

December 31, 2008

President-Elect Barack Obama
P.O. Box 8102
Chicago, IL 60680

RE: Our country needs a rational, comprehensive coastal policy

Dear President-elect Obama:

The United States has over 84,000 miles of coastline containing invaluable economic environmental and recreational resources (US Army Corps of Engineers, 1971). Coastal ports and navigation routes made it possible for this nation to be settled and to grow. Today, 53 percent of the U.S. population lives within 50 miles of the coast, with more people moving to that zone than away from it each day (Census 2000).

America's beaches are the primary economic engine that drives coastal America. Each year, 180 million Americans make 2 billion visits to our nation's beaches (NOAA, 2000). This is twice the number of visits made to all of the properties managed by the National Park Service combined. More than three-quarters of all U.S. domestic activity takes place in the coastal states (U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy, 2004). Much of this is the result of America's largest industry and employer – the Travel and Tourism Economy. TTE contribute \$1.4 trillion to America's GDP (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2007) and puts TTE ahead of durable goods manufacturing and retail trade as a contributor to GDP. TTE employs nearly 1 of every 10 Americans (World Travel and Tourism Council). These are jobs that are unlikely to move offshore, unless we drive them away by our inattention to their basic needs.

America's coastal ports are the primary gateway for international trade. Almost 99 percent of the goods shipped overseas to and from the U.S. come through seaports. Yet the 59 largest ports in the country are kept at their adequate depths only 39 percent of the time (American Association of Port Authorities, 2008).

Waterborne commerce also moves along the thousands of miles of the Atlantic and Gulf Intracoastal Waterways. These vital routes serve ports and military bases, lessen the demand for more highways to move goods by truck, connect to inland waterways and other forms of transportation, and provide opportunities for boating and other recreational activities, all in a relatively "green" manner.

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Within the U.S. coastal zone are many significant environmental resources. There are estuaries whose mixture of fresh and salt water nurtures a rich array of flora and fauna (Restore America's Estuaries, 2008). In addition to the invaluable environmental assets they provide, estuary regions also contribute to the nation's GDP through eco-tourism and recreation activities. Much of the 10 billion pounds of U.S. commercial fish harvested annually comes from the nation's coastal regions. The men and women who work in, supply this industry and purchase from this industry each depend on healthy coasts. Recreational fishing, charter boats, surfers and others also contribute significantly to the national GDP and are adversely affected by poorly maintained and unhealthy coastal conditions.

Among the billions of dollars of private buildings and public infrastructure located on or near America's coasts are many energy and petrochemical installations. Just as municipalities want to protect their coastal roads and public utilities infrastructure, these industries have a vested interest in reversing coastal erosion and promoting policies and programs that enhance healthy beaches and wetlands. Each of the businesses located in America's coastal communities suffers when their coastal environment is degraded by coastal erosion or pollution.

The U.S. has more than 20,000 miles of eroding shoreline, with 2,600 of those miles considered to be critically eroded. This erosion poses an economic threat (wide, healthy beaches are the best barrier to storm-induced waves), an environmental threat (various species breed only in sandy coastal environments), and a threat to recreation (beach visitations, surfing, fishing, boating, etc.) Shoreline erosion may not start at the coast (upstream dams, for instance, can block the natural flow of sediment from hills and mountains), but it certainly does not stop at the coast. Erosion is a near-shore component of an unhealthy ocean environment.

Nevertheless, there is no national coastal policy based on leadership from the White House and full participation from coastal states, localities, universities, and stakeholder groups. No Cabinet-level agency coordinates federal water resource policies and programs. Instead, we plan and fund our responses to erosion, dredging and other coastal issues on a project-by-project basis. The unacceptable end result is illustrated by the kind of devastation caused by recent mega-storms such as Katrina and Ike. Less evident is the cost of doing nothing, for there has already been a steep price paid for our national failure to adequately address our coastal needs, risks and resources.

The American Shore & Beach Preservation Association would like to work with you and your staff to begin to address what has almost become a policy of coastal neglect. I am attaching our government affairs agenda for 2009 in the hope that it will be a starting point for what we believe will be a very fruitful discussion.

Sincerely,



Mayor Harry Simmons
President

Enclosure