



Progress Report

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Five Questions For...

Jane West



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COVER STORY

OCEAN WEALTH VS. OCEAN HEALTH

PLANNING A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE
FOR NEW ENGLAND'S OCEAN WATERS



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OCEAN WEALTH VS. OCEAN HEALTH

With Proper Planning and Collaboration, We Can Have Both

“Ocean use planning is just as vital as land use planning to ensure a sustainable future for our natural resources. We need a cohesive, coordinated approach that both advances the ocean’s economic potential, such as offshore wind development, and protects ocean life and habitat.”

— Priscilla Brooks, Ph.D., CLF director of ocean conservation

It’s another busy summer day in Massachusetts Bay. Twenty miles off the coast of Boston, commercial and recreational fishing boats are returning to shore to unload the day’s catch. Whale-watching boats ferry thousands of tourists to see humpback and rare North Atlantic right whales visiting their favorite feeding grounds. Meanwhile, enormous tankers make their way through whale hotspots to and from the natural gas terminals just outside of state water lines and container ships steam down the shipping lanes on their way into the Port of Boston. Beneath the surface, trawling gear drags the ocean floor above a maze of fiber optic cables and gas pipelines that lie buried under the seafloor.

As developers clamor for a piece of New England’s ocean waters to build businesses from aquaculture to sand and gravel mining to wind energy, the pressure on one of our most precious natural resources has never been greater. Complicating matters, our oceans are governed by dozens of agencies and more than one hundred laws, resulting in confusion and conflicts that threaten both ecosystem protection and economic development efforts.

“In the face of this unprecedented economic interest in our oceans, it has never been more crucial to protect important fishing grounds and unique marine habitats, particularly for endangered species



Sea anemones and other encrusting animals share this deep boulder reef on the ocean floor off the Massachusetts coast. *Photo credit: Dann Blackwood and Page Valentine, U.S. Geological Survey*

like the North Atlantic right whale,” says Priscilla Brooks, Ph.D., CLF’s director of ocean conservation.

Fortunately, a movement is afoot to ensure that irreplaceable ocean resources are not sacrificed to unplanned development. Ocean use planning is a way to capitalize on all that the ocean can provide by way of jobs, food, recreation, transportation and clean, renewable energy without compromising the ecosystem that we all depend upon. Combining the latest science with extensive public and stakeholder input, ocean use planning helps to determine

which areas of the ocean are most suitable for industrial development and which must be protected.

“Ocean use planning is just as vital as land use planning to ensure a sustainable future for our natural resources,” says Brooks. “We need a cohesive, coordinated approach that both advances the ocean’s economic potential, such as offshore wind development, and protects ocean life and habitat.”

OCEAN MANAGEMENT IN ACTION: STELLWAGEN BANK

NEW ENGLAND AT THE FOREFRONT

CLF is at the vanguard of ocean use planning, innovating in New England what has become a national policy initiative intended to balance the protection of vulnerable marine wildlife and habitats with responsible ocean uses. The first major step in better planning occurred in January 2010, when Massachusetts became the first state in the country to implement a comprehensive ocean management plan for state waters, which extend from the coast to three miles offshore. The development of the Mass Ocean Plan, mandated by the Massachusetts Oceans Act of 2008, was a collaborative effort among state legislators, state agencies, environmental groups, fishing organizations, energy and utility interests and other ocean users in which CLF played a key role. Already, the Mass Ocean Plan has improved the management of some activities to better coexist with marine life. Developers siting a fiber optic cable crossing Buzzards Bay and Vineyard Sound, for example, set the path of the cable to avoid increasingly rare eelgrass beds and “cobble bottom” sections of the ocean floor that are known to be rich in biodiversity and important habitat for a variety of fish and other ocean life.



A young ocean enthusiast befriends the unique creatures that live along the Maine coastline.

Photo Credit: Parks in Focus

CLF was also actively engaged in the development of Rhode Island’s Ocean Special Area Management Plan (Ocean SAMP), which was approved in October 2010. The Ocean SAMP provides a comprehensive framework for regulating the state’s ocean waters, which are among the most productive in New England. In particular, the SAMP provides protection for the rocky underwater outcroppings called moraines that contain some of the highest biodiversity found in Rhode Island’s offshore waters.

A NATIONAL PLAN

The work done by CLF and others to develop the ocean use plans in Massachusetts and Rhode Island helped prompt the Obama Administration to establish by Executive Order the country’s first National Ocean Policy in June 2010. The National Ocean Policy creates a process for agencies, ocean users, industries and coastal communities to work together to develop ocean use plans for each coastal region of the country. These regional plans will guide ocean use in federal waters which extend from three miles out to 200 miles offshore.

With the advent of a National Ocean Policy, at long last, the United States acknowledged that protecting and maintaining healthy oceans and coasts is essential to a sustainable future for coastal communities and our economy.

The pioneering Massachusetts and Rhode Island ocean use plans will serve as the building blocks of New England’s regional ocean plan for federal waters. Work on that plan will begin this summer, and CLF will again be leading the region and the nation with forward-thinking approaches to ensure our oceans continue to thrive.



Commercial shipping lanes run through Stellwagen Bank, home to whales and other marine life. *Photo Credit: Kate Sardi, NOAA Fisheries Permit #981-1707-00*

Located at the mouth of Massachusetts Bay, Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary is one of New England’s special ocean habitats. Even before the President’s Executive Order established a National Ocean Policy, Stellwagen was doing some ocean use planning of its own. Stellwagen is home to a variety of whale species, including the endangered North Atlantic right whale, of which there are only about 400 left on the planet. It’s also a busy passageway for tankers and other large vessels traveling to and from Boston. Using 25 years’ worth of whale sighting data, officials found that the shipping lanes used by those vessels also contained the highest concentrations of whales, resulting in collisions that often proved fatal to the whales. In 2007, the Sanctuary narrowed and slightly altered the paths of the shipping lanes, reducing boats’ collisions with all whales by 81 percent and with North Atlantic right whales alone by 58 percent.

Stellwagen isn’t the only biodiversity hotspot that needs to be preserved and protected in order to thrive. New England’s other special ocean places include Cashes Ledge, Jeffreys Ledge, the Atlantic Canyons and Jordan Basin.