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Scientists, environmentalists in New Orleans seek streamlining of ocean-management agencies

By [Chris Kirkham, The Times-Picayune](#)
January 13, 2010, 6:21PM

As the Obama administration formulates a national policy to protect ocean resources, coastal scientists and environmental groups in New Orleans spoke out Wednesday on the importance of streamlining the often-overlapping array of government agencies responsible for managing oceans and coastlines across the country.

Obama announced the national ocean policy plan last summer, and key administration officials were in town in October to hear hours worth of public comment on how the policy should move forward.

"The time when oceans could be treated as an inexhaustible resource has long passed. We now recognize that oceans are fragile and limited in their capacity to withstand the effects of human activities," said Steven Lohrenz, chairman of the **Department of Marine Science at the University of Southern Mississippi**. "We've already vastly altered ocean ecosystems in ways that include overfishing, loss of critical habitat, introduction of invasive species and diminished water quality, and these problems will continue to get worse if we do not embrace an ocean policy that aims to balance the human use of our oceans with sustainability and stewardship."

The ocean policy task force is made up of several different agencies including the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the U.S. Coast Guard, the Minerals Management Service and the White House Council on Environmental Quality. In December they developed the first phase of the oceans plan, which calls for regions like the Gulf of Mexico to plan and map out specific uses for different parts of the ocean and coast.

The goal is to get a scope of the complex pressures on ocean ecosystems, such as oil and gas development, fishing and navigation.

Cynthia Sarthou, executive director of the **Gulf Restoration Network**, said that currently there are 140 laws and regulations governing the oceans across 20 separate agencies.

"This complex legal system often results in inadequate management of public and private activities such as pollution control, fishing and oil and gas development," Sarthou said. "A strong national policy would help to untangle the regulatory jumble by guiding and coordinating all activities regulated by government agencies that affect ocean resources."

Denise Reed, a coastal researcher with the **University of New Orleans**, pointed to management of the Mississippi River as an example of the conflicting interests involved with ocean and coastal policy.

"The river is our greatest resource for (coastal) restoration and yet we have all kinds of different things that we want to do with it," Reed said. "But we have not yet found a way to have a conversation about how we use the river for restoration, continue to navigate on the river and continue to protect ourselves from riverine flooding in Louisiana. This is the opportunity to do that, and the fact that the federal government is coming out with this is a way to get that on the top shelf."

Chris Kirkham can be reached at ckirkham@timespicayune.com or 504.826.3321.

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Posted by Joe The Poster

January 13, 2010, 6:40PM

Here's a novel idea, create another new federal agency and call it the coast guard.

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Posted by daBlade44

January 13, 2010, 8:48PM

Beware! The next thing you will turn around and there will be NO local power. It will be centralized in DC, because they know what's good for you.

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Posted by crescent_box

January 13, 2010, 10:20PM

LOL, You are describing the New Education Federal Program: RACE TO THE TOP - LA Department of Ed., Orleans and Jefferson Parish signed off on this Federal Program before waiting to read the fine print, which the Federals have yet to write - TO LATE, GREED CONQUERS ALL!

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- [Quinn makes nice-guy pitch to Ill. voters](#) 2/1/2010, 10:55 a.m. CST
- [Election officials: New law will cause big delays](#) 2/1/2010, 10:44 a.m. CST

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- Wilkinson Luke 19 by [PrayerWarrior2](#) 02/01/2010 8:26 a.m. CT
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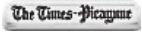
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