



**Policy to Support Coastal States and Territories to Adapt to Climate Change and Advance a Coordinated National Climate Adaptation Strategy  
October 17, 2011**

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**THE STATES' INTEREST**

Climate-related changes are already occurring in the nation's coastal communities and are projected to increase in both frequency and intensity. Coastal areas are particularly vulnerable to sea level rise and lake level changes, shoreline erosion, increased storm surge, and flooding, which could have devastating impacts on coastal populations and economies. Other climate-related impacts include: saltwater intrusion into groundwater aquifers and other fresh water drinking supplies; increased algal blooms; spread of invasive species; habitat loss; changes in migration patterns of marine and coastal species; and changes in the chemical and physical characteristics of marine systems.

Increasing resilience to climate change and improving the capacity of coastal communities to adapt to these changes will require proactive solutions that integrate federal, state, regional, and local policies and programs. Coastal states, territories, and commonwealths are already taking action and utilizing existing authorities to address the impacts of climate variability and change at the state and local level. The Coastal States Organization (CSO) also acknowledges the significant progress made at the federal level. Both the National Ocean Council (NOC) and Interagency Climate Change Adaptation Task Force have laid the groundwork for improved federal agency coordination and leveraging of federal resources to promote policies and programs that help increase the nation's resilience to climate change and support the adaptation activities currently underway in coastal states and territories. As progress continues toward a national climate change adaptation strategy, federal coordination with and support for state agencies, coastal zone management programs, and National Estuarine Research Reserves (NERRs) will be essential.

CSO makes the following recommendations for how Congress and the Administration can support the ongoing efforts of coastal states to adapt to climate change and advance a coordinated national climate adaptation strategy:

✦ **COORDINATE FEDERAL PROGRAMS, POLICIES AND FUNDING**

Congress and the Administration should continue to support efforts to define and implement a national climate change adaptation strategy that promotes intergovernmental coordination, clarifies the roles and responsibilities of federal agencies, and leverages federal resources to support state-driven climate adaptation efforts.

✦ **RECOGNIZE CRITICAL ROLE OF STATE COASTAL PROGRAMS**

Congress and the Administration should recognize the role of coastal states, the Coastal Zone Management Act (CZMA), and existing state authority to address the impacts of climate change, and identify mechanisms by which federal agencies will coordinate with and provide support for state efforts on climate change adaptation.

✦ **ADOPT INTEGRATED APPROACHES TO CLIMATE ADAPTATION**

Congress and the Administration should promote integrated approaches to climate change adaptation at the federal, state, and local levels.

✦ **IMPROVE SCIENTIFIC UNDERSTANDING & INCREASE ACCESS TO DATA AND TECHNICAL SUPPORT**

Congress and the Administration should support continued scientific research and data collection at the state and federal level, as well as the development of educational, outreach, and decision support tools to ensure states are able to access, understand, and apply this critical information to coastal management decisions.

## COORDINATE FEDERAL PROGRAMS, POLICIES AND FUNDING

**Policy Statement:** Congress and the Administration should continue to support efforts to define and implement a national climate change adaptation strategy that promotes intergovernmental coordination, clarifies the roles and responsibilities of federal agencies, and leverages federal resources to support state-driven climate adaptation efforts.

While federal agencies are collecting valuable information about and administering programs for adapting to future climate conditions, the existing patchwork of data, information, and services is inefficient. Improved federal coordination is needed to ensure the most efficient use of resources and to support complementary efforts among local, state, regional and national programs. Better coordination of federal programs, policies, and funding will not only improve awareness and understanding of the federal resources available to state and local governments to support climate adaptation activities, but also will help leverage federal expertise and resources to address data and information gaps and provide more robust technical support and services to help states assess vulnerability, increase resiliency, and identify opportunities for adaptation. While CSO acknowledges progress made by the NOC and Interagency Adaptation Task Force to address intergovernmental coordination on climate adaptation, more work is needed. CSO urges Congress and the Administration to continue to support these important efforts.

Any national climate adaptation strategy must include robust federal funding that is aligned with identified strategic priorities. There is not currently a consolidated set of strategic priorities that integrate climate change programs and activities across the federal government or dedicated resources for these efforts.

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## RECOGNIZE CRITICAL ROLE OF STATE COASTAL PROGRAMS

**Policy Statement:** Congress and the Administration should recognize the role of coastal states, the Coastal Zone Management Act, and existing state authority to address the impacts of climate change, and identify mechanisms by which federal agencies will coordinate with and provide support for state climate change adaptation activities.

Given the physical and socioeconomic diversity of the nation's coastlines and the regional variability of climate impacts, adaptation will be most effective when informed and driven by local needs. State and local governments have direct responsibility for the resources and communities in the coastal zone and are in the best position to assess localized climate-related impacts and identify vulnerabilities. Many coastal states are already using existing authorities to address the impacts of climate change and increase community resiliency through statewide, interagency climate change partnerships, task forces or commissions. As progress toward a national climate adaptation strategy continues, Congress and the Administration should recognize the role of the states, continue to provide financial and technical resources to support climate adaptation activities at the local, state, tribal, and regional levels, and actively engage and coordinate with state agencies, coastal zone management programs, and NERRs, as appropriate.

CSO also supports reauthorizing the CZMA with a strengthened authorization for climate change-related activities, including funding to voluntarily develop and implement coastal adaptation plans that recognize the individual needs of each state while building into a proactive national strategy.

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## ADOPT INTEGRATED APPROACHES TO CLIMATE ADAPTATION

**Policy Statement:** Congress and the Administration should promote integrated approaches to climate change adaptation at the federal, state, and local levels.

Because climate-related impacts will be experienced across all sectors, adaptation strategies should be incorporated into core policies, planning, and programs. Integrated adaptation planning will not only increase coordination and efficiency, but will also help ensure that the social, environmental, and economic impacts of climate change are

considered. CSO also supports ecosystem-based approaches to adaptation that highlight the ability of natural systems to increase resiliency in both the natural and the built environments.

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## **IMPROVE SCIENTIFIC UNDERSTANDING & INCREASE ACCESS TO DATA AND TECHNICAL SUPPORT**

**Policy Statement:** Congress and the Administration should support continued scientific research and data collection at the state and federal level, as well as the development of educational, outreach, and decision support tools to ensure states are able to access, understand, and apply this critical information to coastal management decisions.

Considerable progress has been made to address the science needs of state coastal resource managers, but further research, observations, and modeling will continue to help: improve forecasts of regional and local scale climate impacts; assist states and local governments in planning and conducting vulnerability assessments; inform adaptation efforts; and avoid maladaptive activities. A better integrated state and federal research agenda that includes the physical, natural, and social sciences will not only address critical gaps in understanding, but will also help guide the development of models, tools, and services to interpret scientific data and inform coastal management decisions.

While federal agencies are collecting valuable data and developing analysis tools to supplement the robust scientific research conducted by state agencies and academic institutions, these federal resources are not always readily accessible or presented in a useable form. CSO acknowledges the NOAA Coastal Services Center's Digital Coast effort, which has responded to the need for reliable coastal data, tools to interpret this data into useable products, and training opportunities to help users make the most of out the data and tools available. CSO urges Congress and the Administration to continue to support Digital Coast and similar efforts that advance state and federal climate research and improve access to the best available science, technical guidance, and decision support tools.

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## **CONCLUSION**

There is a large body of credible scientific evidence that shows climate change will have lasting effects on our nation's coasts, oceans and Great Lakes, as well as the coastal economies dependent on the health of these ecosystems. Communities in the nation's coastal zone face a number of challenges in adapting to the effects of a variable and changing climate. In order to successfully meet these challenges, the states must be full and equal partners in the development and implementation of any national climate adaptation strategy. This will require close coordination between the federal government and the states in climate research, the development of strategies to identify and prepare for the effects of future climate conditions, and the sharing of best practices. While state authorities and sovereignty should be maintained, states coastal programs need federal assistance -- financial and technical -- to support climate change adaptation activities along the coasts.

*Since 1970, CSO has represented the interests of the Governors of the nation's thirty-five coastal states and territories, including the Great Lakes states, on issues relating to the sound management and development of coastal and ocean resources.*