



New York Ocean and Great Lakes Ecosystem Conservation Council

For Immediate Release

January 29, 2009

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New Report Calls For Immediate Action to Improve New York's Ocean and Great Lake Ecosystems

New York's coastal regions face critical problems, emerging threats and troubling economic and environmental declines

ALBANY - (January 28, 2009) – Against a backdrop of record beach closings and a continual decline in commercial fishing, the New York Ocean and Great Lakes Ecosystem Conservation Council today issued a report calling for action to protect the state's coastal waters and coastal communities.

In the report, "Our Waters, Our Communities, Our Future," the council recommended a "ecosystem-based management" approach that will coordinate the efforts of various state agencies to address issues including land use, water quality, building capacity and research goals.

The council, made up of nine state agencies today released a draft report for public review. The final report will be submitted to the Governor and Legislature later this year.

Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) Commissioner and Chair of the Council Pete Grannis said: "Healthy coastal ecosystems are an essential ingredient in New York's future – for our environment, our economy and our quality of life. But we must act now. As the report

makes clear, we must switch from our traditional management methods to an integrated approach. We must merge all of our knowledge, all of our science and all of our experience to create a sound economic, ecological, social and technical blueprint for our coastal areas for both near and long term.”

New York State Secretary of State Lorraine Cortés-Vázquez, whose department provides support for the Council, said: "Our coastal communities are in trouble. While existing approaches have been effective at dealing with past challenges, this new generation of challenges will require new solutions and new ways of making decisions. Now is the time for all of those concerned about the well being of our coastal ecosystems to work together in addressing these problems."

The report details the numerous challenges facing New York’s coastal ecosystems. Stormwater runoff and overflows from sewage treatment plants have impacted water quality. Declines in fish habitat have contributed to a nearly 80% decrease in commercial landings over the past 50 years. In 2007, ocean and Great Lakes communities lost valuable revenue because beaches were closed over 1,500 days due to pollution - an increase of 300 days over the prior year. Wetland losses have continued throughout ocean and Great Lakes shorelines, and the increasing demand for new sources of energy, has greater pressure on offshore waters.

The draft report seeks to address the environmental, economic, and social aspects of ocean and Great Lakes ecosystem health and to emphasize the development of comprehensive, locally-driven solutions to ecosystem problems. The draft report calls for a set of immediate actions to be taken by the State to address critical priorities for the health of New York's ocean and Great Lakes. These actions include:

- *protecting and enhancing critical habitats necessary for sustaining fish populations.
- *aligning state, regional and local actions with the principles of ecosystem-based management;
- *incorporating the best scientific information into decision-making;
- *working to accommodate competing demands for limited resources and space in offshore areas, such as energy development, commercial fishing, and navigation;
- *rebuilding fish stocks by identifying and reducing sources of marine mortality.
- *reducing debris in ocean and Great Lakes waters; and
- *providing the public with information and mechanisms for better decision-making.
- *undertaking nutrient and contamination abatement.
- *explore possible no-discharge zones.
- *address sources of marine debris and floatables.

The Council strongly encourages the public's participation in the review process. To obtain an electronic download of the draft report, submit comments, or view the schedule of public meetings, please visit www.nyoglecc.org <<http://www.nyoglecc.org>>. This site will be updated periodically, as additional meetings are scheduled. In the event that you do not have Internet access, please contact Samantha Bartling at (518) 474-1844.

The New York Ocean and Great Lakes Ecosystem Conservation Council was established in August 2006 and first convened in September 2007. Along with Commissioner Grannis, Chair of the Council, and Secretary of State Cortés-Vázquez, members include: Commissioners of Agriculture and Markets, Patrick Hooker; General Services, John Egan; Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, Carol Ash; and Transportation, Astrid Glynn; Commissioner of the Department of Economic Development, Marisa Lago; President of the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority, Francis J. Murray; and Officer-in-Charge, Office of the Chancellor of the State University of New York, John J. O'Connor.

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