CONSERVATION ACT

In 2006, the New York Legislature and Governor made a bold commitment to conserve, maintain and restore New York's coastal ecosystems through the New York Ocean and Great Lakes Ecosystem Conservation Act (Act).

The Act established the New York Ocean and Great Lakes Ecosystem Conservation Council (Council), consisting of nine State agencies. Each of the nine agencies, including the Department of State, were charged with identifying programs relevant to managing human activities in coastal ecosystems and incorporating ecosystem approaches and principles into their daily program activities and long-range planning.

The Department of State plays an integral role on the Council. In addition to the Secretary of State being a standing member on the Council, the Act directs the Deputy Secretary of State for Coastal Resources, as Executive Director, to oversee and support the New York Ocean and Great Lakes Ecosystem Conservation Council members to help them achieve their responsibilities as provided in the statute.

The provisions of the Act may be found at [http://nyoglecc.org/media/ECL\\_Article%2014.pdf](http://nyoglecc.org/media/ECL_Article%2014.pdf)

### THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE'S LEADERSHIP ROLE

The Department of State possesses unparalleled expertise in land and water use planning and has a long history of working closely with local governments to deliver a multitude of programs to municipalities across the State.

The Department's Division of Coastal Resources (DCR), established in 1981, has significant responsibility and authority over certain activities that effect the State's coastal communities and coastal waters under the federal Coastal Zone Management Act (CZMA). The formation of the New York Ocean and Great Lakes Program grew out of this foundation. Five full time staff, whose daily work addresses the interconnections between human activities and ecosystem health, assists the Council agencies to implement priority recommendations, provides professional and technical expertise for taking action, and shapes new policy to address a new generation of challenges facing the Great Lakes and ocean.

## MEETING OCEAN AND GREAT LAKES CHALLENGES

Over the past seven years, there has been an increasing focus on the declining ecosystem health of the oceans and Great Lakes, and calls for integrated management from Pew Oceans Commission (2003) and the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy (2004).

More recently, the Obama Administration has embraced a holistic approach to manage ecosystems on the national level. On June 12, 2009, President Obama issued an executive memorandum calling for the formation of a National Ocean Policy Interagency Task Force. The Task Force was charged with two things: 1) develop a new National Ocean Policy using ecosystem-based management as a foundation; and, 2) develop a framework for coastal and marine spatial planning that would coordinate federal, regional, and state planning activities for future uses of the ocean and Great Lakes.

The Task Force issued its Interim Report in September 2009, detailing a number of new policies and initiatives to protect oceans and Great Lakes. Among the recommendations were the need: to incorporate ecosystem approaches into how the federal agencies deliver ocean programs; and for science-based decision-making for ocean and Great Lakes issues. This was followed in December by an Interim Framework for Effective Coastal and Marine Spatial Planning, which recommended a comprehensive, integrated and regional approach to ocean and Great Lakes planning and managing uses and activities. Under this framework coastal and marine spatial planning would be developed cooperatively among federal, state and local authorities with substantial stakeholder and public input.

## COORDINATING A STATEWIDE MULTI-AGENCY ECOSYSTEM APPROACH THROUGH THE DOS OCEAN AND GREAT LAKES PROGRAM

Delivery of *Our Waters, Our Communities, Our Future* report to the Governor and the State Legislature

DOS led the nine Council agencies to assess existing efforts and identify future opportunities and actions to protect and enhance New York's ocean and Great Lakes ecosystems.

A draft report was released for public review and comment in January, 2009. DOS led a rigorous stakeholder and public review process, with 14 "community conversations" spanning the State from Fredonia to Montauk. Over 500 New Yorkers attended and provided input and feedback which DOS incorporated into the report. The report was overwhelmingly supported and generated significant interest across sectors, including industry, advocacy, local governments, federal agencies, neighboring states, and citizens at large.

On April 8, 2009, the Council report, *Our Waters, Our Communities, Our Future. Taking Bold Action Now to Achieve Long-term Sustainability of New York's Ocean and Great Lakes* was delivered to the Governor and the members of the State Legislature.

An electronic version of the Council's report may be obtained by visiting the Council's website: [http://nyoglecc.org/media/Final\\_New\\_York\\_Ocean\\_and\\_Great\\_Lakes\\_Report\\_April\\_2009.pdf](http://nyoglecc.org/media/Final_New_York_Ocean_and_Great_Lakes_Report_April_2009.pdf)

The Council's report identifies 13 priority recommendations:

1. transition the Council to implementation
2. accommodate competing offshore uses, including renewable energy and habitat protection
3. establish regional EBM action plans
4. work with local governments to advance EBM
5. continue EBM integration into existing government programs
6. develop a health index to monitor ecosystem vitality
7. continue key data and research efforts
8. broaden stakeholder engagement
9. refine a coastal ecosystems research agenda
10. complete projects in the demonstration areas
11. address sources of marine debris
12. consider additional vessel no-discharge zones
13. enhancing the ocean and costal resources atlas



### Implementing the Council Report's Recommendations

Under the direction of the DOS, a number of the report recommendations have already been undertaken in the short time since its delivery to the Governor and the Legislature. Below are some of the implementation highlights.

#### *Demonstrating Local Approaches to Addressing Ocean and Great Lakes Ecosystem Issues*

DOS works in the field to provide leadership to stakeholders, including farmers, fishers, loggers, conservationists, and local officials to develop new and inclusive planning and implementation activities in two demonstration areas identified by the Council statute: 1) eastern Lake Ontario's Sandy Creeks Watershed and 2) Long Island's Great South Bay.

The two demonstration areas have contrasting landscapes, communities, and economies. Great South Bay is a water body steeped in maritime tradition, surrounded by a densely populated urban/suburban mainland and a

barrier island complex that includes the Fire Island National Seashore. The Sandy Creeks Watershed is a rural, working landscape with small communities and headwater tributaries that run through significant stands of northern hardwood forest, agricultural lands, and converging into the lake plain recreational area.

DOS took a two-pronged approach to the demonstration areas:

- *Gain on-the-ground experience in applying ecosystem approaches to local land and water planning.* The areas serve as learning laboratories for the Council agencies on ways to collaborate on various approaches to ecosystem-based planning and implementation for future statewide application; and
- *Undertake restorative and corrective measures to attack known ecosystem problems.* This involved tackling invasive species and installing riparian buffers in Sandy Creeks and addressing the alarming decline of hard clams and chronic nutrient loading in the Great South Bay.

DOS fostered broad public participation in identifying problems, finding solutions, and taking action.

In Sandy Creeks DOS partnered with the Tug Hill Commission and The Nature Conservancy. DOS directed the launch of an effective campaign to map and eradicate invasive species with 568 acres treated to control the spread of the invasive plant, Pale Swallow-wort. Another invasive, Purple loosestrife, was treated with a biological control agent at four different outbreaks in the dune/wetland complex. Other successful on-the-ground projects included: mapping and assessment of the Tug Hill Aquifer, restoration of stream corridors and buffers with over 8,200 feet of fence installed, and 2,200 trees and shrubs planted along select tributaries. Staff worked with user groups to limit ATV access to sensitive headwater stream areas, co-develop and deliver three forestry best management practices workshops and installed educational kiosks in and around the Eastern Lake Ontario Dune and Wetlands Area.

Staff also developed an inclusive stakeholder decision-making process to identify and prioritize projects in the watershed. The stakeholders came from many walks of life and, through DOS facilitation, found common ground on local project needs that addressed their mutual issues. The process was positive and local stakeholders worked diligently to identify a set of priority projects.



The Sandy Creeks Watershed Demonstration Area



Forestry Workshop - Building a skidder bridge

In the Great South Bay: DOS partnered with the South Shore Estuary Reserve Office and The Nature Conservancy. DOS work focused on hard clam and sea grass restoration activities, important to the cultural fabric of the maritime communities, as well as the fragile ecosystem of the barrier bay and wetland system along the south shore of Long Island.

DOS led several important projects in Great South Bay. The hard clam restoration effort resulted in over one million seed clams planted over 13,400 acres of Great South Bay, with The Nature Conservancy and Suffolk County recently documenting over 300 million juvenile clam sets on bay bottom lands one year after restoration activities. Local government partners, towns of Brookhaven, Islip, and Babylon designated five hard clam spawner sanctuaries in the Great South Bay and collaborated on an expanded shellfish nursery and monitoring program. This work has shown to be an effective local response to a 95% decline in hard clam harvest numbers since the early 1970s.

Experimental seagrass plantings including 2,500 seed filled burlap pouches and 35,000 seagrass seeds were placed in key locations throughout Great South Bay. Monitoring is underway to determine the best seed

transplant methodology. In addition, nitrogen loads and levels were studied and assessments of management options were conducted.

The demonstration areas have provided a unique learning environment and DOS staff is using the knowledge gained in these areas to tailor and apply these successes and experiences in other locations across New York.



The Great South Bay Demonstration Area



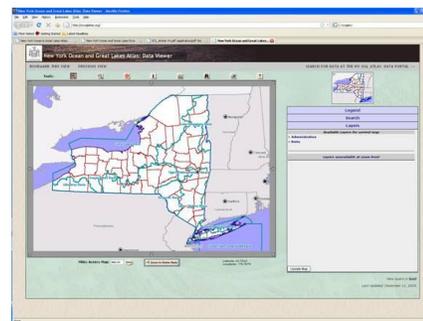
Juvenile Clams - the size of a fingernail

### *Building a State-of-the-Art Web-based Ocean and Great Lakes Atlas*

DOS led development of a one-of-a-kind on-line information access system that allows State agency decision-makers, local governments, and interested citizens to use the best and most up to date geographic information available for the ocean and Great Lakes, and across the State. Programs across the country are trying to follow the New York Ocean and Great Lakes Program example and develop similar systems for their states.

DOS has spearheaded the development of and manages the New York Ocean and Great Lakes Atlas (Atlas). Launched publicly in July, 2008, the Atlas is an online web mapping application that allows users to view and download a wide range of data. Currently, the Atlas provides access to 400 datasets encompassing geographic, natural resource, and community information. Recently, DOS developed and delivered a new portal feature expanding the Atlas' ability for viewing and downloading information. This feature allows easier topic searches and can open information directly into GoogleEarth or other formats used by geographic information system professionals. An additional 400 datasets will soon be uploaded and available, totaling over 800 datasets.

An Atlas development strategy was developed by DOS staff and released in the Fall of 2008, outlining future enhanced capabilities of the Atlas for the next five years. At the end of this five year period, the Atlas will be able to connect users to thousands of data sets using easy "search engine" style queries, allowing access to more information without the cost of updating or maintaining the data.



The New York Ocean and Great Lakes Atlas

The Ocean and Great Lakes Atlas may be accessed at [New York Ocean and Great Lakes Atlas: Data Viewer or Data Portal](#).

## *Integrating Ecosystem Approaches into State and Regional Programs*

DOS developed an analytical process for State agencies to assess their programs relative to managing human activities that affect coastal ecosystems. The nine Council agencies, led by DOS, identified approximately 200 programs and activities that affect coastal ecosystems and each agency selected a small number of programs to evaluate for opportunities to refine those programs and activities to better address activities affecting ecosystem health. DOS worked with individual agencies to apply the analytical process.

DOS worked with each agency to develop an initial set specific key recommendations and drafted a report to the Council in January, 2009, entitled Summary Report of Agency Guidelines and Recommendations, detailing the results. The results are illustrated below, using the Office of General Services (OGS) and DOS as examples.

OGS included several dozen staff members, including the entire executive team, in the analysis and examination of their programs. OGS has refined and developed several programs, policies and business practices, including:

- Used procurement responsibilities to promote environmental sustainability by developing statewide specifications requiring all State purchasing contracts to purchase and all State agencies to use non-toxic cleaning products, non-polystyrene product use in food service venues and availability of biodegradable wares to replace processed paper and plastic food service materials.
- As owner of the State's underwater lands, OGS formed an interagency working group to identify sensitive ecological underwater lands in the Hudson River and transfer ownership of those under lands to ensure conservation goals are achieved.
- Incorporated ecosystem-based concepts and principles into their agency mission statement and strategic goals in order to support sustainable and environmentally friendly policies and practices.
- Implemented and incorporated Green Leasing mandates and guidelines into Requests for Information for leased space to State agencies to reduce negative impacts of development to the environment through requiring sustainable design, construction practices within leased buildings.
- Assisted all state agencies to comply with Executive Order 111 to achieve a 35% reduction in energy consumption in buildings they own, lease or operate by 2010 (relative to 1990 levels).

DOS reviewed some of its own programs and developed the following recommended actions:

- Expand the Local Waterfront Revitalization Program (LWRP) as a local delivery mechanism for ecosystem-based management and Smart Growth principles statewide, and strengthening the application of these principles in existing LWRPs.
- Revise the local boundary determination process, expanding inventory and analysis to include descriptions of ecosystems for consideration of ecological effects and incorporating ecosystem-based management principles and perspectives into the development of LWRPs.

DOS have begun the following actions:

- examining ways to revise the structure of LWRPs to integrate ecosystem-based principles into the plans and add them to LWRP grant evaluation criteria.
- revising coastal policies and coastal consistency processes to reflect EBM principles and objectives.
- regulating site design and construction in the Building Code and more fully capturing building renovation in the Energy Conservation Code.

An electronic version of the *Summary Report of Agency Guidelines and Recommendations* is found under the appendices section of the New York Ocean and Great Lakes Council web site:

<http://nyoglecc.org/reports.html>

### *Completing EPF Funded Ocean and Great Lakes Ecosystem Projects*

DOS provided guidance and oversight to all the Council agencies' as they developed and designed specific Environmental Protection Fund (EPF) projects to improve coastal ecosystem health.

In total, the EPF allocated \$12 million for over 45 projects initiated during Fiscal Years 2006-2009. Some of the highlights include:

- launching the New York Ocean and Great Lakes Atlas
- initiating a statewide Ocean and Great Lakes literacy campaign
- advancing the Demonstration Area restoration and planning projects to learn and apply successes statewide
- creating a New York Marine Sciences Consortium to advise agencies and policy-makers on ocean and marine related matters
- designing an on-board Marine Fishery Observer Program scientifically quantify and address the impacts to fisheries from unwanted fish being tossed back as "bycatch"
- undertaking critical scientific monitoring to advise management decisions, such as the acoustic whale monitoring project in New York harbor
- initiating the development of an "ocean health Index" to track ocean health over time and evaluate progress on management activities affecting the ocean
- initiating the development of an offshore renewable energy siting and habitat protection plan to safely and responsibly meet New York's energy needs.

## FORGING NEW INTERSTATE AND FEDERAL PARTNERSHIPS TO TACKLE SHARED OCEAN ISSUES

### *Building a Partnership with Neighboring State and the White House Council on Environmental Quality*

DOS convened and led the first ever regional ocean dialogues among the Mid-Atlantic states. With the support of Governor Paterson, in September, 2008, DOS initiated discussions with coastal management agency principals in the four neighboring Mid-Atlantic States (New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland and Virginia) to identify common ocean issues that could benefit from regional approaches and explore the possibility of forming a formal regional ocean partnership. Following up on these discussions, on March 6, 2009, DOS drafted and submitted, on behalf of the five Mid-Atlantic Governors, their shared ocean priorities to Nancy Sutley, Chair of the White House Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) in a jointly signed letter. In early April, 2009, CEQ White House Chair Sutley responded, encouraging the Governors' efforts. This marked the beginning of a formal interstate partnership at the executive level, led by DOS.

### *Establishing the Mid-Atlantic Regional Council on the Ocean (MARCO)*

DOS led the development of the Mid-Atlantic Governors' Agreement on Ocean Conservation, which outlined the guiding principles, shared ocean priorities and shared actions of the five Mid-Atlantic Governors and the commitments that they would make to address them through a comprehensive and regional approach. Staff also negotiated with each state's coastal program leaders resulting in unanimous consent of the contents of the agreement and established the foundation for Mid-Atlantic Regional Council on the Ocean (MARCO).

On June 9, 2009, DOS organized a summit of the Governors of the Mid-Atlantic states in New York, co-hosted by Governor David A. Paterson and Governor Jon S. Corzine of New Jersey. Designees of Governors Jack Markel of Delaware, Martin J. O'Malley of Maryland and Timothy M. Kane of Virginia were present to sign the historic Mid-Atlantic Governors' Agreement on Ocean Conservation committing to work together on four shared ocean issues which were identified as increased protection sensitive offshore habitats, the development of offshore renewable energy, strategies to adapt to climate change induced sea level rise and increased federal support for water quality infrastructure improvements.



MARCO Governors Summit

The agreement also established the Mid-Atlantic Regional Council on the Ocean (MARCO) comprised of the Governors from New York, New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland and Virginia to advocate for and leverage greater state influence in the management of offshore ocean areas.

The summit was also attended by 75 senior staff from state and federal agencies in the region who met in work sessions to begin to develop an action plan to advance the MARCO Agreement.

On June 12, 2009, three days after the MARCO Summit, President Obama issued a memorandum to the heads of executive departments and federal agencies establishing an Interagency Ocean Policy Task Force, led by the White House CEQ. The Task Force was charged with developing a recommendation for a national policy that ensures protection, maintenance, and restoration of oceans, coasts and the Great Lakes; and recommending a national framework for improved stewardship, and effective coastal and marine spatial planning. DOS has been in close collaboration with the Task Force members, working with a broad array of national ocean leaders to ensure New York's ocean and Great

Lakes needs are incorporated into this new federal ocean policy development. In part as a result of this meeting, the President’s Budget for FY2011 includes \$20 million for a new national grants program to fund projects that address the goals of regional ocean partnerships. DOS was integral to raising MARCO’s profile at the national level and establishing a new national program aimed at satisfying the needs of regional ocean programs and to coordinate regional ocean governance across state and federal interests.



Offshore Canyons in the Mid-Atlantic

The Mid-Atlantic Governors’ Agreement on Ocean Conservation” may be accessed at: <http://www.midatlanticocean.org/agreement.pdf>

The August 2009 Mid-Atlantic Governors’ Summit report, “Actions, Timelines, and Leadership to Advance the Mid-Atlantic Governors’ Agreement on Ocean Conservation” may be accessed at <http://www.midatlanticocean.org/summary-actions.pdf>

### *Convening the Mid-Atlantic Regional Council on the Ocean (MARCO) Stakeholder Conference*

DOS designed and organized a program for a Mid-Atlantic regional stakeholder conference. On December 9 and 10, DOS staff convened the MARCO Stakeholder Conference to build support for the Mid-Atlantic State Governors’ actions and recommendations with key ocean interest stakeholders and secure commitments moving forward. Over 150 ocean stakeholders from across the region assembled in support of the Mid-Atlantic Governors’ ocean agenda. The conference successfully helped to raise public awareness and build a broader constituency for ocean issues and identify programs, activities and resources that stakeholders could commit towards accomplishing the initial actions identified by the Mid-Atlantic Governors.



Secretary Cortés-Vázquez opens the Conference



Stakeholder Conference attendees

### *Developing the Mid-Atlantic Regional Council on the Ocean (MARCO) Website*

DOS produced the content for the MARCO website hosted located at: <http://www.midatlanticocean.org/>

## Future direction of the New York Department of State Ocean and Great Lakes Program Activities MOVING FORWARD

The Department of State and its Ocean and Great Lakes Program staff will initiate a bold new 18 month initiative:

*Accommodating Competing Demands for Limited Offshore Resources and Space: Taking Steps to Meet the Governor's Energy Goals and Protect Vital Offshore Ocean Habitats Through an Ocean Amendment to the New York Coastal Management Program*

DOS will lead an effort to develop an amendment to New York's Coastal Management Program that will guide the siting of future offshore renewable energy projects and identify and take measures to protect offshore ocean habitats. The amendment will include maps, analyses of available data necessary to describe offshore conditions and requirements for wind facilities and for offshore habitat protection. Management areas will be identified to refine areas that may be best suited to offshore wind facility development. Management areas will also be identified for habitat protection measures to safeguard our oceans vital offshore habitats. A policy document will contain revised or new coastal policies and explanations to guide state and federal decision-making, implementation strategies, and a description of needed coordinative processes and procedures.

The Phase I planning area will begin 1500 feet offshore and include: 1) the area with the best sustained wind speeds for generating wind energy, closest to shore and of a depth appropriate to current wind generation technologies and practices; 2) the Hudson Canyon depression from the New York Harbor along the continental shelf out to the shelf edge; and, 3) the continental shelf edge and slope.

Over the course of 18 months, the DOS will engage federal, state, and local governments, key ocean user groups, environmental organizations and other stakeholders to begin Phase I implementation. These discussions, and other DOS data gathering efforts, will generate information on: offshore ocean uses, their location, the uses competing for available space, including shipping, fishing (commercial and recreational) and other recreational activities, ecological attributes, cultural features, and physical characteristics. This information will inform and shape the component pieces of the amendment to the State's federally approved Coastal Management Program.

One of the most immediate benefits of Phase I will be to provide a better understanding of where the most appropriate areas may be suitable for offshore renewable energy development, a critical step in promoting the sustainable emergence of this important new industry.

DOS has also been providing regulatory consultation and advice to three of the State's utilities, who collectively are seeking to develop a commercial-scale wind project offshore of Long Island.

The DOS was designated by the Governor's Office as the lead state agency for the U.S. Department of Interior's New York Task Force, formed to coordinate offshore wind facility siting among federal, state and local governments.

The timing of DOS's offshore planning work is especially important as there is growing interest in similar approaches at the regional and national levels. Specifically, on December 13, 2009, following the MARCO Stakeholder Conference, President Obama's Interagency Ocean Policy Task Force released its Interim Framework for Coastal and Marine Spatial Planning Report, which identifies regional ocean councils, including MARCO, as playing a lead role in offshore spatial planning to assist in siting new, sustainable uses.

### Broadening Regional Partnerships

DOS will initiate new dialogues with the Northeast Regional Ocean Council and consider joining this coalition of Governors. This will provide the necessary coordination for offshore planning work in Long

Island Sound, Block Island Sound, and Fishers Island Sound, waters with shared issues among Connecticut, Rhode Island and Massachusetts.

Developing a mechanism to track progress and inform the public on the status of our ocean and Great Lakes ecosystem health

DOS will begin the development of an Offshore Health Index that will provide a graphic depiction of New York's offshore ocean and Great Lakes health and design a framework for using existing and new information to determine our progress in improving ocean and Great Lakes ecosystem health. The work will be phased and begin with New York's offshore ocean.