



In danger of loving our ocean to death

By Guest Columnist

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By Leesa Cobb and Kristofor Lofgren

No matter how different we may appear to each other, Oregonians will always have one thing in common: We love to catch and eat fish. Salmon, lingcod, rockfish: You name it, we love it. People have been living on this land and off the bounty of the neighboring ocean as far back as we can look.

Here in Oregon, the ocean has long been an essential component of our economy and lifestyle. It provides food, jobs, education and entertainment. But there are signs, here and elsewhere, that our ocean is being loved to death.

Pressures on our marine resources are growing by the year. Wave-energy development, a boom in ocean-freight exports, transportation, recreation and fishing are crowding coastal waters. Algal blooms, a growing dead zone and a struggling salmon fishery underscore the importance of balancing industrial uses with conservation, managing for sustainability and ensuring long-term environmental and economic health.

With this in mind, our state leaders have begun taking steps to safeguard Oregon's ocean for long-term use. We've begun updating the state's territorial sea plan -- mapping out fishing grounds, shipping lanes, whale migration routes, and areas for wave development and sensitive habitat -- to inform management efforts.

As the owner of a certified sustainable sushi restaurant and a sustainable fisheries activist, we applaud these forward-thinking efforts. But when it comes to the ocean, we can't go it alone. We need a single, unified national policy that will coordinate the work of managing all of our nation's oceans, coasts and Great Lakes on behalf of the communities, economies and jobs they support.

In the coming weeks, President Barack Obama may have the opportunity to do just that -- sign an executive order creating a national ocean policy. Although it would be a national policy, the plan would be about ensuring that the voices of local people who know these issues best are heard. It would signal a shift toward a more place-based model for ensuring sustainable fisheries and seafood for our children and grandchildren.

This is about being smart and efficient with our decision making, coordinating our efforts to meet the demands of a wide range of industries and public interests. Our current system is clunky, wasteful and often counterproductive. Waterways are managed by more than 20 federal agencies -- in addition to local and state governments -- and subject to more than 140 different laws and regulations.

A strong national ocean policy would untangle this bureaucratic mess. It would create an overarching framework under which the work of all ocean resource management would take place, in concert, without duplicating efforts or working at cross-purposes.

A national policy also would create a way for us to engage constructively on regional and local concerns, balancing business needs with ecological considerations through science-based regional plans. We'd call in the latest scientific findings and technology to identify where industrial use should take priority over recreational needs, and prioritize our most sensitive and important wildlife habitat.

Given how important Oregon's fisheries, coastal tourism and other ocean industries are to our state's

economy and way of life, we need the Obama administration to deliver a strong national policy for the ocean waters of our state and the rest of the country.

A national ocean policy would be a big step toward addressing the challenges of managing our water resources -- and a step toward a system that will leave this all-important resource in sound shape for future generations to inherit.

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