

ASSESSING THE POTENTIAL FOR A REGIONAL OCEAN GOVERNANCE PILOT PROJECT IN THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST

Proposal Narrative (6/3/04)

By Marc Hershman

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The Pew Ocean Commission recommended a regional approach to issues of ocean governance, and the US Commission on Ocean Policy is expected to make a similar recommendation. The underlying tenet is that “ecosystem-based” resource management requires thinking about a geography that is defined by biophysical features rather than jurisdictional boundaries and analyzing and addressing multiple resources, threats and issues in an integrated manner. Despite the increasingly strong consensus on the need for and benefits of ecosystem management and regional governance, **how** to do either in real places is less clear. The University of Washington School of Marine Affairs (SMA) and The Nature Conservancy (TNC), in partnership with NOAA, propose to assess whether a pilot project in the Pacific Northwest could lead to a model for regional, ecosystem-based ocean governance.

The process of developing regional support for ecosystem management and action will take time and must be very carefully managed. It will require dynamic leadership and inclusive participation. Throughout this process, we will need a "two-track" approach; we need to build regional identity and a regional vision in which coastal and ocean issues are placed within the larger regional ecosystem context; at the same time begin to take specific actions to show progress, build regional capacity, and model at a smaller scale the collaboration needed for regional governance. This requires a strategy that is adaptive – lessons are learned from specific actions that feed back to the broader vision, and movement toward the vision helps in the choice of specific projects. Overlaying this approach is a need to make our findings and experience available to a wider, national audience to fulfill the purpose of a pilot project.

SMA, in close collaboration with TNC, proposes a preliminary, one-year project (August 1, 2004 to July 31, 2005) to assess four factors that will determine the likelihood of success of a regional ocean governance pilot project in the Pacific Northwest: applicable models for an approach, leadership and participation, information resources, and priority issues. These are described below. There will be three results of this work: First, we will identify key participants (at leadership, technical, and stakeholder levels) and begin bringing them into the process. Second, we will also prepare a report that assesses each of the factors, which might also provide a template for the type of assessment other regions of the US should undertake before embarking on a regional approach to coast and ocean affairs. Third, we will prepare a "prospectus" for a pilot regional ocean governance process in the Pacific Northwest.

If the assessment proves favorable, our intent will be to advance a proposal for a pilot project starting in 2005 that launches a process leading to the clear articulation of a regional governance approach to managing a suite of critical marine and coastal issues in the Pacific Northwest..

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Applicable models for an ecosystem-based approach. This factor includes an analysis of regional governance efforts both within and outside of the Pacific Northwest that can inform a new effort in the Pacific Northwest and be a valuable resource document for similar regional ocean governance efforts elsewhere in the country. Examples from the Chesapeake Bay, Gulf of Maine and Great Lakes have been well documented and will be reviewed. Many regional efforts particular to the Pacific Northwest are also underway but are less well documented, for example: Lower Columbia Solutions Group (dredge spoil issues); Northwest Straits Commission (marine conservation); Shared Salmon Strategy (salmon recovery in Puget Sound); and Puget Sound/Georgia Basin International Task Force (environmental problems associated with population growth). The objective of our review will be to uncover the rationale behind regional cooperation, the tools of governance that have been employed, the methods used to initiate and operate regional efforts, and the relative strengths and weaknesses of the activities. This review will help focus future efforts in the Northwest and elsewhere and provide specific case examples.

Leadership and participation. Leadership and widespread participation will be essential to the success of any regional project. The Northwest has a strong regional identity, but how it relates to ocean resource management beyond Puget Sound and the Strait of Georgia is unclear. There are many players involved in coastal and ocean affairs that need to be informed of the potential for regional governance and consulted regarding their likely interest and participation in a pilot project. The federal agencies, particularly NOAA, and corresponding state and local and tribal officials, are a key group. Additionally industry, NGOs and experts in academia and consulting firms are active players. A series of interviews and focus group discussions will be used to uncover relevant issues, such as perceived benefits and costs, jurisdictional conflicts, potential opposition, funding concerns, etc. The interviews will also help identify possible leaders for a regional effort. We also seek to identify “natural connections” among the players: synergies and efficiencies that could be achieved quickly at the scale of a pilot project.

Information resources. Information, together with the infrastructure and services that make it available, is essential to a regional perspective and ecosystem-based resource management. Full-scale regional governance will demand an integrated approach for harvesting, analyzing, and delivering useable information to decision-makers. The Northwest is well studied, and new efforts (Venus/Neptune, Oceans and Human Health Initiative, etc.) will add more information relevant to ocean management. This project will research and document existing sources of information, consolidate recommendations regarding future information needs, and begin the task of gathering data into a geographic information system that will support resource development and conservation decisions. The Nature Conservancy has already taken substantial steps in this direction and will continue under a cooperative agreement being developed with

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NOAA's Coastal Services Center. That cooperative agreement specifies outreach to make the lessons learned applicable in other coastal areas.

Priority issues. In the course of researching models in the Northwest, talking to important participants, and developing the information base we will be exposed to a wide range of science and opinion that helps identify ocean resource development and conservation issues. These will be documented in our report with comments on the applicability of early action projects at a pilot scale that could demonstrate principles of regional, ecosystem-based governance.

As noted above, these factors are essential starting points for a regional ocean governance pilot project in the Pacific Northwest. Moreover, they are likely to be the essential starting points for any regional ocean governance approach in the United States. We will be diligent in documenting our experience so that methods can be developed for follow-on projects here and beyond the Northwest.