

Dear Sanctuary Colleague,

The white paper below is the product of conversations with many of you, and review and input from our Executive Team and others. I have drawn liberally from everyone, but the views expressed are my own. I have intentionally not followed advice to cut it back, and hence it is still about 8 dense pages. Sometimes you just have to take the time to dig deeper and wrestle with ideas – this is one of those times. I encourage, actually expect, everyone to find the quiet time to read this thoroughly and think and then, of course: “get back to work.” Where we go from here will be determined by what you do.

Dan Basta

2/22/09

“Our Challenge”

Today, perhaps as never before, our National Marine Sanctuary System is poised to help address the fundamental problems confronting the nation.

This memorandum presents a perspective on the future direction(s) of the National Marine Sanctuary System and its programs. It proposes that the system and its programs have far more to provide the nation; that these special places can be considered vehicles for helping Americans to resolve many of the critical problems of our time -- sustainable economies, energy independence, climate change and adaptation, barriers between cultures that prevent collective solutions, national security and others. The proposition is that a system of special places can create broad-based effects of sufficient scale to be of nationwide significance. In these times of seemingly insurmountable problems and great change, this memorandum presents a *challenge and opportunity* to the leadership and staff that manage the National Marine Sanctuary System of the United States and their partners.

Our System Today

Marine sanctuaries are places where local, regional, national and international communities come together to study, discuss, and find solutions to pressing problems.

After four years of level funding, increasing costs of operations, and growing pressures on the special marine places we manage, we have nevertheless kept relevant, innovative, and directed to the resource protection mission of the sanctuary system, served our communities, and provided leadership throughout the nation. It has been, in fact, a remarkable achievement for so few individuals, for we are really very few in numbers in the scheme of things. This has been possible only because of our extremely dedicated staff and partners, our collective understanding and approach to creative design and innovative programming, and, most importantly, our ability to look past the "moment" and harness ways to affect millions of individuals across our country and beyond.

These next few years are a defining moment for addressing the crises of our economy, our energy independence, our national security, our ecosystems and natural resources, and for overcoming the cultural and racial gaps that divide us -- our very quality of life. Today's National Marine Sanctuary System and its programs must therefore aim ever higher and pursue

broader objectives. We must embrace these challenges together by taking action, by building on what we have done, and by going to a different level of engagement in order to sustain them.

We must understand and support the goals of the new administration and align our system and programs accordingly, while maintaining focus on our mission to conserve and protect the resources in our trust. We must consider that a new Congress means a possibly different view of what we do and who we are. We must consider that there are new partners to engage that we have not yet discovered. These are the challenges that confront today's National Marine Sanctuary System, its programs and its partners.

Expanding Our View

Marine sanctuaries have natural and societal properties that encourage partnerships in science, education, technology, management and community.

Expanding our view requires that we adjust our mindset to understand more fully how “special marine places” provide special opportunities to embrace a new landscape. The past three years have demonstrated that a change is in the wind. Bills introduced in Congress to expand the Gulf of the Farallones, Cordell Bank, and Thunder Bay national marine sanctuaries, and to designate a sanctuary in Puerto Rico are clear signals. Adding the Davidson Seamount to Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary is another signal. In fact, there is a groundswell of interest in most coastal areas of the nation. There is an emerging recognition that places count. Why is it important to expand a system of special marine places?

Special places are important because only by addressing, demonstrating, and connecting attention to discrete places is it possible to convey a sense of problem, of solution(s), or of opportunity that connects citizens directly to their environment and their future. A *place* gives a context, realism, a window into which messages or solutions become understandable and digestible. The more special a place is, the more powerful the effect of demonstration; the more special places that are orchestrated and connected in demonstration, the far greater the range of effects.

Although every site is a unique convergence of interests, purpose and creation, the system was neither designed, nor perhaps has evolved, to address the challenges now before us. The existing geography or landscape of our special marine places is a legacy of past political, social and economic drivers and ideas. We must now consider what should be the geography of marine special places to not only fulfill our mandate, but to also in equal measure help our nation resolve many of the critical problems confronting us all.

Given that the cause and effects of all the challenges we face are intertwined and connected across the nation, our expanded view must consider the geography of marine special places and a mix of programs that maximize the cultural engagement of a broader base of communities and stakeholders. *In the long run, the places we now manage cannot be protected or sustained unless we embrace an expanded view of place and community and help the nation address the critical challenges confronting us all.*

How Do Our Programs Connect to America's Challenges?

Emerging programs, projects and partnerships across the National Marine Sanctuary System are actively exploring innovative approaches that can help resolve many of the critical challenges.

Among the highest challenges confronting the nation and new administration are the economy, energy independence, climate change, cultural engagement (on many levels), and national security. These issues are at the center of national attention. They will be the focus of the administration's programming and investment, and command the attention of every relevant committee of Congress. We have ongoing and emerging programming that is illustrative of how we may engage further in helping to address these critical issues. The descriptions below briefly describe some of these activities and should speak to us about what is possible as we move forward.

- **Sustaining Our Economy**

With plunging auto and home sales; rising unemployment rates and home foreclosures; and failing financial institutions and businesses, our economy is in trouble, but there is also a related crisis of confidence – in us as individuals and in our institutions. Solutions will take time and patience and will require a variety of antidotes. These antidotes must not simply be directed to recovering the status quo, but also towards economic and social solutions that reflect new and alternative products, new means of production, and employment in alternative enterprises and activities. All of this must move us towards an emerging economy that is greener (and with all that it implies), more sustainable, more connected to the natural world, and that generates a meaningful quality of life for all citizens.

Our system of special places and their communities can help shed light on alternative *ways forward* through our programming (such as in visitor centers and operations) and the programs we sponsor, by demonstrating new technologies or enterprises that are compatible with, or even enriched by, a healthy environment. We can help create and demonstrate enterprises or activities that both provide employment and revenue and enhance natural environments. Our special places have a role to play in shedding light on alternative ways forward that can make a difference in helping to recover and improve our economy. For example, local efforts to grow organic produce that benefit watersheds that drain into a sanctuary can be highlighted in our visitor centers and educational programming. A site, through its staff and advisory council, can work directly with local and regional governments on alternative approaches to sustain local economies. We have already demonstrated these qualities in a number of places, including Thunder Bay and the Florida Keys.

Similarly, we have a role to play in helping to restore confidence in our institutions and our government. We can do this by demonstrating that we share the problems and fears of our communities, and we are committed to working with them to find solutions. Helping to restore or establish an “attitude” of confidence is a prerequisite for all antidotes. *At this point, there are no bad ideas to consider and we all have something to contribute, but as a system of special places we can connect and magnify effects dramatically.*

- **Energy Independence**

We are in a time when energy is a critical concern on the minds of the American public and the world community. Energy use is the ‘thread’ that connects all of the challenges we face. Many believe energy and how we use it is the most critical issue of our time. It is explicit or implicit (in the background) in every discussion in this document; aspects of how we can help address this challenge are sprinkled throughout. But, as the nation searches for additional or new sources of both renewable and nonrenewable energy, the new administration will be faced with hard decisions. Many areas of the EEZ are being proposed for a variety of energy development projects, and we have already had some experiences in considering these projects – in our Olympic Coast National Marine Sanctuary, for example. However, some perceive the National Marine Sanctuaries Act as simply a tool to prevent offshore oil and gas development and, by inference, any offshore energy development. But *we must change this perception* if we are going to help the nation resolve the future of offshore energy development and sustain the resources and “special marine places” we are mandated to protect.

We can contribute through the use of our science-based planning processes and by engaging more fully in marine spatial planning. We can help identify areas that must be preserved to sustain ecosystem structure, function and services, that then also point toward areas where energy development could proceed. In the early 1980s the White House Council on Environmental Quality and NOAA pursued a similar approach for energy facility siting. We can work more closely with the offshore energy industry, especially as we have at our Flower Garden Banks sanctuary, to better understand the potential threats posed by alternative energy technologies. We can explore energy conservation programs that provide potential offsets to offshore nonrenewable energy development. *Opening our minds to new thinking in this area may be our biggest challenge.*

- **Climate Change and Adaptation**

There is little doubt that climate change will emerge as the central issue in our society, and, hence, public policy and investment, well into the foreseeable future. It may well be the overall compelling driver of change in our lifetimes. A great need exists for information and sensible programming to more fully understand the types and rate(s) of change occurring, the potential implications of change(s), how to develop and implement innovative community-based programs, create adaptation and mitigation strategies and technologies, and, above all, develop meaningful ways to keep an active and engaged public continually involved. Our system of special marine places, and the communities associated with them, can serve as active places to address, in some fashion, all of these needs. In fact, we already have begun to do so across the system.

Early last year, all sanctuary advisory councils (SAC) were asked to create a committee on “greening” as a means to involve our communities in creating meaningful community-based activities related to addressing climate change. Several SACs have already done so. The program has created an “Implementation Plan” for addressing climate change across the system, and initial funding has been provided to Gulf of the Farallones National Marine Sanctuary for a pilot effort.

In 2008, we have sponsored the Summit on Climate Change in San Francisco. National marine sanctuaries have been proposed as locations for long-term monitoring of climate – as “sentinel” sites. We have signed an agreement with the Department of Energy that allows us access to their programs that demonstrate how marine sanctuaries can showcase green technologies. Our personnel are beginning to conduct international training sessions on how to manage MPAs for climate change. And there is much more going around the system. *Re-thinking how we approach climate change and building on our ongoing efforts could add significantly toward coming to grips with this issue, especially if we bring our communication and education skills to bear.*

- **Cultural Engagement**

A renewed and expanded sense of the critical importance of cultural engagement is the silent partner of success in resolving all the problems we face. Programs and actions directed at cultural engagement are critical for many reasons. Our economy is global, our marine ecosystems are international, and our nation is an extraordinary mix of cultural, ethnic, religious, etc., communities interwoven in a local and regional landscape across the country. Addressing the critical need for programming directed at cultural engagement is, consequently, not just about our own country, but is an international issue as well. Our sanctuary system has a rich and diverse cultural foundation with communities and traditions that share and inform our perspectives.

Consequently, we have been evolving a special capacity, capability, and experience base that can be used to address the pressing challenges before us.

For example, Oceans for Life, described below, is an example of how we can effect a cultural engagement that is international and very purposely directed to the issue of national security. Our emerging African American Voyage of Discovery project and our well-established (but under-funded) MERITO program are examples of cultural engagement programming directed at disenfranchised communities in our country. There are other examples around our system.

As we have all come to understand through our education programs, public processes, and engagement in community-based problem solving, if you cannot get someone’s attention, then they cannot hear you, and if they cannot hear you, then they will never be an active part of a solution. Programs directed at cultural engagement must be personal to an individual(s), but individuals make up groups, groups make up a community, communities make up a population. We have a good start on how to come to grips with this need. *Failure to make this a priority at this time of crisis will drive us apart rather than bring us together for collective action. We can help lead by demonstrating the innovative and creative ways we direct our programming.*

- **Contributing to National Security**

Contributing to the nation’s security is far more than providing “guns and badges.” Ensuring our nation’s security is also based on establishing or re-establishing mechanisms that work to remove the barriers of misunderstanding and ignorance that separate one nation or culture from another. Put in another way, this view of national security recognizes that long-term or lasting security can only be achieved if we work towards concepts of mutual security. Finding and developing venues and program concepts that help bridge these gaps are only now beginning to emerge. Most recognize that in today’s charged world, such efforts must be non-threatening, focus on

themes or subjects of mutual interest, and, most importantly, connect people in a life-changing experience.

We are all obligated to do our share in addressing this critical national issue, especially those in government who have access to or manage programs that may have bearing. Our system -- the National Marine Sanctuary System of the United States -- (stated this way to emphasize who we are) is uniquely suited to make a significant contribution by providing “neutral” or “safe” venues and innovative programming to help create networks of individuals and places that reach across the barriers of misunderstanding and ignorance. Taking advantage of today’s technologies in telepresence, Web, digital film and communications, modest programs can have far-reaching effects. We have a considerable body of experience and success that can be applied to effect meaningful outcomes in this area. *Lastly, we have one very important factor working for us – the OCEAN! Oceans connect us all, and as a metaphor for common ground and heritage, the oceans provide an organizing theme around which to develop programs. And our system is comprised of some of the most special ocean places on the planet.*

We have begun a number of programs that begin to demonstrate how we can contribute to national security as described above. Oceans for Life, a joint project developed initially with DOD colleagues, will conduct two (2) field camps this summer (Florida Keys and North Central California), and bring together 60 students from six (6) to eight (8) Middle Eastern countries and the U.S. This project is funded and is a pilot effort from which we stand to learn a great deal. If successful, Oceans for Life could become a major role for our program. In addition, discussions have been underway for sometime on a similar learning program with students selected from MPA communities from around the world. But in this concept, field camps would also be conducted in other countries. Both of these efforts would directly support the cultural engagement objectives described above.

In addition, there are aspects of our surveillance, monitoring, and remote sensing needs that are similar to many national security needs. Consequently, there are opportunities to help test and demonstrate new technologies on “real problems” across our system. In fact, several small projects in this area have already been conducted. Expanded engagement with other agencies and partners would not only contribute to national security, but show other added-value for investments in these technologies, and benefit us directly in fulfilling our needs. *We must use our collective creativity to think through the manner in which we contribute to national security through our system and program because it is about more than guns and badges.*

What can you do?

Herein lays the personal challenge to each of us. We cannot respond as an organization or as a system of special places unless we, as individuals, rise to this challenge. We are part of the essential fabric of our communities perhaps more broadly than most anyone in NOAA or in many other organizations in government or the private sector. Sitting as we do in the middle of competing interests and at the edge of change and controversy, we have become veterans in dealing with challenges that have similar paths towards solution. Nevertheless, we cannot proceed with business as usual and hope to influence the great challenges before us, and I know how hard it is to transition to anything different than status quo, but somehow we must start. *We have it in us to make a significant contribution.*

Our first challenge is to begin a dialogue within our program, across our sites, across our regions, with our partners, person-to-person. This dialogue is to explore the questions raised here, propose new ideas to explore, and identify how to organize or direct our efforts as we move forward. We must work this into our daily cadence to find the solutions to meet these challenges. We must find a way to work into what we do aspects of solutions to these challenges. The second is to maintain our patience and confidence in what we do, its importance, and our paced and deliberate approach forward. There are no quick fixes, and hasty leaps forward may feel good, but always lead to questionable lasting contributions.

Lastly, mark in your minds where you were on Inauguration Day January 20, 2009, so you may look back and recall what you were doing and thinking on that day. If this new administration can rise to the great challenges before us and chart a new path, then looking back will reveal how you, we, our system of special marine places, rose to the challenge. What do you want that picture to show about the National Marine Sanctuary System and the role it played? Get together with colleagues, friends, and partners across the system and begin to discuss and form your views on how we move forward.

Thank you for taking the time to read “Our Challenge,” and let us all begin the journey forward together.