

**Accelerating Implementation of Climate-Ocean Policy  
Working Meeting of Federal and State Partners  
Climate Week 2023**

**Organized by:**

OA Alliance  
The Pew Charitable Trusts  
UN Foundation  
The Climate Registry

**Date and Time:**

Monday, September 18, 2023

**Location:**

Ford Foundation for Social Justice  
320 E 43rd St 3rd floor, New York, NY 10017



**Participants:**

- Federal partners:
  - o National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA); Office of Special Presidential Envoy for Climate; White House
- U.S. States:
  - o State agency directors and executive policy leads in California, Oregon, Washington, Maine, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, and North Carolina.
- Practitioners:
  - o UN Foundation, OA Alliance, Pew Charitable Trusts, Climate Registry, U.S Climate Alliance, National Caucus of Environmental Legislators (NCEL), Ocean Conservancy, Nature4Climate US, Ocean Defense Initiative, US Aquarium partners.

[Agenda can be found here.](#)



## Meeting Summary

Federally, the U.S. has led domestic and international leadership on climate-ocean change knowledge and response. On March 21, 2023 the U.S. government released President Biden's [Ocean Climate Action Plan](#). U.S. states have been transforming climate-ocean policy by assessing regional risks, prioritizing information needs, incorporating coastal habitats into climate mitigation planning, and formulating local actions to support coastal resource and community resilience.

During Climate Week 2023, U.S. state and federal practitioners met to share and discuss emerging priorities, information needs and funding opportunities for:

- Ongoing mapping, evaluation, deployment, and accounting of blue carbon ecosystems to meet state climate mitigation goals.
- Improved planning and investments for climate resilient marine resources and coastal communities.

The meeting generated an exchange of ideas that are meant to spark state-based discussions as well as inform future U.S. focused work planning for the OA Alliance in 2024 and onwards.

The meeting summary is paired with a [survey eliciting participant feedback](#).

This will inform next steps for aligning priorities, particularly in areas where increased state to state or state to federal discussions would be most fruitful and benefit shared goals. Main takeaways from the survey shared with meeting organizers, anonymously reported back to this group, and synthesized in a letter from meeting organizers to federal partners responsible for implementing the nation Ocean Climate Action Plan.

Below, please find a summary of main discussion points and opportunities under each theme.

### **Under theme one—Achieving state climate mitigation and resilience goals with coastal blue carbon habitats—states were asked to describe the following policy priorities and management goals:**

- Blue carbon policy priorities across Maine Won't Wait Climate Action Plan
  - *Maine Department of Environmental Protection*
- Coastal wetlands as coastal management and climate resilience tools
  - *Maryland Department of the Environment*
- Evaluating the potential of marine ecosystems to sequester carbon and/or provide climate adaptation/ resilience co-benefits
  - *California Ocean Science Trust*
- Perspective on blue carbon GHG inventory development and target-setting for natural climate solutions
  - *California Natural Resources Agency*



- Interventions were provided from the U.S. Climate Alliance, regarding recent takeaways and state priorities associated with Natural Working Lands Learning Lab in March 2023.
- NOAA provided updates on the blue carbon related activities and recommendations outlined in the Ocean Climate Action Plan and associated funding priorities.

**Discussion key points:**

- U.S. states have been incorporating blue carbon ecosystems (mapping, sequestration evaluation and accounting) across climate action plans and resilience strategies and can learn from one another.
- Many coastal states are incorporating the potential of blue carbon to account for their net-0 or carbon neutrality goals. State greenhouse gas inventories are developed regularly (every ~2-3 years) and there is a growing desire to account for blue carbon ecosystems within inventories.
- There is also recognition by U.S. states that marine and coastal ecosystems help to improve water quality nearshore, remediate acidification, and have climate resilience benefits regardless of carbon benefits.
- In some instances, states have dedicated practitioners or state working groups to carry out the technical aspects of mapping, establish methodologies to support sequestration potential, and conduct targeted research to determine how coastal habitats can meet mitigation and resilience goals.
- Policies and incentives are being developed to promote the multiple values of living shorelines and restore mid-shore islands. These policies and incentives are being directed at state agencies, federal partners, and individual property owners.
- Some states have 30x30 or related goals to protect 30% of land and waters by 2030 and have identified coastal habitats like seagrasses, seaweeds, and wetlands as part of meeting these targets. This has led to increased state funding to support coastal resilience.
- Targeted science, monitoring and modelling is needed to help states quantify carbon sequestration and storage in marine and coastal vegetation. From there, states can better determine how blue carbon inventories and ecosystem protections could help to achieve climate mitigation and restoration/ resilience goals. Federal agencies can assist with this.
- The NGO and practitioner community can aid in communication products to better highlight the potential for marine and coastal vegetation to help states meet climate mitigation and resilience goals. This will help policy makers articulate the specific applications/ policy goals they are seeking to achieve with coastal vegetation. This, in turn, will help the science communities better target science, monitoring and modelling that supports different coastal habitat policy objectives.



Opportunities:

- There exists an opportunity to better coordinate data needs, model approaches, monitoring and verification across regions to support state climate plans and legislation.
- States, federal partners, and practitioners could envision regionalized approaches to supporting states' information needs for discrete management, mitigation, and resilience applications of coastal habitats.
- How can a federal interagency working group on blue carbon—as envisioned through the administration's Ocean Climate Action Plan— best coordinate more holistic regional approaches to organizing science for state management and policy applications?
- How might outcome oriented/applied science, monitoring and modelling work be funded at larger scales?
- How can climate mitigation and resilience budgets (federal and state) be leveraged for this work?
- Is there a role for insurance tools or other finance mechanisms to protect and restore marine and coastal habitats?
- How can groups like OA Alliance, Climate Registry, US Climate Alliance and Pew further support states and feds in aligning information needs and financing for climate mitigation and resilience applications?

**Under theme two—Improved assessments and integrated planning to support climate resilient living marine resources, seafood economies, coastal communities—states were asked to describe the following policy priorities and management goals:**

- State approaches to improving climate risk assessments to better reflect vulnerability of fisheries, aquaculture and thereby coastal community socio-economic impacts. Role of Insurance Commissioners in preparing for discrete disruptions and long-term changes.
  - *California Office of Insurance Commissioner*
- Localized approaches to assessing information needs and vulnerabilities (ocean vs. estuary; grow operations, human communities) and applying a spatially informed approach to resilience decision making.
  - *Maryland Department of the Environment; New York Department of Environmental Conservation; Maine Department of Environmental Protection*
- Integrating aspects of marine food security, access, and sovereignty across larger climate justice priorities, policies and investments.
  - *California Natural Resources Agency; Washington State Department of Ecology*



- U.S. State Department provided perspectives on the role of the U.S. Ocean Climate Action Plan to further support (and be informed by) state examples, projects and priorities across this topic. State Department also illuminated how U.S. state and federal actions serve as examples of climate-ocean policy integration internationally through conventions like the UNFCCC and UN Sustainable Development Goal 2030 Agenda.

**Discussion key points:**

- In the context of climate and ocean change, economic and ecosystem resilience go hand and hand.
- U.S. state climate planners and resource managers are experiencing climate change and have already been in the act of adapting to those changes, often in an ad hoc, responsive, and less strategic way than desired. This is especially true of recovery from extreme events like drought, wildfire, hurricanes, and marine heat waves. All the while, more chronic issues like oxygen depletion in marine waters and acidification are undermining resilience.
- There is a desire to advance more intentional, strategic planning and actions that build resilience across resources and communities, increase recovery time from disruptive events, and lessen impact.
- States face ongoing resilience planning conversations including: *What events/conditions are we planning for (best scientific predictions)? What “resilience measures” will be most helpful in weathering the predictions? How do we know when we have successfully “built” resilience? How do we acknowledge and account for trade-offs across resilience decisions (winners and losers)?*
- Strategic management of marine resources—including fisheries and seafood—offers coastal states increased adaptation/resilience lenses including a picture of ocean ecosystem health, economic vibrancy, cultural identity, and food security. It was acknowledged that food security has become even more of a focus of concern for states since the Covid19 Pandemic.
- 2014/2015 California and Pacific Coast states experienced, “the blob” one of the largest marine heat waves on record, which due to toxic algae creating demonic acid, closed the profitable Dungeness crab fishery for several months. Increasing headlines point to the potential for hundreds of millions in economic losses related to salmon fishing disruptions in the context of climate change.
- Increasingly, there is a role for state insurance commissioners to help decrease unpredictability and smooth out economic and financial shocks. What kind of planning tools are needed to think ahead about the types of marine and coastal shocks that communities, industry, or state operations may experience. And further, what will help communities, industries or state operations recover?
  - Some of these options might include nature-based insurance, or insurance for seafood grower operations.



- It's possible that fisheries insurance could exist; (examples from partners in the Caribbean, COAST) and provide options for fishing industries, seafood growers and vendors to recover from periodic losses.
- U.S. states are looking at applying hazard mitigation models, though need more communication and capacity building tools to reach communities they serve to identify priority resilience measures.
- Permitting and shoreline/ coastal zone uses are also relevant to state plans for targeted adaptation and resilience strategies. Example from state of Maine, in partnership with EPA, exploring programs to recycle oyster shells in coastal waters to promote shoreline stabilization and reduce local acidification. There is a strong desire to inventory the best nature-based solutions in a given location.
- Another example—connected to the co-benefits of marine and coastal vegetation—would be co-locating shellfish growing operations (aquaculture) nearby or within areas with high coverage of marine and coastal vegetation. Marine ecosystems absorb carbon in the water column, improve water quality and provide better conditions for calcifying organisms to grow and reproduce. This is a nature-based solution that is also tied to policy priorities (citing, permitting and shoreline use allocations) and funding.
- In the context of climate-resilient seafood strategies, there is also an ongoing and parallel management discussion about food loss and waste where regulatory actions and policy incentives likely have a role.
- U.S. states are also considering the role of science, monitoring and modelling to better predict conditions and windows of time that will be better for certain seafood growing periods than others. This includes looking at best locations for shellfish larvae or crabs to thrive. More generally, this means ensuring that regional science is actionable, applicable, and being translated to necessary end users.
- Additionally, many Tribal governments have Treaty Rights and are co-managers of marine resources in some states. This means risk and response to seafood security goes beyond economic concerns and centers cultural and spiritual impacts that must be accounted for.
- For both U.S. states and federal practitioners, ocean justice—and ocean climate justice—has been a key focus area. Some states have policy directions to embed equity considerations across all climate mitigation and adaptation planning efforts; some states have specific funds allocated for supporting front line or most vulnerable communities in the face of myriad climate impacts and disruptions.

Opportunities:



- Overall, there are opportunities to better integrate climate, ocean and marine policy, management, and science priorities at state and federal levels.
- Increasingly, there is a desire to embed climate finance and insurance roles across state action planning to underpin long-term implementation. This is especially true as insurance agencies are seeking direction and increased product development in the context of climate ocean change.
- There is a need to better coordinate state and federal data and information needs for climate resilient marine resources (fisheries, aquaculture, seafood). This includes better integrating climate modeling with decision makers and marine resource management needs. This also includes better alignment and communication with Regional Marine Fisheries Organizations.
- There is an interest in developing/ sharing tools for engaging communities on key resources, risks and preparedness and applying ecosystem-based approaches to adaptation and resilience planning.
- Desire to see improved, more holistic, vulnerability assessments that take into account marine and coastal impacts of climate change with an emphasis on socio-economic and socio-cultural aspects of vulnerability and response. How can research partners, indigenous communities and managers, state managers, and federal partners better assess regional climate-ocean vulnerabilities and prioritize funding for response measures?
- Supporting coastal community resilience requires engagement from federal government as a partner, helping to build outreach and engagement measures that work from bottom up, not just top down.
- Many states have suggested key recommendations back to U.S. Federal Ocean Justice Strategy, including improvements to early warning systems, removing barriers to community funding, increasing engagement with Tribal Governments as co-managers, reducing pollution and better accounting for socio-economic and socio-cultural impacts of climate-ocean change (not just sea-level rise, but impacts to seafood and harvestable resources).
- There is an opportunity and need to better identify regional and local research gaps that support better climate-ocean-coastal response for EJ and Tribal/ indigenous communities.
- There exist opportunities to anchor or prioritize ocean and coastal nature-based solutions through policy (citing, permitting and shoreline use allocations) and funding.
- Desire to build-upon the federal nature-based resources guide; showing all existing programs across relevant agencies and identify \$2billion USD in resources, funding, technical support for climate resilience projects.
- Finally, learning potential and meaningful sharing opportunities abound: state to state; state to Tribal government; state to federal government; state to international government.

