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March 6, 2023

The Honorable Ron DeSantis  
Governor of Florida  
Members of the Florida Legislature  
Tallahassee, FL 32399

Dear Governor DeSantis and Members of the Florida Legislature:

The Florida Ocean Alliance is pleased to provide our 2023 Policy Priorities that identify our key policy issues for your consideration. These include strengthening coastal resilience, improving water and habitat quality, and ensuring coastal community hazard preparedness. These priorities are based on the Alliance's 2020 Strategic Plan for Florida's Oceans and Coasts that was funded by the Florida Legislature ([Securing Florida's Blue Economy: A Strategic Plan for Florida's Oceans and Coasts](#)). This Plan highlighted four key issues:

(1) the Blue Economy, (2) Ocean and coastal resilience, (3) Human and natural infrastructure, and (4) Implementation, outreach, and financing. As an ocean state with lengthy and multiple coastlines and an invaluable marine environment, coastal resilience is critical here. Florida policymakers need to deal with increasingly stronger storms and hurricanes, as well as warming oceans and accelerated sea level rise along our coasts. The state's economic viability relies on a vibrant Blue Economy for economic resilience and stability, and that Blue Economy depends on healthy oceans and coasts.

The Florida Ocean Alliance represents a diverse nonpartisan leadership partnership dedicated to positioning Florida as a global leader in responsible ocean and coastal economic development, conservation, education, and technology innovation. Our Board of Directors represents industry (ports, cruise lines, marine industries), as well as nonprofit research organizations, academia, the ocean research community, and public interest groups. We respectfully request that you consider the Florida Ocean Alliance Board of Directors as a valuable resource to assist in these efforts.

Sincerely,

Paul Anderson, President  
Florida Ocean Alliance

## 2023 PRIORITIES FOR A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE FOR FLORIDA'S OCEANS & COASTS



Photo: Miami-Dade County

*Make Florida a national and global leader in ocean and coastal economic development, conservation, scientific research, and innovative technology.*

Florida's extensive shoreline of 8,436 miles and adjacent oceans provide the state with all the assets necessary to become a powerhouse in economic development, sustainability, innovation, science, industry, and environmental management. However, the state's ocean and coasts are at risk due to the impacts of natural disasters, an aging and inadequate infrastructure, and human activities on water quality, natural habitats, and marine resources.

With visionary leadership, Florida now has a historic opportunity to proactively protect and restore its valuable ocean and coastal resources and thus take full advantage of the economic opportunities and innovation they provide. **Florida Ocean Alliance's Priorities** support the ocean and coastal priorities of the Governor, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. The Alliance recommends a focus on four key areas:

1. **Coastal Resilience, Improving Water and Habitat Quality**
2. **Coastal Community Hazard Preparedness**
3. **Natural Resource Protections, the Foundation of Florida's Blue Economy**
4. **Implementation of the Strategic Plan for Florida's Oceans & Coasts**

The Florida Ocean Alliance is Florida's leading non-partisan, science-driven, private-public sector partnership comprising leaders from industry, academia, and non-profits. The Alliance focuses on innovative thinking, planning and implementation actions. Our goal is to protect and restore Florida's ocean and coastal assets, while promoting responsible economic growth, diversification and job creation within Florida's ocean and coastal industry clusters. The Florida Ocean Alliance has been serving Florida as a trusted, independent leadership alliance for more than 20 years.

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Executive Director, Florida Ocean Alliance

### 1. Coastal Resilience, Improving Water and Habitat Quality

Florida's geography makes it uniquely vulnerable to the effects of climate change, particularly from flooding in coastal areas. That vulnerability comprises many different elements, including a substantial portion of Florida's economic dependence on coastal and ocean resources, as well as the large amount of real estate assets located in high flood risk areas. At the same time, Florida has extensive natural assets, such as reefs and coastal marshes and wetlands, that could serve to reduce the possible damages from coastal storms and flooding. Cost-effective options for reducing damage to Florida's coasts include protection, restoration, and management of healthy natural habitats (e.g., mangroves, oyster and coral reefs, and dunes), the state's natural infrastructure.



As the fastest growing state at 22.4 million people in 2022, Florida must confront all the issues of that rapid change. The surging population growth results in development, associated changes in land use, and increased demand for freshwater, exacerbating historical alterations to drainage patterns and legacy loads of contaminants and placing increasing pressure on Florida's ocean and coastal resources. In addition to these local threats, global climate change, including sea level rise and more extreme weather, intensify impacts on these fragile resources and the health and well-being of communities. The impacts of sea level rise associated with climate change already are visible in and around Florida. Miami Beach, Miami, Hollywood, and other coastal cities regularly experience routine flooding during lunar high tides, king tides, rain events, and periods of prolonged onshore winds. Furthermore, recent events indicate global changes in the frequency and intensity of extreme weather. The number of billion-dollar disasters has been increasing due to population growth and continuing coastal development, as well as climate change. Climate change is driving greater intensity and frequency of extreme weather events, the latest being Hurricane Ian in 2022.

### 2. Coastal Community Hazard Preparedness

As Hurricane Ian demonstrated in the fall of 2022, Florida's coastal residents are in danger. People, businesses, and communities on Florida's coasts are at risk from real-time hazards (hurricanes, storm surge, flooding, coastal erosion, and sea level rise). Coastal communities need tools, approaches, and technologies to assess their level of risk from these contemporary and future threats. They also need effective strategies to reduce hazard risks, impacts and recovery efforts to minimize the economic impact on coastal properties and coastal businesses. Improved communication and education on hazards and appropriate response to warnings and alerts are also important.

This is a pre-eminent issue for the State of Florida to address, given that nearly 80% of the state's gross domestic product is at risk and associated with low-lying coastal counties where over three-quarters of Florida residents live. This issue is a focus of Governor DeSantis' Executive Order 23-06. The Florida Department of Environmental Protection, Office of Resilience and Coastal Protection, can play a major role in helping address these real concerns, providing solutions for the state's coastal communities and habitats, with new funding, technical assistance, and coordination among federal, state, regional and local entities.

### 3. Natural Resources Protections, the Foundation of Florida's Blue Economy

Florida has the second longest coastline among the U.S. states and territories, second only to Alaska. Coastal counties are home to an overwhelming majority of the state's population, nearly 17 million of over 22 million. They host critical infrastructure, drive robust economic activity, and contribute to Florida's thriving economy. In 2018, Florida's economy exceeded more than \$1 trillion dollars, of which 77 percent was contributed by activities in coastal counties. In fact, the GDP of Florida's coasts exceeds the GDP of 45 states. Ocean resources accounted for over a million jobs and \$73 billion total contribution

to the state's GDP in 2018. Leading industries include ocean tourism, ocean transportation, marine industries, ocean recreation, and living resources. Ocean and coastal resources support Florida's Blue Economy and are critical to its prosperity.

Ecological habitats are a vital component of Florida's economic health yet face threats from climate change and sea level rise, population growth and development, and poor water quality. Oceans and coasts are home to important yet sensitive ecological habitats, such as seagrasses, wetlands, mangroves, beaches, mollusk beds, and coral reefs. Degradation of these invaluable habitats is costly, economically and ecologically, and diminishes quality of life. Restoration and conservation of these habitats is crucial to the long-term sustainability of Florida's economy. Its beaches drive state tourism, offering enormous economic benefit, as well as value to the environment and quality of life by reducing storm damage to infrastructure and communities. Its ports and boating industries are thriving economic assets for the state. Its commercial and recreational fishing industry leads the U.S. in jobs and sales value, relying on healthy waters. The state's natural resources are essential to Florida's economic health. Protecting natural resources while expanding Florida's Blue Economy are key priorities of the Florida Ocean Alliance.



### 4. Implementation of the Strategic Plan for Florida's Oceans and Coasts

The Florida Ocean Alliance has more than 20 years' history of working with State agencies on key policy issues, including the 2020 Strategic Plan for Florida's Oceans and Coasts (funded by the Florida Legislature in 2019). This Plan included key strategies and actions to address four major policy issues in the state:

- Florida's Blue Economy
- Ocean and coastal resilience
- Human and natural infrastructure
- Implementation, outreach, and financing

We remain committed to implementing the Florida Ocean Alliance's 2020 Strategic Plan *Securing Florida's Blue Economy: A Strategic Plan for Florida's Oceans and Coasts* and its recommendations.

### About the Florida Ocean Alliance

#### *Vision*

The Florida Ocean Alliance's vision is to position Florida as a national and global leader in ocean and coastal research, conservation, education, and responsible economic development. We envision a Blue Economy where the state and communities enjoy both economic and environmental resiliency.

#### *Mission*

The Florida Ocean Alliance is dedicated to bringing together the private sector, academia, and nonprofit research organizations in Florida to protect and enhance Florida's coastal and ocean resources for social and economic benefit. Using the knowledge gained from working together with disparate groups within these sectors, we offer our resources to advise and guide Florida's resilience efforts, finding and implementing solutions so that the state and communities will continue to protect and benefit from Florida's rich coastal and ocean assets.

#### *What We Do*

- Monitor and publicize actions related to the oceans and coasts.
- Assist private and public sector stakeholders to develop community consensus and common-sense solutions to complex coastal and ocean challenges.
- Serve as a clearinghouse for information on key ocean and coastal issues facing the state in both the public and private sectors.
- Promote Florida as a global center of excellence in ocean and coastal conservation, research, technology innovation and economic development.

#### *How We Do It*

- Outreach and educational activities for the public and policy makers.
- Conferences and workshops to identify problems and develop consensus solutions.
- Economic studies and issue papers on ocean and coastal policies, challenges, and opportunities.
- Expert, multi-industry sector testimony on ocean or coastal policy to national or state agencies and commissions.

### Florida Ocean Alliance Initiatives

- ✓ Florida's Blue Economy Leadership Meeting, hosted by the Florida Ocean Alliance with Royal Caribbean Cruises and Port Everglades, November 2022
- ✓ Sponsor of annual Florida Oceans Day at the Capitol in Tallahassee, Florida with Mote Marine Laboratory and Florida Institute of Oceanography, since 2001
- ✓ Filing of response to request for information on the U.S. Ocean Climate Action Plan from the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy, October 2022
- ✓ *Securing Florida's Blue Economy: A Strategic Plan for Florida's Oceans and Coasts*, June 2020 (Legislative Appropriation)
- ✓ Florida Ocean Alliance Annual Dispatch on Florida's Oceans and Coasts for the Florida Governor and Legislature, since 2014
- ✓ *Healthy Oceans Generate Jobs for Florida's Economy*, 2013

Learn more: [www.floridaoceanalliance.org](http://www.floridaoceanalliance.org)

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