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Ocean task force meeting in New Orleans Monday to discuss new policy

By **Chris Kirkham**, *The Times-Picayune*
 October 16, 2009, 5:57PM

Several senior environmental officials with the Obama administration will be in New Orleans Monday to discuss a wide-ranging new ocean policy that could eventually lead to new laws governing everything from pollution to sustainable fisheries to coastal development.

The Interagency Ocean Policy Task Force will meet Monday from 3:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. at the Audubon Aquarium of the Americas & Entergy IMAX Theater, at 1 Canal St. The meeting is open to the public.

The task force includes Nancy Sutley, President Barack Obama's top environmental advisor who chairs the White House Council on Environmental Quality; Jane Lubchenco, administrator of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration; Peter Silva, the assistant administrator for water at the Environmental Protection Agency; Adm. Thad Allen, commandant of the U.S. Coast Guard; and Laura Davis, the associate deputy secretary of the Department of Interior.

The group will hold six meetings across the United States before drafting an ocean policy plan for President Obama by Dec. 9.

The **group issued an interim report last month** that mentions the need to address issues such as overfishing, wetlands loss and nutrient pollution in rivers that leads to problems such as the Gulf of Mexico's perennial "dead zone."

The group pointed out that one of the major obstacles to managing ocean and coastal resources has been a "complex" and "piecemeal" set of overlapping laws and governmental agencies.

"It's the first-ever attempt to really cast a critical eye on how we're managing this comprehensive resource," said Aaron Viles, campaign director with the Gulf Restoration Network, an environmental advocacy group. "A couple of the biggest marine resource crises in the nation are in the Gulf of Mexico: the dead zone and our coastal land loss crisis."

Witnesses invited to speak at Monday's meeting will include Gary LaGrange, president and chief executive officer of the Port of New Orleans and Robert Twilley, the associate vice chancellor for research at Louisiana State University.

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

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