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February 4, 2010

The Honorable Nancy Sutley, Chairwoman
White House Council on Environmental Quality
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Chairwoman Sutley:

I am writing in response to the December 9, 2009, Interagency Ocean Policy Task Force's Interim Framework for Effective Coastal and Marine Spatial Planning (Framework). I commend you for your strong interest in, and commitment to, our ocean waters, coastal communities and estuaries. Your draft document represents a significant step towards restoring and protecting the long-term health of our nation's marine waters.

Washington State has already put into place many of the key concepts contained in the Framework and we are working very closely with others connected to our marine waters. In 2006, Washington, Oregon and California, which are linked by the California Current Large Marine Ecosystem, launched the tri-state West Coast Governors' Agreement on Ocean Health. This is a regional initiative, which includes key federal officials and agencies, to promote the health and collaborative management of the ocean and coastal resources along the entire West Coast. In addition, Washington and four coastal tribes participate in the Intergovernmental Policy Council, a collaborative forum for ocean management issues sponsored by the Olympic Coast National Marine Sanctuary. Washington also works closely with British Columbia on issues affecting our shared waters.

Washington has developed comprehensive management programs to protect and promote compatible uses of our marine waters. This includes ecosystem-based management plans for two of the largest estuaries on the West Coast – Puget Sound and, with Oregon, the lower Columbia River. Our efforts include Washington's Ocean Action Plan and management plans for shorelines and aquatic lands. We also have locally-driven collaborative watershed health and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)-approved salmon recovery plans that are now being implemented. The formation of marine resources committees in our coastal counties will enable similar bottom-up participation in planning and implementation initiatives.

I am strongly committed to promoting environmental and economic health along Washington's outer coast, including the Willapa Bay and Grays Harbor estuaries. These rural communities are highly dependent on healthy marine waters and marine-based industries, such as fishing and shellfish aquaculture. Marine spatial planning can be a significant tool in helping minimize conflicts among uses, while supporting the sustainability of these industries, coastal communities and the health of our marine waters along Washington's coast.



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In 2007, I created the Puget Sound Partnership (PSP) to return Puget Sound to health by 2020. One of the top priority actions in the 2008 Action Agenda is a characterization of all watersheds within the Puget Sound basin for water flow, water quality, habitat and land use. That effort, scheduled for completion next year, will result in a spatial representation of priority areas for upland and nearshore restoration and protection, as well as locations that may be appropriate for development. The PSP is also developing an Integrated Ecosystem Assessment for the marine waters of Puget Sound. When complete, this study should provide the scientific underpinnings for a marine spatial plan. Our partners in the West Coast Governors' Agreement view the Puget Sound Integrated Ecosystem Assessment as a model for conducting ecosystem-scale studies for the rest of the West Coast. I believe that, by building on this foundation of work, Puget Sound would benefit greatly from the type of marine spatial planning initiative, as envisioned by the Framework.

Given the significant efforts already underway in Washington, I want to ensure the Framework integrates with these measures instead of supplanting them. I believe the objectives we have developed for the management of our marine waters can and should inform the federally proposed objectives. These include conservation, protection of existing uses and values, and pollution prevention based on the rigorous use of science, recognition of the cross-cutting nature of our collective work, the involvement of stakeholders, and respect for tribal treaty trust responsibilities. Washington believes coastal and marine spatial planning is an important tool, which should be integrated into existing plans and aligned with our current authorities to help us effectively manage our marine waters.

Thank you for advancing the creation of a comprehensive ocean policy to protect our nation's marine assets. We look forward to working with you and the Obama Administration to demonstrate how marine spatial planning can be used as a tool to balance competing demands on these valuable resources.

Sincerely,



Christine O. Gregoire
Governor

cc: The Honorable Ted Kulongoski, Governor of Oregon
The Honorable Arnold Schwarzenegger, Governor of California
The Honorable Kevin Ranker, Washington State Senate
William Ruckelshaus, Chair, Puget Sound Leadership Council
Debrah Marriott, Executive Director, Lower Columbia River Estuary Program