



MARLOWE & COMPANY

GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS CONSULTANTS

Memo

To: Marlowe & Company Clients
From: Toby Hicks, Legislative Intern
Re: Proposed USGS Plan for a National Coastal Program
Date: November 17, 2009

Background

As population growth expands along U.S. coasts, coastal ecosystems are impacted by urban, industrial, and agricultural development. The U.S.'s coastal region, while only 17% of the area of the contiguous states, includes more than 53% of our population. Between 2009 and 2015 the population in this region will grow by 27 million people and attract 180 visitors annually. But issues that affect the coast – such as shoreline erosion, chemical contamination, algal blooms, habitat loss, and resource exploitation – threaten to diminish the health and economic utility of the coast. North Carolina for example has already lost 34% of its coastal wetlands including habitats critical to a fishery industry which contributes more than \$1 billion annually to the state's economy.

To help decision makers confront these issues with informed public policy, the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) has proposed development of an integrated National Coastal Program organized and maintained by the USGS. The program's objective would be to "provide national and regional capabilities to characterize coastal systems, and forecast coastal changes (natural and artificial) that affect coastal economies, resource availability, recreational quality, and the integrity and sustainability of the Nation's coastal ecosystems."

The National Coastal Program

The National Coastal Program would include mapping, inventory, monitoring, and research efforts. Designating USGS as the central repository for this information would allow the development of a National Coastal Information Infrastructure (NCII) database where the information can be organized, accessed, and used. Products that USGS specifically plans to develop from this comprehensive database include predictive system-scale models, decision support tools, and integrated coastal assessments at both the national and regional levels. The data would include hundreds of dimensions ranging from changes in species prevalence, to terrain and ecosystem responses to external factors, to human activity in coastal areas. Additionally the USGS

1667 K STREET, NW ■ SUITE 480 ■ WASHINGTON, DC 20006 ■ (202) 775-1796 ■ FAX (202) 775-0214

EMAIL: MARLOWE@MARLOWECO.COM ■ WWW.MARLOWECO.COM

A Limited Liability Company

acknowledges that the program will be most useful as long as it remains properly managed, accessible, includes user friendly tools, and promotes science-based event understanding.

Implementation Activities

The USGS recognizes that, because of its immensity, the program depends on collaborative effort. In their proposal USGS refers to two other parties: stakeholders and partners. “Stakeholders” refers to Federal, State, and local entities that will derive the benefits from the products produced while the term “partners” encompasses mostly information gathering entities including other Federal agencies and local universities. Continued planning and development of the National Coastal Program will include both of these parties to better define critical concerns and needs and to ensure that coordinated efforts proceed effectively.

Five centerpiece activities will characterize the expansion of USGS efforts. First is the creation and initial population of the NCII database using existing data if available and the discovery of any gaps in existing data from its disparate sources. Second is the establishment of an integrated monitoring network. The network will initially be prioritized for watershed-scale systems, nutrient input, freshwater, sediments, and selected contaminants. Third is the beginning of a better understanding of coastal systems through data characterization. The initial focus will be to initiate a systemic approach to mapping elevation, surface geology, habitat distribution, and land use on Department of the Interior and federally managed land and water. Fourth is research expansion to improve existing models and tools. And fifth is an integrated research effort concerning specific regional issues. The first regions of study will be the Chesapeake Bay, the San Francisco Bay, Tampa Bay, the Northern Gulf of Mexico, and the Pacific Northwest Systems.

Implementation Timeline

The USGS provides ten year timelines proposing how the five centerpiece activities above would be implemented in the near future. As one would expect, NCII construction will begin immediately, as will training, and some monitoring and data gathering activities. However, implementation in some regions will lag behind others. The areas mentioned above – the Chesapeake Bay, the San Francisco Bay, Tampa Bay, the Northern Gulf of Mexico, and the Pacific Northwest Systems – are where monitoring, environmental characterization, and research activities will begin immediately. Other areas assigned a lower priority – namely the mid-Atlantic and North Carolina, the great lakes region, and Southern California – will not see similar local/regional efforts until three to four years into the National Coastal Program. Regions not mentioned will have to wait at least five years until any intensive work in their area would begin and no mechanism for a region to petition or apply to be included in the National Coastal Program is stipulated.

Citations

U.S. Geological Service. *A plan for a comprehensive national coastal program*. (Washington DC, U.S.A., 2009).

Common acronyms used

USGS [The] U.S. Geological Survey
NCII National Coastal Information Infrastructure

For further information on this issue, please contact your Marlowe & Company team leader or email legislation@marloweco.com