

Managing change along the East Coast

From shifting ecosystems to emerging economic activities, East Coast communities and industries are facing a period of unprecedented change. The Eastern seaboard is experiencing new challenges associated with increased extreme weather events, climate change, and ocean waters becoming more acidic. Decreasing environmental quality and the cumulative effects of multiple stressors are taxing ocean and coastal ecosystems and the people that rely on them. Simultaneously, new opportunities are presenting themselves with the development of offshore domestic energy sources and the transformation of global trade routes with the expansion of the Panama Canal.

In the face of these changes, governance and policy structures must be responsive and adaptive. Up and down the East Coast the public, private, and non-profit sectors are already undertaking activities to address these challenges. Building upon existing efforts and recognizing the immensity of the task, leaders across all sectors must come together to determine how to manage for resilience and how to balance emerging economic opportunities with increasing conservation needs. Identifying specific opportunities to strengthen political leadership, improve research efforts, and ensure adequate funding and infrastructure are fundamental to effectively managing change.

East Coast Ocean Leadership Roundtable


As part of JOCI's effort to develop an Ocean Action Agenda to deliver to current leaders and those taking office after the 2016 elections, JOCI brought together representatives from federal, state, and local government, leading scientists, and experts from key East Coast industries and nongovernmental organizations in June 2015 for the East Coast Ocean Leadership Roundtable. Held in New York City, the meeting was designed to gather valuable input on how our nation should be addressing East Coast ocean priorities. Participant discussions focused on the theme of managing dramatic changes in waters off the East Coast, and on four interconnected topics:

- Resilience and adaptation to climate change
- Offshore energy development
- Marine transportation and infrastructure
- Addressing multiple environmental stressors

This document summarizes the key priorities, themes, and ideas that emerged from the discussions at the East Coast Ocean Leadership Roundtable.

East Coast communities depend on the Atlantic Ocean for commerce, security, and prosperity, but the seascape is rapidly changing.





Diverse ecosystems, thriving economies, and vibrant coastal communities all stand to benefit from forward thinking approaches to managing change.

Priorities Identified by East Coast Leaders

Advance a proactive approach to coastal resilience: With the threat of sea level rise and an increasing number of extreme weather events, East Coast communities must adopt a proactive approach to resilience planning with a stronger focus on preparedness. Potential opportunities include reforming risk-based insurance rates; identifying and communicating the short- and long-term economic, social, and especially ecological costs and benefits of resiliency; applying lessons learned from disaster response and scenario planning to developing mitigation measures and future response plans; incentivizing resilient rebuilding or relocation; and investing in green infrastructure development. After a disaster occurs, communities should be able to rely on clear guidelines for response and policies supporting recovery.

Promote a balanced approach to offshore energy development: As new opportunities for energy development off the East Coast emerge, a measured approach that sets goals and objectives for offshore renewable and traditional energy development, addresses increasing demand, and accounts for improving energy efficiency is needed. Decision makers should consider social and ecological costs and benefits in addition to economic factors. Efforts to stabilize and reform energy policies to facilitate renewable energy development should be enacted. Novel partnerships for information sharing between fossil fuel development and offshore wind should be considered, while revenue from fossil fuel development could help subsidize the development of renewable energy and address other ocean priorities.

Invest in research on multiple fronts to inform decision making: For a more comprehensive understanding of the East Coast ecosystems and how they are changing, it is necessary to collect more regional-scale physical, chemical, and biological data and improve integrated models. For decisions on ocean uses, robust geophysical, geotechnical, and environmental data are needed to understand the cumulative effects of multiple stressors. Existing data sources should be made more accessible for new analyses and the academic, private sector, and federal science communities should coordinate to encourage an ecosystem-based approach.

Leverage regional approaches to management: Addressing the nexus of human uses and marine resources, regional cooperation is developing new pathways for coordination, efficiency, and innovative management. The progress of regional ocean planning efforts already underway along the East Coast, as well as associated data portals, should be leveraged as a forum for data sharing and best practices development to inform decisions on multiple issues.

Enhance maritime infrastructure: Improved and more resilient infrastructure is necessary for U.S. global competitiveness and national security. Resilient physical port infrastructure and comprehensive information infrastructure are both crucial to maritime commerce. A comprehensive national policy for the maritime sector would elevate the benefits of trade and the role of ports, assist with increased coordination across the supply chain, and help diagnose and address safety needs.

Ensure long-term funding to support decision making: In order to achieve the above recommendations, stable funding is essential. Dedicated funding should support the science and research needs for resilience and adaptation to climate change, offshore energy development, marine transportation and infrastructure, and ecosystem change. Opportunities for public-private partnerships and innovative funding structures should be considered. A modest portion of the revenues from offshore commercial energy activities could be invested to better understand and manage our ocean and coastal resources for the benefit of the nation.