

## **MEMORANDUM**

**TO:** James D. Watkins – Admiral, U.S. Navy (Ret.)  
Chairman, U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy

**FROM:** Virginia K. Tippie, Director

**SUBJECT:** Coastal America governance lessons

**DATE:** December 20, 2002

We at Coastal America have observed the work of the Commission with keen interest. We are aware that you are now intensely involved in developing your recommendations. At this time, we thought it would be helpful to you if we shared the key insights we have gained through a decade of interagency public/private experiences throughout the coastal areas of the United States. Created in 1992 by a memorandum of understanding among several federal departments and agencies, Coastal America is characterized by:

- Regional Teams supported by a national structure
- Flexible regional approach to meet local needs
- Effective leveraging of resources
- Combines existing program authorities
- Inclusive Processes (Federal/State/Local/Tribal/NGO/Private)
- Voluntary Involvement
- Action focus with on-the-ground projects
- Well-established awards program

Functioning in this manner, Coastal America has compiled a record of facilitating more than 600 collaborative projects benefiting the nation's coastal resources and those who depend upon them. In many instances, Coastal America has served as a means for overcoming governance barriers caused by fragmented institutions and authorities. Currently, many corporations are joining through the Corporate Wetlands Restoration Partnership to effectively focus public/private resources on needs identified by Coastal America.

The attached document provides a summary description of Coastal America and key lessons we have learned. I have also included a copy of our 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary report Coastal America: A Decade of Commitment to Protecting, Preserving, and Restoring America's Coastal Heritage and a brochure that describes the Coastal America process. We are sharing these with the Commission in the event that they may be useful as you complete your report. Should you wish further elaboration on any of this information, please contact me at 202/401-9928.

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**A STATEMENT BY THE COASTAL AMERICA PARTNERSHIP  
TO THE NATIONAL COMMISSION ON OCEAN POLICY**

**DECEMBER 2002**

**Introduction**

The Oceans Act of 2000 (Public Law 106-256) requires the Commission to include in its final report to the President and Congress, a review of existing and planned ocean and coastal activities of federal entities, as well as a review of relationships among federal, state, and local governments and the private sector in planning and carrying out ocean and coastal activities. The Commission was also directed to make recommendations for coordinated and comprehensive national ocean policy that will promote close cooperation among all government agencies and departments and the private sector.

Through this mandate to the Commission, the Congress recognized that cooperative mechanisms that enable responsible parties the means to simultaneously fulfill their responsibilities while acting in a coordinated manner with others are essential to effective ocean and coastal policy. In a sense, the collaborative arrangements empowered and facilitated through such mechanisms amount to coordinated, shared governance.

Ten years ago, several federal departments initiated a novel, voluntary approach to facilitate coastal protection, preservation, and restoration. This partnership effort is known as Coastal America. The purpose of this statement is to review the key features of the Coastal America partnership and to highlight the lessons learned. The statement is also intended to provide information that will assist the Commission in addressing its mandate.

**Collaborative Needs**

**Coastal Responsibilities and Authorities.** Many authorities and tools can be enlisted to protect, preserve, and restore, and improve coastal resources. These authorities and tools are vested in several agencies and levels of government, as well as among non-governmental organizations. The result is the challenge of attempting to use these various authorities and tools in a concerted and focused way to address coastal resource issues that cross multiple jurisdictions. At just the federal level, numerous statutory authorities provide means to protect and conserve coastal resources. In addition, each coastal state has authorities and resources that can be used to address coastal needs. Local governments possess additional land use planning and regulatory tools. Many voluntary organizations, institutions, and private citizens have significant abilities to shape the future condition of coastal areas.

**The Coordination Challenge.** The Administration believes that the aquatic resources of the United States are best managed in full consideration of the watersheds in which they lie. The challenge is how to effectively mobilize and synthesize the various coastal authorities and tools into a coordinated set of actions that can deliver improvements in the quality and condition of these resources. To be most effective, governance strategies must integrate the technical and managerial capabilities and resources of federal partners with those of state, local, and voluntary organizations to collaboratively identify and solve specific local coastal problems. These collaborative strategies are united by the principles of sustainable development while recognizing that to be effective, they must be developed within ecosystem and watershed contexts, often across various political jurisdictional boundaries.

The Coastal America partnership was established to address this challenge by providing a framework that brings the responsibilities, talents and resources of many entities together in a strategic way.

### **Coastal America: A Working Model Since 1992**

#### **Uniting Coastal Conservation Efforts**

Several federal departments and agencies established Coastal America in 1992 as a mechanism to foster collaborative strategies and actions. Currently, the participating Coastal America partners are: Departments of Agriculture, Air Force, Army, Commerce, Defense, Energy, Housing and Urban Development, the Interior, the Navy, State, Transportation; the Environmental Protection Agency; and the Executive Office of the President (Council on Environmental Quality). The enabling memorandum of understanding has been renewed several times – most recently in November 2002.

The Coastal America Partnership was established to:

- Protect, preserve, and restore the Nation's coastal ecosystems through existing Federal capabilities and authorities;
- Facilitate collaboration and cooperation in the stewardship of coastal living resources by working in partnership with other Federal programs and integrating Federal actions with state, local, and nongovernmental efforts; and
- Provide a framework for action that effectively focuses agency expertise and resources on jointly identified problems to produce demonstrable environmental and programmatic results that may serve as models for effective management of coastal living resources.

#### **How the Coastal America Partnership Works – A Collaborative Process**

Coastal America isn't an agency or a single program. It is a collaborative process, bringing agencies together to systematically cooperate on problems that benefit from multi-faceted interagency efforts. Coastal America helps identify areas of overlapping mandates, authorities,

policies, and objectives. It encourages collaboration in those overlapping areas. (See accompanying process description brochure for more detail.)

**Operating Premise:** The operating premise is that if one agency identifies a project that needs group assistance, all agencies review their own mandates for applicable programs such that a collaborative effort results, often yielding a solution beyond the scope of any single agency.

**Distinguishing Features:**

- National Memorandum of Understanding with shared goals and objectives
- Regional Teams supported by national structure
- Flexible regional approach to meet local needs
- Effective leveraging of resources
- Combines existing program authorities
- Inclusive process (Federal/State/Local/Tribal/NGO/Private)
- Voluntary involvement
- Action focus with on-the-ground projects
- Well-established awards program

**Structure:**

- *Principals Group* – A working group of Assistant and Under Secretaries of the partnering departments that meet several times a year to provide overall program direction and set policy for the partnership.
- *National Implementation Team* – A group of senior managers from each of the partner agencies. They meet monthly to implement policy direction and provide support to the Regional Teams.
- *Regional Principals Groups and Regional Implementation Teams* – This is the core of Coastal America. Under the guidance of Regional Principals, nine implementation teams have been established covering all coastal areas (See Figure 1). Comprised of senior regional officials of the federal partner agencies and state agency representatives, they represent the primary operating units for interagency consultation and action. They identify regional issues, develop strategies, and select and prioritize projects. They are advocates for the projects with their headquarters counterparts. They communicate, build relationships, synthesize information and look for ways to break down barriers that prevent collaboration. They deliver federal programs on the ground to communities.
- *Project Teams* – Locally based groups comprised of federal, state, and local organizations. They are established as needed to implement projects. The Regional Implementation Teams support the project teams. Place-based coalitions such as the American Heritage Rivers and National Estuary Programs have local action plans and processes that often facilitate project development and implementation.

**Accomplishments:**

- *Regional Strategies.* – Early in the development of Coastal America the uniqueness of coastal ecosystems in each region was recognized. While many issues are the same (e.g. habitat loss and degradation), the ecological features are often distinct, and local resources, methods, and priorities for addressing these issues may differ. Further, different social, economic, and political institutions mandate differing approaches when dealing with these problems. The regional teams set ecological priorities and focus their collaborative efforts on providing the desired government services to communities within a regional context.
- *Projects.* Over 600 projects carried out by various agencies and partners have been accomplished to protect, preserve, and restore coastal resources. Many of these efforts are implemented at a larger scale (e.g. watershed). Through these projects, over 250 state and local governments, and more than 450 private businesses and organizations have employed their resources in collaborative coastal restoration and protection efforts. The web site <http://www.CoastalAmerica.gov> displays these projects.
- *Coastal Ecosystem Learning Centers (CELC).* Established in 1996, the CELC initiative is a partnership network of federal agencies and 15 marine education centers. Coastal America has helped facilitate the participation of various agencies and partners in these centers. Most Learning Centers are aquariums, but science centers and even a fishing museum are included. The goal of each Learning Center is to educate and involve the public in protecting our nation's coastal ecosystems. Through these centers, the federal government is able to directly assist in education about aquatic resources.
- *Corporate Wetlands Restoration Partnership (CWRP).* The CWRP is a public/private partnership developed in 1999 through the Coastal America process. The National Association of Manufacturers is the national sponsor and there are currently more than 100 participating companies. In addition, more than 55 non-governmental organizations are participating in CWRP. The CWRP is deployed through state-specific charters and will eventually include all states. Further detail about CWRP may be found at <http://www.cwrp.org>.

**Added Value:** Participants in Coastal America enjoy the following benefits:

- Ready mechanism and processes for addressing complex ecological issues.
- Quicker implementation of multi-party projects.
- Mechanism to focus national attention on program directives or regulatory burdens that warrant relief.
- Mechanism for public-private partnerships with investments for restoration and protection of wetlands and related natural resources.
- Priority for funding of endorsed projects.
- Effective means for increasing public understanding of coastal processes, issues, and needs.
- Ready means for facilitating understanding of regional and local needs.

## A Nationally Recognized Partnership

Over the years, Coastal America has been recognized for its effective innovation. The Partnership received the “Hammer Award” for reinventing government and has been recognized by the Innovations in American Government program of the Ford Foundation and The John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard. A 1997 National Fish and Wildlife Foundation report concluded, “The success of the Coastal America partnership can be attributed to: (1) A collaborative approach that encourages innovative and cost-effective solutions to specific real world problems, (2) A partnership network that enables the development of a broad consensus for action and insures implementation, and (3) A management structure that facilitates communication across government and from the field to the policy level.”

## Lessons Learned

The Coastal America experience has shown that a collaborative partnership needs to have adequate scope, an effective organizational structure and appropriate operational mechanisms.

**Scope:** Collaborative coastal management requires adequate scoping to meet the various agencies’ statutory responsibilities, accommodate shared work processes, and address multiple goals. The multiplicity of federal, state, and local authorities reflects the complexity and diversity of coastal resource management issues. A collaborative partnership approach is often better matched to real world needs because it addresses this diversity. The Coastal America experience has shown that governmental agencies with statutory responsibilities for coastal resources or whose operational activities affect the coastal environment are most effective when they work together on a watershed basis. These include agencies with responsibilities for:

- Stewardship/protection of natural resources;
- Commerce, Transportation, and Infrastructure;
- Military operations and services.

**Organizational Structure:** In order to effectively manage coastal resources and restore degraded areas, means must be found for the various actors to come together in a concerted, coordinated effort. A horizontally and vertically integrated organizational structure best facilitates this process. The Coastal America experience suggests that an effective partnership structure should:

- Encourage a collaborative approach among federal, state, and local entities.
- Allow for individual missions of the different programs to be maintained in their entirety.
- Increase coordination and efficiency among the programs.
- Provide for accountability to be maintained, and expectations to be met.
- Be transparent and easily understood by all stakeholders.

**Operational Mechanisms:** The achievement of partnership goals and objectives is the measure of program success. Operational mechanisms that facilitate implementation of partnership efforts are essential to the process. The Coastal America experience suggests that a collaborative partnership can be most effective when:

- There is a set of comprehensive strategies, supported by the partners, that addresses restoration of deteriorated areas and conservation of areas with resources at risk.
- Agency leadership sets high expectations for the partnership and emphasizes collaborative efforts.
- The work of the partnership is transparent and it is held accountable for results.
- Agency budgets assign priority to actions supported by the partnership.
- Agencies have clear direction to share strategies, budgets, personnel and program resources.
- Accomplishments are rewarded and result in career enhancements.
- Incentives are provided to ensure appropriate involvement of state and local governments, Native American tribes, and affected non-governmental organizations.
- The partnership supports and encourages place-based solutions to local and regional needs. Such solutions must be comprehensive to the extent that all affected authorities are involved in implementing cooperative actions.
- Agency work processes are sufficiently flexible to permit synthesizing or blending to accommodate regional and local needs. Such work processes include, among others: land use and water planning, budgeting, use authorization, restoration, and evaluation.

### **Relevance to the Work of the Commission**

The Commission has identified the need for a comprehensive and coordinated framework to effectively manage ocean and coastal resources. In this regard, the Commission's Working Group on Governance has posed the question: "Are there useful models, either existing or proposed, for improving our existing approach to resource use, protection, and management?" Although there are many useful partnership models, Coastal America is somewhat unique in that its purpose is to serve as a framework that facilitates collaboration among a wide array of federal programs and integrates federal efforts with state, local and nongovernmental efforts. The Coastal America partnership experiences may prove instructional as the Commission develops its recommendations for a national and regional framework.

Figure 1.

