



Environment

[Comments](#) 0 | [Recommend](#) 0

Providence to host session on ocean policy

01:00 AM EDT on Saturday, September 12, 2009

By Peter B. Lord

Journal Environment Writer

A special interagency task force created by the Obama administration to develop a new national ocean policy has scheduled a listening session for 4 to 7 p.m. Thursday, Sept. 24 at the Rhode Island Convention Center.

The 23-member interagency task force is headed by the President's Council on Environmental Quality. The council has yet to announce a hearing date, but two environmental organizations with great interests in the oceans, the Conservation Law Foundation and the Ocean Conservancy, are confirming the date. And the CLF confirmed additional details.

The council has held one hearing in Anchorage, Alaska, and plans to hold another Sept. 17 in San Francisco. According to CLF, it is scheduling additional hearings in Providence, Cleveland, Honolulu and New Orleans.

During the Bush administration, two major studies by a presidential commission and by the Pew Foundation recommended sweeping new policies to protect and preserve the oceans. President George W. Bush created some large marine protective areas in the Pacific, but took little other action. In June, President Obama issued a memorandum creating the oceans task force and giving it six months to recommend "effective coastal and marine spatial planning."

Sean Cosgrove, spokesman for the CLF in Washington, D.C., said the format for the hearing in Anchorage was to hear from two panels of selected experts, and then have an "open microphone" period for comments.

For the San Francisco hearing, a number of top administration officials are scheduled to attend. They include Nancy Sutley, chairwoman of the White House Council on Environmental Quality, and Jane Lubchenko, administrator of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, as well as officials from the Environmental Protection Agency, the Department of Interior, the Navy and the Coast Guard.

"The Ocean State is a good place to have a hearing like this because it has a lot of people involved in ocean issues," said Sean Cosgrove, spokesman for the Conservation Law Foundation. The hearings are being held around the country, he said, "so we get to hear from as many people as possible."

Several years ago, national reports by the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy and the Pew Oceans

Commission recommended creation of a national oceans policy, more work to address ocean and coastal needs and better management of marine resources. A collaboration of the two studies called the Joint Ocean Commission has continued to work for policy changes and more resources for ocean management.

The commission strongly supported Mr. Obama's memorandum laying out a timeline and structure for developing a national ocean policy.

The Council on Environmental Quality did not return a request for more details about the hearings.

For more information on the commission's recommendations for the oceans, go to www.jointoceancommission.org.

plord@projo.com