



Opportunities for Ocean-Climate Action in the American Jobs Plan

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Climate change is the biggest threat to the health and productivity of our ocean and our coastal communities. As part of the American Jobs Plan, the Administration and Congress have the opportunity and obligation to act swiftly and comprehensively to strengthen the economy and avoid the worst consequences of catastrophic climate change. As the American Jobs Plan is being considered, Ocean Conservancy urges inclusion of bold financial investments and changes in federal policy to reduce U.S. greenhouse gas emissions, contribute to technological advances in clean energy, and provide resources to help communities and ecosystems adapt and thrive. The investment and scale of change needed is significant. However, investing in infrastructure and communities without addressing climate change or the pre-existing social inequities that are exacerbated by climate change will only make these efforts slower, costlier, and more inefficient.

Our ocean and coasts are gravely threatened by climate change; however, they can also provide solutions to this challenge. Both are home to people and ecosystems that can and should be protected throughout our transition to a resilient, clean energy future, even as their literal power and other resources can be sustainably harnessed.

Many of the climate mitigation and adaptation policies and investments proposed in the American Jobs Plan will provide additional benefits for a healthy ocean, advance ocean-based climate solutions, and support vulnerable and marginalized coastal communities and people. As Congress considers how to address climate change and build back better, we urge consideration of how the ocean can contribute to this effort and how it and the communities that rely on it will be impacted by the activities enabled.

Among others, **Ocean Conservancy supports the following policies and investments for reducing U.S. greenhouse gas emissions and contributing to the global effort to limit warming to 1.5 degrees C:**

- **Upgrade, modernize, and decarbonize ports of entry and coastal ports.** Addressing emissions from our nation's ports will help us tackle climate change, create jobs, and reduce the harmful impacts of air pollution on communities

living near our nation's ports – which are often low income and communities of color (1). We commend the recognition in the American Jobs Plan, as proposed by the Biden-Harris Administration, that the shipping sector and our nation's ports must be part of the solution to mitigate climate change and move us to a clean energy future. The American Jobs Plan includes \$6 billion in spending for a Healthy Ports Program, which would include support for shore power and electrification of port equipment, hydrogen production and use, and the development and implementation of port climate action plans. We look forward to working with the administration and champions in Congress to ensure that the American Jobs Plan includes robust funding to decarbonize the shipping sector and our nation's ports.

- **Invest in and provide a production tax credit for low-carbon hydrogen and other zero-carbon shipping fuels to mitigate shipping emissions that account for 2.89% of global emissions (2). We also recommend that the proposal to provide tax incentives for sustainable aviation fuel be expanded to include zero-carbon shipping fuels, which may include green hydrogen.** Studies have shown that ‘electrofuels’ made using renewable electricity – particularly hydrogen and ammonia – have an important role to play in decarbonizing shipping. The technology required to produce these and other zero carbon shipping fuels is well proven and shipbuilders have already started designing vessels to use them, with the aim of having the first vessels in the water in the mid-2020s. Planning for and investing in the development and production of these fuels should begin now so that the production capacity will be ready when demand ramps up in the second half of the decade. First-mover countries stand to benefit from the burgeoning demand, and the United States should not miss this opportunity at a critical time for economic development. Additionally, the development of zero-carbon shipping fuels will have spillover benefits for decarbonizing other sectors, like aviation and heavy industry. Moreover, it will help to establish infrastructure, skills and supply chains for renewable technologies, driving down their costs and encouraging increased adoption. In addition, there would be reduced reliance on imported fuels globally as zero-carbon shipping corridors are established, increasing energy security and fuel price stability (3).
- **Extend and enhance renewable and alternative energy incentives and create energy efficiency and clean electricity standards.** Incentivizing and setting standards for renewable and alternative energy, including from marine renewables like offshore wind, will not only lower the greenhouse gas pollution from the electricity we use in homes and factories but also the energy we need to make less carbon intensive fuels for transportation, including aviation and shipping. Recognizing a broad range of critical policies needed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in the United States, Ocean Conservancy urges consideration of existing legislative packages that can achieve parity in energy and fuel sources and accelerate the transition to a clean energy economy.
 - **Ensure consistent and long-term tax credits for renewable energy investments, generation, transmission and storage that are critical to advance responsible offshore wind energy and decrease reliance on fossil fuels.** The goal set by the Biden Administration to generate 30 gigawatts of power from offshore wind by 2030 is over 700 times the amount currently produced by offshore wind in the United States (4). Past industry investment and development has followed a boom-bust cycle that closely tracks access to financial incentives. Consistency and predictability in this sector will incentivize development to meet ambitious climate mitigation goals. It also has the potential to alleviate short-term development or permitting pressure that undercuts the significant long-term investment in the science and technologies needed to research and reduce the impacts offshore wind may have on our communities, environment, other ocean users, and wildlife. While being beneficial to offshore wind energy, these policies could also help catalyze and scale other nascent marine renewable energy technologies.
 - **Eliminate subsidies and preferential treatment for fossil fuels.** The fossil fuel industry benefits from tens of billions of dollars of tax subsidies and other preferential treatment each year. Closing these loopholes will ensure that companies pay their fair share, help accelerate the transition to low- or zero-carbon fuels and renewable energy, and also help address the growing plastics crisis. Plastics pollution and climate change share a common source and pose overlapping, interconnected threats to ocean ecosystems and coastal communities. More than 99 percent of all plastics are made from fossil fuels, and the feedstock extraction, production, use, and disposal of plastics is responsible for 3-4 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions as well as significant local air and water pollution (5, 6). Moreover, petrochemicals, driven by plastic production, are projected to be the largest source (60 percent) of oil demand growth through 2030 (7, 8). Giveaways to oil and gas companies facilitate the continued growth in plastics production. Ending subsidies should make virgin plastic production less financially attractive, enabling recycled plastic and alternatives to compete, and accelerating a transition to a circular economy.

The policies above and others contained in the American Jobs Plan are critical steps to achieve zero-carbon by 2050 as President Biden has committed, but they cannot be the only policies employed if the United States wants to meet this goal. We encourage Congress and the Administration to consider additional measures, including market-based measures, to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in the near future.

Ocean Conservancy supports a range of investments in climate change adaptation and recommends that in their allocation and distribution they acknowledge the outsized need of ocean and coastal ecosystems and communities.

Ocean and coastal communities are facing multiple impacts that compound the pace and scale of risk exposure. Sea level rise, ocean warming, increased severe weather events, and oxygen loss are occurring simultaneously and posing direct physical threats to coastal communities as well as harming the ocean-based economies and ecosystems they rely on. For example, hotels and restaurants in Florida suffer financially during harmful algal blooms, or red tides, that are more frequent with warming water (9). A recent report by FEMA’s National Advisory Council states that, “Many FEMA programs do not consider the principle of equity in financial assistance relief...Through the entire disaster cycle, communities that have been underserved stay underserved, and thereby suffer needlessly and unjustly.” The report references the Public Assistance Program which, “most benefits communities that can afford to pay the required match,” which is typically 25% of the cost of a project (10, 11). To ensure not only a sustainable but also a just future we must focus investments in economically depressed, vulnerable and marginalized communities, including communities of color (12). Coordinated and focused attention and resources for adaptation efforts will be necessary for coastal communities to adapt, survive, and thrive in a climatically changed world.

- **Invest in coastal restoration and resilience projects.** Not only do coastal restoration and resilience projects help buffer the impacts of sea level rise and flooding that our communities are facing today, but these projects have proven to create jobs, protect and restore the carbon sequestration potential of ecosystems and provide important habitat for fish and wildlife populations. In 2009, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) provided NOAA with \$167 million for coastal restoration and resilience projects – in which the agency received over \$3 billion in proposals. These ARRA funded projects supported over 2,000 jobs and generated \$260 million in total economic benefits while restoring 25,584 acres of habitat and removing 433,397 tons of debris from coastal habitats. Today, there is still a high demand for coastal restoration and resilience projects, with 19 of 35 coastal and Great Lakes states and Territories alone identifying over \$6 billion shovel ready restoration and resilience projects. While we are heartened to see the American Jobs Plan call for \$2.5 billion for coastal restoration and resilience projects, we further encourage Congress to meet existing demand, which far exceeds the \$6 billion already identified, and invest at least \$10 billion for these projects.
- **When implementing and providing resources for many of the programs included in the American Jobs Plan, they should prioritize climate-vulnerable and marginalized coastal communities (13).** An example of this is the proposed investment to ‘Redress historic inequities and build the future of transportation infrastructure’. These investments could be used to restore and reconnect communities of color in coastal cities that were separated from public coasts, beaches and waters by highways, thoroughfares, other industrial infrastructure, or by lack of public transportation options to access them. Other programs and provisions that could similarly benefit coastal communities include:
 - Mobilize the Civilian Climate Corps;
 - Maximize the resilience of land and water resources to protect communities and the environment through Improve coastal resilience;
 - Increase flood and drought resilience for vulnerable communities;
 - Improve climate forecast capabilities and information products for the public and monitoring the impacts of climate change;
 - Invest in resilience financing mechanisms; and
 - Support disadvantaged community investment in hazard mitigation projects, including incentives for building above existing codes and standards.

Ocean Conservancy also urges careful consideration of how policies that promote renewable energy, resilience, and a transition to a low-carbon economy will affect ocean health and coastal communities.

- **Supply of critical minerals.** The transition to renewable energy and a low-carbon transportation sector is central to addressing climate change, yet will require batteries and technologies that rely on critical minerals in high demand that also face supply chain risks. Abundant stores of these elements have been discovered in specific seafloor

environments; however, the environmental implications of seabed mining and its ability to supply an acceptable alternative to land-sourced or recycled materials are not well understood at this time. A precautionary approach is warranted and seabed rare earth mineral prospecting and extraction should not be permitted unless and until these and other uncertainties are resolved.

- **Power and water infrastructure.** As part of reenergizing America’s power infrastructure and ensuring clean, safe drinking water for all communities, the American Jobs Plan can create well paid jobs, foster a just transition, and prioritize communities that have been historically marginalized and under supported. The opportunities and benefits created as these efforts to make America’s land, water, and communities healthier are pursued must be equitably distributed. Among the investments and activities proposed, the following are opportunities to improve ocean health and protect coastal and marginalized communities:
 - **Remediate or reclaim abandoned wells and mines.** In addition to creating jobs and helping clean up scars left by poorly planned and financed industrial activities, this effort can mitigate a major source of methane emissions, a greenhouse gas eight times stronger than carbon dioxide. We encourage Congress and the Administration to include offshore oil and gas infrastructure in this work. Recent studies have demonstrated that, as is true for onshore oil and gas activities, methane emissions from offshore platforms are also underestimated, likely due to disproportionately high emissions from operations in shallow water and also inaccurate platform counts (14). By increasing our understanding of methane leakage from offshore operations and funding the needed remediation efforts, we can reduce emissions and create jobs in coastal areas dependent on this industry as they transition to a clean energy economy.
 - **Remediate brownfield sites.** We strongly support increased funding and attention to this issue and urge prioritization of remediation in coastal zones subjected to or predicted to be affected by sea level rise and increased storm and flooding events due to climate change. According to the EPA, “Floodwaters, especially brackish or salty floodwaters, can release and spread site contaminants and debris endangering human health, animals and the environment. Brownfields often are located near minority and low-income communities” (15). Sea level rise, storms and flood events already disproportionately affect low-income communities that may not be able to afford prevention, insurance, or relocation. When floodwaters and high-tides become toxic, the barriers to recovery and rebuilding can become insurmountable.
 - **Upgrade and modernize America’s drinking water, wastewater, and stormwater systems.** Similarly, the water crisis in the United States is most acute in communities who have already experienced minimal investment and support from the federal government – and in coastal areas where they continue to experience maximum impacts from climate change like sea level rise, extreme weather, and coastal erosion. These include African American communities' Indigenous communities, economically marginalized and rural communities. The ongoing, well-publicized, and unresolved water crises in Flint, Michigan; on the reservation lands of the Diné (Navajo Nation/Naabeehó Bináhásdzo) and throughout the tribal reservation system; and in coastal Louisiana are examples of this (16).

As Congress considers investments and policies to address climate change and build back better, we urge a thorough exploration of how the ocean can contribute to this effort and how it and the communities that rely on it will be impacted by the activities enabled.

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