

**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE  
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration**

**Responses to Comments on Draft Guidance on Designation of New Regional Ocean Partnerships**

***I. General Feedback***

**1. Comment from Nicole Cropper of NOAA’s Office for Coastal Management:** Add links so applicants can read more about various examples provided.

**Response:** Comment addressed. Links were added to Section V of the guidance to provide further information on the West Coast Ocean Alliance, Pacific Fishery Management Council, West Coast Ocean Tribal Caucus, Mid-Atlantic Regional Council on the Ocean, and Gulf of Mexico Alliance.

**2. Comment from Jenna Valente, Miranda Foley, and Nicole Griffin:** Request to formally recognize the Pacific Regional Ocean Partnership (PROP) in the guidance along with the other 4 Regional Ocean Partnerships (ROPs) mentioned. Makes the case that the PROP does not have to repeat the application process despite it currently being inactive as a stand-alone entity.

**Response:** No change. The underlying law, the James M. Inhofe National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2023 (NDAA), specifically identifies four existing regional ocean partnerships, so the guidance cannot presume designation of any others, e.g., the Pacific Regional Ocean Partnership. The introduction of the guidance acknowledges these four existing ROPs and that “the application process for new partnerships does not apply to them.”

**3. Comment from Eddie Baza Calvo:** Eddie Baza Calvo appoints Mr. Joseph Aretro-Cameron (POC on Coral Reef Conservation Programs, Fisheries, and Ocean Matters) and Dr. Jason Biggs (Scientific Advisor on Ocean Matters) to be his 2 designees to the Pacific Islands Regional Planning Body to initiate collaborative regional planning efforts on behalf of Guam.

**Response:** No change. This comment is outside the scope of this guidance.

**4. Comment from Morrie Lemen Jr. of the Iñupiat Community of the Arctic Slope:** NOAA should engage in specific technical assistance and outreach to Tribes looking to participate in a new ROP. Tribal governments often need specific assistance to participate given resource constraints.

**Response:** Comment addressed. Section IV of the guidance was revised to highlight that NOAA will provide assistance to Tribes. Also, NOAA invited Tribal consultation according to Executive Order 13175: *Consultation and Coordination With Indian Tribal Governments* in developing this guidance and will offer further consultation when considering applications for the designation of new regional ocean partnerships.

**5. Comment from Diane Hoskins of the Carbon to Sea Initiative:** Support for the Northeast Regional Ocean Council’s informative webinar on marine carbon dioxide removal (mCDR) and additional actions related to mCDR including interactive follow-up discussions at existing and new ROPs (commenter offered to help with these).

**Response:** No change. New and existing regional ocean partnerships may engage in mCDR-related matters if they declare this topic a regional priority.

**6. Comment from Diane Hoskins of the Carbon to Sea Initiative:** Incentivize the development of ROPs in regions that are lacking such as the South Atlantic, Caribbean, Western Pacific, and Alaska.

**Response:** Comment addressed. In Section V, part 6, the guidance discusses how new regional ocean partnerships (ROPs) must not be duplicative of existing ROPs (*NDAA Sec. 10202(b)(2)(E), 16 U.S.C. § 1468(b)(2)(E)*). It states, “NOAA encourages new regional ocean partnerships in geographies where no such partnership exists rather than applications that overlap with existing partnerships.”

## ***II. Tribal Consultation***

**7. Comment from Derek Brockbank of the Coastal States Organization:** Support for “In accordance with Executive Order 13175, NOAA will consult with Tribes before approving a new ROP.”

**Response:** No change. This step is already included in the guidance to reflect the National Defense Authorization Act.

**8. Comments from Morrie Lemen Jr. of the Iñupiat Community of the Arctic Slope:** Explicitly state that any new ROP is required to consult with all Tribes in the region, not just those within the partnership.

Define meaningful consultation with Tribes (use Executive Order 13175 as model) and add an enforcement mechanism to ensure that ROPs follow through with consultation plans.

**Response:** No change for the first part of the comment. Section II of the guidance states that NOAA “will consult with Tribes in the region on the proposed designation of new regional ocean partnerships according to Executive Order 13175: *Consultation and Coordination With Indian Tribal Governments*.” This consultation requires that “information obtained from Tribes be given meaningful consideration, and agencies should strive for consensus with Tribes or a mutually desired outcome.” (Memorandum on Uniform Standards for Tribal Consultation, (<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2022/11/30/memorandum-on-uniform-standards-for-tribal-consultation/>))

Also, Section V, part 2 of the guidance notes that the National Defense Authorization Act requires a regional ocean partnership to maintain mechanisms for coordination, consultation, and engagement with Indian Tribes.

Regarding the second part of the comment on meaningful engagement, a footnote was added to include a definition for “meaningful engagement” that states: “For purposes of this guidance, “meaningful engagement” is defined as the intentional, consistent inclusion of underserved and/or Tribal partners to collaborate towards solutions of problems identified by communities themselves.”

### *III. Environmental Review and Compliance*

**9. Comment from Nicole Cropper of NOAA’s Office for Coastal Management:** Tribes may have to offer a limited waiver of sovereignty. The guidance should also identify how data sovereignty will be protected (or not).

**Response:** Comment addressed. Section III of the guidance was revised to state “Regarding tribal data sovereignty, NOAA will follow practices contained in “NOAA Guidance and Best Practices for Engaging and Including Indigenous Knowledge in Decision-Making.”

([https://www.noaa.gov/sites/default/files/2024-](https://www.noaa.gov/sites/default/files/2024-05/NOAA_Indigenous%20Knowledge_Guidance_with_Appendix_FINAL_e-signed%205-17-24%20%282%29.pdf)

[05/NOAA\\_Indigenous%20Knowledge\\_Guidance\\_with\\_Appendix\\_FINAL\\_e-signed%205-17-24%20%282%29.pdf](https://www.noaa.gov/sites/default/files/2024-05/NOAA_Indigenous%20Knowledge_Guidance_with_Appendix_FINAL_e-signed%205-17-24%20%282%29.pdf))

**10. Comment from Derek Brockbank of the Coastal States Organization:** Indicate whether designation of a new ROP is a major federal action under NEPA and whether a categorical exclusion would apply or if an environmental assessment or environmental impact statement would be required.

**Response:** No change. NOAA must evaluate every proposed action to determine the applicability of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). If the Act applies to the proposed action, the decision-maker must determine whether to apply a Categorical Exclusion, or prepare either an Environmental Assessment or an Environmental Impact Statement. For a new regional ocean partnership, the proposed action will initially be developed by the applicants, and NOAA will strive to coordinate with the applicants early in the planning process and inform those entities of what information NOAA might need to ensure NEPA compliance. Further information on environmental compliance can be found in the appendix to the guidance.

**11. Comment from Derek Brockbank of the Coastal States Organization:** Support for language noting that applicants shall comply with all federal, state, and local law, including compliance with state and territory coastal management programs under the Coastal Zone Management Act.

**Response:** No change. Thank you for the comment.

### *IV. Submitting a Regional Ocean Partnership Application to NOAA*

**12. Comment from the Mid-Atlantic Regional Council on the Ocean:** Add an opportunity for public comment prior to NOAA’s approval of a new ROP.

**Response:** Section IV of the guidance was revised to state, “NOAA will review the application and provide a preliminary decision for public review and comment within 120 days of receipt.”

**13. Comment from the Northeast Regional Ocean Council:** Include existing ROPs in the application review process or at a minimum in the initial vetting of applicants to screen for issue areas of commonality and outline where overlap with an existing ROP may occur.

**Comment from Stephanie Bailenson of The Nature Conservancy:** The statutory requirement for mechanisms for consultation, coordination, and engagement with a range of governmental and non-governmental entities should extend to the application process and not be applied only once a new ROP has been established. The identification of the initial issues the ROP will focus

on should be selected with such consultation and engagement in order to reflect the priorities of the covered communities.

**Response:** Comments addressed. Section IV of the guidance was revised to state “NOAA encourages entities considering forming new regional ocean partnerships to communicate with NOAA early in the process and to coordinate with the organizations listed in Section V, part 2 below, and with other entities in the region. As entities develop their management structures, NOAA will provide assistance, such as answering questions, providing connections to existing regional ocean partnerships, and reviewing early application drafts. This support includes assistance to interested Indian Tribes and, as relevant, working with applicants and existing regional ocean partnerships to ensure new partnerships are not duplicative of existing regional ocean partnerships.” Section V was revised to state, “Coordination should begin in the planning stages of a new partnership, before an application is submitted to NOAA.”

**14. Comment from The Nature Conservancy:** Support for “To assist applicants, NOAA will provide technical assistance, answer questions, and allow for resubmission if an initial application is denied.”

**Response:** No change. Thank you for the comment.

#### *V. Requirements for New Regional Ocean Partnerships*

**15. Comment from the Mid-Atlantic Regional Council on the Ocean, Gulf of Mexico Alliance, Northeast Regional Ocean Council, Derek Brockbank of the Coastal States Organization, and John Hansen of West Coast Ocean Alliance:** Need to clarify the term “regional.” Its meaning can vary across different geographic scales. Geographically, the scope of the 4 existing ROPs is consistent with congressional intent (used in implementing Executive Order 13547) as well as many NOAA programs including NOAA Fisheries, NOAA coastal mapping, and NOAA coastal zone management.

**Comment from the Mid-Atlantic Regional Council on the Ocean, Gulf of Mexico Alliance, and John Hansen of West Coast Ocean Alliance:** Use the geographic scope of the 4 current ROPs as a guiding framework for the development of any new ROP

**Comment from Northeast Regional Ocean Council:** There are examples throughout NOAA’s work and within the context of many ocean policy discussions defining the concept of regional including the US Commission on Ocean Policy (2004). The Commission Report clearly outlines the value and need for regional approaches to address complex issues that impact many parts of the ecosystem. The report specifically advocates for the development of ROPs. Discussions in the Commission Report also include the need for larger jurisdictional boundaries of geographic scope as well as a focus on large marine ecosystems (LME), beyond a given state’s Coastal Zone Management authority to address complex issues, assess and manage cumulative impacts, and reduce duplication while maximizing limited resources. The Commission’s recommendations were embraced and formalized in the Final Recommendations of the Ocean Policy Task Force (Obama Administration), those considerations have been made, and there are now nine general biogeographical regions accepted as the appropriate baseline for consideration as ROPs. The Final Recommendations of the Ocean Policy Task Force build on the Commission’s recommendations and identify nine biogeographic regions based largely on LME characteristics. These areas, which were later formalized under the now defunct Regional Planning Bodies, were embraced by the governors of multiple regions as ROPs. Since at least 2010, NOAA recognized

and embraced the nine biogeographic regions as the appropriate scale for ROPs, over the course of multiple publicly noticed funding opportunities for ROPs, stating, “NOAA will use the [NOP] LME-based regions for consideration in funding.” Taken collectively, for over 20 years the federal government has consistently identified ROPs in a specific way, and the conception of ROPs with these larger geographic scopes in mind still remains pertinent to the current ocean and coastal management challenges of our nation.

**Response:** Comments addressed. Section V of the guidance was revised to state, “Regional ocean partnerships are intended to “empower States to take a lead role in managing oceans, coastal, and Great Lakes areas” and be “intergovernmental coordinators for shared regional priorities among states and Indian Tribes relating to the collaborative management of the large marine ecosystems, thereby reducing duplication of efforts and maximizing opportunities to leverage support in the ocean and coastal regions.” (NDAA Sec. 10201(b)(4)). Thus the “region” must be of sufficient geographic scale to meet this intent.

The guidance further states, “Applications for new regional ocean partnerships must identify how the partnership would meet the intent of collaborative management of large marine ecosystems and the Great Lakes. NOAA therefore expects new regional ocean partnerships to encompass a multistate region. However, there may be cases where a proposed new regional ocean partnership encompasses one or more large marine ecosystems adjacent to only one state, such as Alaska.”

**16. Comment from Diane Hoskins of the Carbon to Sea Initiative:** Do not approve more than one ROP per major geographic region. For vast expanses like the Western Pacific and Alaska create appropriately chartered and staffed subcommittees to deal with priority subregional issues.

**Response:** The first part of the comment was addressed (*see* Comment 15). Regarding subcommittees, there is no change; regional ocean partnership (ROP) structure (e.g., subcommittees) is a more appropriate discussion during the ROP application process.

**17. Comment from Derek Brockbank of the Coastal States Organization:** Support for flexibility around membership, leadership, and structure requirements for new ROPs to meet each region’s unique needs.

**Response:** No change. Thank you for the comment.

**18. Comment from Derek Brockbank of the Coastal States Organization:** Ensure that all minimum requirements are clearly defined in the final guidance and that they represent a comprehensive, predictive framework for proposal review. Potential future ROP proponents should have confidence that, if any application is submitted in compliance with all minimum requirements identified in the guidance, that they will not be disapproved for failure to comply with expectations not laid out in the guidance.

**Response:** Comment addressed. The introduction to Section V of the guidance was revised to state, “All requirements for designation of new regional ocean partnerships are included within the NDAA and further detailed in this guidance document.”

**19. Comment from Stephanie Bailenson of The Nature Conservancy:** Articulate what TA [technical assistance] for pre-designation planning could include and how to request it.

**Response:** Comment addressed. Section IV of the guidance was revised to state, “NOAA will provide assistance, such as answering questions, providing connections to existing regional ocean partnerships, and reviewing early application drafts. This support includes technical assistance to interested Indian Tribes and, as relevant, working with applicants and existing regional ocean partnerships to ensure that new partnerships are not duplicative with existing regional ocean partnerships.”

***VI. Requirements for New Regional Ocean Partnerships: Identify the Members that Will Comprise the New Partnership***

**20. Comment from Stephanie Bailenson of The Nature Conservancy:** Clarify what partnerships are possible in areas where states and territories don’t share boundaries and may not have federally recognized tribes.

**Response:** No change. Section V of the guidance asserts that states that do not share a boundary may form a partnership: “a regional ocean partnership must include at least one coastal state, as defined in the NDAA, and at least one other eligible entity. Other eligible entities are other coastal or non-coastal state(s) that share a common ocean or coastal area with the coastal state, without regard to whether the coastal states share a boundary; state(s) that would contribute to the priorities of the partnership, or Indian Tribe(s), as defined in the NDAA.”

**21. Comment from Stephanie Bailenson of The Nature Conservancy:** Facilitate collaborative bodies that enhance engagement amongst state, territory, tribal, and community partners consistent with the functions laid out in the statute.

**Response:** No change. NOAA will enhance engagement by providing technical assistance to entities interested in forming new regional ocean partnerships, as stated in Section IV of the guidance.

**22. Comment from John Hansen of West Coast Ocean Alliance:** NOAA should ensure that all State and Tribal governments in a region be included in the proposed ROP if they choose to participate and that no government intends to act or speak on behalf of another government in the region in the context of defining regional consensus building.

**Response:** No change. NOAA will strive to alleviate this concern through coordination with entities developing new regional ocean partnerships and review of the designation applications.

**23. Comment from Morrie Lemen Jr. of the Iñupiat Community of the Arctic Slope:** Approve only those applications that include Tribes.

**Response:** No change. Section V of the guidance states that “a regional ocean partnership must include at least one coastal state, as defined in the NDAA, and at least one other eligible entity” including Indian Tribe(s).

Also, Section V of the guidance states “NOAA expects all new partnerships to coordinate and collaborate with Indian Tribes in the development and continued implementation of the partnership.” These actions will ensure that all interested Tribes in a region have the opportunity to meaningfully participate in the regional ocean partnership.

***VII. Requirements for New Regional Ocean Partnerships: Identify the Governing Body of the New Partnership***

**24. Comment from Morrie Lemen Jr. of the Iñupiat Community of the Arctic Slope:** Deny any new ROP whose governing body would prevent member Tribes from voting. Such partnerships should not dilute the importance of Tribal governments through reserving co-equal seats for entities like the Borough. Any ROP that excludes or limits Tribal participation is inherently inadequate and does not align with the guidance’s stated purpose to address “ocean and coastal issues of common concern in the region.”

**Response:** No change. Section V of the guidance states “One purpose of the NDAA is to “incorporate rights of Indian Tribes in the management of oceans, coasts, and Great Lakes resources and provide resources to support Indian Tribe participation in and engagement with Regional Ocean Partnerships.” Sec. 10201(b)(6). As such, NOAA expects all new partnerships to coordinate and collaborate with Indian Tribes in the development and continued implementation of the partnership. And, as noted above, NOAA will invite consultation with Indian Tribes in the region on the proposed designation of new regional ocean partnerships in accordance with Executive Order 13175: *Consultation and Coordination With Indian Tribal Governments.*”

**25. Comment from Nicole Cropper of NOAA’s Office for Coastal Management:** Add that the partnerships should aim to have a governing body consisting of individual members with diverse backgrounds, identities, and perspectives and demographically representative of their respective impacted coastal communities.

**Response:** Comment addressed. Section V of the guidance was revised to state, “The partnerships should aim to have a governing body consisting of individual members with diverse backgrounds, identities, and perspectives and demographically representative of their respective impacted coastal communities.”

**26. Comment from Nicole Cropper of NOAA’s Office for Coastal Management:** The term “tribal leaders” is very vague, and in tribal communities, leaders may not necessarily be part of the decision-making body. Maybe change this language to “tribal government leaders” or something similar.

**Response:** Comment addressed. Section V of the guidance was revised to use the term, “Tribal government leaders.”

**27. Comment from Derek Brockbank of the Coastal States Organization:** Include language that federal agencies may participate as partners/members.

**Response:** No change. The National Defense Authorization Act states that regional ocean partnerships must maintain mechanisms for coordination, consultation, and engagement with the federal government, and this is addressed in Section I and Section V, part 2 of the guidance.

***VIII. Requirements for New Regional Ocean Partnerships: Identify the Purposes and Functions of the New Partnership***

**28. Comment from Nicole Cropper of NOAA’s Office for Coastal Management:** Add that the ROP must maintain mechanisms for coordination, consultation, and engagement with Impacted communities, including those that have been historically marginalized or otherwise

impacted by environmental injustice. This should also include a footnote with the definition of EJ (environmental justice) from federal executive orders.

**Response:** This comment proposed adding language to the underlying law, the National Defense Authorization Act, not the guidance, so it was not addressed. The Act does not include the term “environmental justice.”

**29. Comment from Stephanie Bailenson of The Nature Conservancy:** NOAA should ensure that coordination mechanisms are reasonable to the specific circumstance of the ROP and not unduly burdensome (not all ROPs will choose to engage on issues that are relevant to all the bodies specified in statute).

**Response:** No change. NOAA will advise potential regional ocean partnerships on appropriate coordination mechanisms and will review them as part of the designation application.

**30. Comment from Stephanie Bailenson of The Nature Conservancy:** Underscore that the expectation for ROPs to coordinate, consult, and engage with tribes does NOT relieve federal agencies of any requirements to consult with tribes.

**Response:** No change. Section V, part 2 of the guidance already states, “These coordination, consultation, and engagement mechanisms do not relieve federal agencies of any requirement to consult with Indian Tribes, as described under Executive Order 13175, *Consultation and Coordination with Indian Tribal Governments*, or any other applicable law or policy.”

**31. Comment from Morrie Lemen Jr. of the Iñupiat Community of the Arctic Slope:**

Support for “applications must outline how any new ROPs will ‘maintain mechanisms for coordination, consultation, and engagement’ with Tribes.”

**Response:** No change. Thank you for the comment.

**32. Comment from Nicole Cropper of NOAA’s Office for Coastal Management:** Add that when holding meetings, partners should consider the accessibility of materials and venues, and when appropriate, that members of the public have an opportunity to meaningfully engage with content provided in plain language. We should also define meaningful engagement here.

**Response:** Comment addressed. Section V, part 2 of the guidance was revised to state, “When holding meetings, partners should consider the accessibility of materials and venues, and when appropriate, members of the public [should] have an opportunity to meaningfully engage with content provided in plain language. “Meaningful engagement” is defined as the intentional, consistent inclusion of underserved and/or Tribal partners to collaborate toward solutions of problems identified by communities themselves.”

**33. Comment from Diane Hoskins of the Carbon to Sea Initiative:** Encourage new ROPs to work closely with regional ocean observing systems and regional ocean acidification consortia.

**Response:** No change. Coordination with the regional associations of the National Integrated Coastal and Ocean Observation System is required by the National Defense Authorization Act and stated in the guidance (Sec. V. 2). NOAA encourages new regional ocean partnerships to work closely with regional ocean acidification consortia, but it is not a requirement for designation.



**34. Comment from Stephanie Bailenson of The Nature Conservancy:** Concern that NOAA is requiring more detail than necessary at the time of application. NOAA should not place the burden of extensive planning on the states, territories, and tribes before they are eligible for potential federal resources to support such work.

**Response:** No change. The guidance encourages potential applicants to communicate with NOAA early in the process so that NOAA can provide assistance and help to alleviate this burden (Sec. IV).

**35. Comment from John Hansen of West Coast Ocean Alliance:** Ensure that new ROPs' activities align with ROP authorization language focused on the unique functions supported by ROPs, including more effective management of ocean resources, direct support of intergovernmental coordination, improvements to the ecological and economic health of ocean and coastal areas, and supporting ocean data and science activities, among other roles.

**Response:** Comment addressed. Section V, part 3 of the guidance was revised to clarify this point, “[the application for the new partnership] must explain how [the issues it will focus on] align with the purposes of the NDAA.”

**36. Comment from Diane Hoskins of the Carbon to Sea Initiative:** Ensure that ocean-based solutions to climate change mitigation and adaptation exist in all US coastal areas.

**Response:** No change. This is a broad goal that goes beyond NOAA's guidance on designation of new regional ocean partnerships.

**37. Comment from Stephanie Bailenson of The Nature Conservancy:** In some cases, there are existing arrangements with other entities to serve some of the usual functions of an ROP. The issuance of this guidance should not disrupt that work if a region chooses to continue it. Doing so could have funding implications for existing data-sharing efforts and the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act specifies that funding provided includes “to enhance associate sharing and integration of Federal and non-Federal data by ROPs, or their equivalent.”

**Response:** No change. Section V, part 4 of the guidance already states, “The partnership is intended to complement existing coastal and ocean management efforts that require or could be enhanced with a regional, intergovernmental focus.”

**38. Comment from the Mid-Atlantic Regional Council on the Ocean, Gulf of Mexico Alliance, Northeast Regional Ocean Council, Derek Brockbank of the Coastal States Organization, and John Hansen of West Coast Ocean Alliance:** To further avoid duplication (as noted in Section 10201(b)(4) of the NDAA authorization language for ROPs), there should be an added requirement where entities considering an application in geographies where an active ROP exists to collaborate with those established ROPs.

**Response:** Comment addressed. Section V, part 6 of the guidance was revised to state, “Applicants for new partnerships must consult with any existing regional ocean partnerships in the same geographic area.”

**39. Comment from the Mid-Atlantic Regional Council on the Ocean, Northeast Regional Ocean Council, and Derek Brockbank of the Coastal States Organization:** Change language to allow NOAA to review an application before determining the level of continued engagement or opportunity for refinement and to first seek to engage directly with an existing ROP.

**Response:** No change for the first part of the comment. Section IV of the guidance already encourages early coordination with NOAA before a designation application is formally submitted. For the second part, see the response to Comment 38.

**40. Comment from the Mid-Atlantic Regional Council on the Ocean:** Does “partnership” refer to existing ROPs in this context (“new ROPs cannot be duplicative of an existing partnership”)?

**Response:** Yes. Section V, part 6 of the guidance was revised to clarify this language.

**41. Comment from Stephanie Bailenson of The Nature Conservancy:** Clarify that partnerships can overlap without duplication. For example, Florida currently participates in Gulf of Mexico Alliance. Would it be able to participate in a South Atlantic effort should other eligible entities want to form such a partnership? Similarly, if the South Atlantic states and tribes decide not to form a new ROP, would North Carolina be able to form a partnership with Virginia, a participant in the Mid-Atlantic Regional Council on the Ocean? Could multiple tribes form a tribal ROP if it overlaps in an area (in whole or in part) with an existing state-based ROP? We think these are all examples of potentially worthwhile collaborations and should be considered by NOAA.

**Response:** No change. Section V of the guidance specifies the eligible members of a partnership and Section V, parts 1 and 6 describe the criteria for avoiding duplication with existing regional ocean partnerships. NOAA will address specific questions on duplication when providing technical assistance to potential applicants.

**42. Comment from the Northeast Regional Ocean Council:** Refer to the existing functions of ROPs as outlined in ROP Act legislation within the 2023 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA):

- “(d) FUNCTIONS.—A Regional Ocean Partnership may perform the following functions:
  - (1) Promote coordination of the actions of the agencies of governments participating in the partnership with the actions of the appropriate officials of Federal agencies, State governments, and Indian Tribes in developing strategies—
    - (A) to conserve living resources, increase valuable habitats, enhance coastal resilience and ocean management, promote ecological and economic health, and address such other issues related to the shared ocean, coastal, or Great Lakes areas as are determined to be a shared, regional priority by those states; and
    - (B) to manage regional data portals and develop associated data products for purposes that support the priorities of the partnership.
  - (2) In cooperation with appropriate Federal and State agencies, Indian Tribes, and local authorities, develop and implement specific action plans to carry out coordination goals.
  - (3) Coordinate and implement priority plans and projects, and facilitate science, research, modeling, monitoring, data collection, and other activities that support the goals of the partnership subsection (f).

(4) Engage, coordinate, and collaborate with relevant governmental entities and stakeholders to address ocean and coastal related matters that require interagency or intergovernmental solutions.

(5) Implement outreach programs for public information, education, and participation to foster stewardship of the resources of the ocean, coastal, and Great Lakes areas, as relevant.

(6) Develop and make available, through publications, technical assistance, and other appropriate means, information pertaining to cross-jurisdictional issues being addressed through the coordinated activities of the partnership.

(7) Serve as a liaison with, and provide information to, international counterparts, as appropriate on priority issues for the partnership.”

**Response:** No change. These activities are discretionary in the National Defense Authorization Act (Sec. 10202(d)) and are not required to be in place for NOAA to designate a new regional ocean partnership: “A Regional Ocean Partnership *may* perform the following functions” (emphasis added).

#### ***IX. Eligibility for Funding as a Partnership***

**43. Comment from Stephanie Bailenson of The Nature Conservancy and Diane Hoskins of the Carbon to Sea Initiative:** The benefits of enhanced coordination and collaboration should not be limited to those states, territories, and tribes with ample resources. NOAA should support the pre-designation planning of new partnerships and the implementation of established partnerships in the development of its annual budget (beyond FY27) and if funding is appropriated by Congress, NOAA should apply it to both pre-designation planning and post-designation implementation efforts.

**Response:** Comment partly addressed. Section IV of the guidance was revised to state, “NOAA will provide assistance, such as answering questions, providing connections to existing regional ocean partnerships, and reviewing early application drafts. This support includes assistance to interested Indian Tribes and, as relevant, working with applicants and existing regional ocean partnerships to ensure new partnerships are not duplicative of existing regional ocean partnerships.” The guidance does not address the development of NOAA’s annual budget request since that is not relevant to NOAA’s guidance on the designation of new regional ocean partnerships.