MISSION FOR AMERICA · CHAPTER 21 · THE PLAN

The National Mission for Oceans

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The Problem

America's ocean is in crisis. The waters that feed the country, protect its coasts, and support billions of dollars in jobs are filling with plastic and fertilizer runoff, losing the habitat that fish depend on, and growing warmer and more acidic, and the harm is already reaching people's health and livelihoods. Climate change makes every part of it worse.

Millions of metric tons of plastic enter the world's oceans every year. Credible estimates run from roughly one to 12 million tons, and the range itself is a symptom of how little the world tracks where it all goes. Ghost gear, the lost and discarded fishing nets, traps, and lines, makes up 46 to 70 percent of all large floating plastic debris by weight and goes on killing for years after it is lost. The Gulf of Maine loses an estimated 175,000 lobster traps annually. Coral reefs are bleaching from Florida to Hawaii. Seagrass meadows are shrinking by 11,000 hectares a year. Mangrove forests, which protect coastlines from storms and store more carbon per acre than most forests on land, lost vast areas in the late twentieth century at rates of 1 to 3 percent per year. Conservation has slowed the losses since then, but many of the damaged areas have never been restored. Mangroves, seagrasses, salt marshes, and kelp forests soak up carbon dioxide and bury it in the mud and their own tissue, which is why scientists call them "blue carbon" ecosystems. They are vanishing about twice as fast as forests on land, and when they go, the carbon they stored escapes back into the air, coastlines lose a natural storm buffer, and the young fish that grow up among them lose their nursery.

The Gulf of Mexico dead zone measured 6,705 square miles in August 2024 and about 4,400 in 2025. Federal and state agencies have set a goal of shrinking its five-year average below 1,900 square miles by 2035. It fell to about 1,300 square miles in 2026 only because a dry spring cut the Mississippi's flow. That dead zone is caused by agricultural runoff from the Mississippi River basin.

The chemistry of the water itself is also changing. The ocean absorbs carbon dioxide from the air, and as it absorbs more, the water becomes more acidic. That rising acidity is dissolving the shells and skeletons of the creatures at the base of the marine food chain, the corals, shellfish, and tiny plankton that everything larger depends on. These organisms build their bodies out of calcium carbonate, the same material as limestone, and acidifying water makes that harder and harder to do. The problem will worsen until atmospheric CO2 concentrations come down.

Fishing is the one part of the picture that has improved. Commercial and recreational fishing generated about $319 billion in sales across the U.S. economy in 2023 and supported about 1.7 million jobs. Under the Magnuson-Stevens Act, the federal law that governs fishing in U.S. waters and requires catch limits to be set by science, the country has rebuilt 50 depleted stocks since 2000 and pushed overfishing to record lows, proof that science-based limits work. But the job is unfinished. Dozens of stocks remain overfished, many more are too data-poor to assess at all, warming water is pushing fish into new ranges faster than management can follow, and the stock science and at-sea monitoring that accurate catch limits depend on have been chronically underfunded.

The global framework for managing these crises is failing. Marine Protected Areas, the zones where fishing, mining, and other extraction are restricted, cover only about 10 percent of the world's oceans, and only about 3.3 percent are fully or highly protected, meaning no extraction of any kind. The international community pledged to protect 30 percent of global oceans by 2030, and that target is nowhere close to being met. The International Seabed Authority, the UN body responsible for setting rules for deep-sea mining in international waters, has stalled, with zero commercial mining contracts approved and the rulebook still under negotiation.

At the same time, the federal agencies that protect America's oceans are losing staff and freezing grants. Federal coastal restoration, the work of rebuilding eroded beaches and dunes, replanting salt marshes and seagrass beds, restoring oyster reefs, and hardening shorelines against storm surge, has long run on a patchwork of several hundred million dollars per year spread across the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF). It was already a fraction of what the country needs to protect its coasts from rising seas and more frequent storms.

The Mission

The Mission for America will transform the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone into the healthiest, best-monitored, and most economically productive large marine area on Earth. This is the ocean the United States controls, reaching 200 nautical miles out from every American coast and covering more water than the nation has land. The RFC and government partners will restore the living systems that feed hundreds of millions of people and protect coastlines from storms. In the process, we will create tens of thousands of high-wage jobs in coastal communities, build new industries around ocean restoration, and earn the standing to lead the international agreements that restoring the global ocean will require.

The Mission will clear 90 percent of the large floating plastic out of U.S. waters by 2039 and retrieve every piece of newly lost ghost gear. The advanced recycling industry that processes that recovered waste, breaking plastics chemically back down into raw material, will be built domestically, employing tens of thousands of workers in recycling, manufacturing, and collection. The nets and bottles pulled from the water will become feedstock for new goods. Getting the plastic out will also cut the microplastics that break off it and end up in the fish and shellfish Americans eat, a health risk the Toxins chapter covers in more detail.

Along the coast, the Mission will rebuild the oyster reefs, mangroves, seagrass meadows, salt marshes, and kelp forests that filter water, shelter fish, prevent billions of dollars in flood damage, and store carbon. Most of them have been destroyed or degraded, and restoration has a strong record of bringing them back. The Mission will finance coastal restoration the way roads and power plants are financed, with RFC direct loans to restoration operators, conservation districts, and tribal nations. Kelp farming will expand into a domestic industry that supplies soil amendments now and, as the market matures, feedstock for bioplastics. Aquaculture will produce affordable protein without depleting freshwater or arable land. And

because the runoff that suffocates coastal waters starts inland, the Mission will pay farmers upstream to cut the fertilizer pollution that drives the Gulf dead zone, working through the Farming chapter. Coral reefs are the one ecosystem the Mission cannot promise to rebuild in a decade. They are dying from heat and acid faster than anyone can replant them, so the Mission will breed hardier strains, rescue living coral into gene banks during heat waves, and keep the reefs alive until the decarbonization missions cool the water. Acidifying water also threatens shellfish farms, so the Mission will give growers early warning and the equipment to buffer their water, the same methods that saved the Pacific Northwest's oyster farms.

The Mission will also map and govern the whole U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). Roughly 44 percent of U.S. ocean waters remain unsurveyed to modern standards. Designating Marine Protected Areas, setting seafloor-mining rules, and tracking ecosystem health all depend on knowing what is down there, and on the agencies that govern the coast working together. On Day One, the president will create a National Coastal Coordination Council to bring them together around a single map. The Mission will survey every square nautical mile of the EEZ and publish the data openly. Working from that survey, the nation will protect 30 percent of its waters as fully protected Marine Protected Areas by 2039, and will site offshore wind where the data says it belongs, clear of sensitive habitat and migratory routes. The Mission will pay for enforcement directly from the federal budget, while a mandate-driven restoration-credit market, modeled on America's existing wetland and endangered-species banks that require anyone who damages habitat to pay to rebuild it elsewhere, pulls private capital into restoring marine habitat. Deep-sea minerals in the EEZ will stay on the seafloor while NOAA leads the research on them, and no commercial extraction will be allowed until rigorous, independent science shows it would not do irreversible harm.

Finally, the Mission will rebuild the fisheries, because cleaner water and protected habitat do little good if fish are caught faster than they reproduce. It will fund the science behind accurate catch limits, end overfishing, set a hard date to rebuild each depleted stock, and put modern monitoring on the boats. Fishers who lose income in the transition will get grant-funded buyouts and income support paid for by the government, and by the end of the decade American fishing will land more fish, from healthier stocks, than at the start.

The RFC will provide most of the financing. It will extend 30-year, low-interest loans to recycling facilities, restoration operators, and aquaculture farms, and it will lend directly through state agencies and community development lenders so local operators reach capital without waiting on federal approval. It will contract for the domestic manufacture of robotic ocean skimmers and monitoring systems, paying only for results, and it will pay directly for NOAA's full survey of the EEZ. Other tools will cover what loans cannot. The Ocean Cleanup Fund, paid for by a fee on new plastic, will cover the cleanup, so the companies that make plastic pay to remove it. A national packaging-waste standard and federal purchasing will create steady demand for the recovered plastic and the restored habitat. A Coastal Restoration Match Fund will put two federal dollars behind every dollar a state, tribe, or foundation raises. Ordinary federal grants will pay for the public work that earns no revenue to repay a loan.

Solutions

Solution 1: Clean the Sea

Ghost gear is the worst of the plastic in the water. Lost fishing nets, traps, and longlines drift for years, entangling and killing marine life, and they make up 46 to 70 percent of all large floating debris by weight. In the Gulf of Maine alone, an estimated 175,000 lobster traps are lost every year, and across the U.S. fishing fleet no one even knows the total, because no one is required to count it.

An Ocean Cleanup Fund modeled on the abandoned-mine cleanup fund. The Mission will capitalize a dedicated Ocean Cleanup Fund that finances collection contracts and gear retrieval programs. The Fund's revenue will come from a per-ton fee on virgin plastic production, on the principle that companies introducing new plastic into the economy should pay to remove the old stuff from the ocean. The fee also closes the price gap between virgin and recycled material, making the new domestic recycling industry competitive against subsidized petrochemical feedstock for the first time. A single federal fee will raise enough to pay for cleanup across the whole Exclusive Economic Zone. As recycled and plant-based materials come online, the fee on new fossil plastic can rise until making that plastic no longer pays. By then the producer-responsibility fees described below will carry the cleanup, so cleanup funding will not depend on plastic production staying high.

The structural model is the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act (SMCRA) and its Abandoned Mine Land program, a polluter-pays trust fund that has been reauthorized on a bipartisan basis for 50 years because the money goes back to the affected communities. The ocean fund will work the same way. Revenue from the virgin plastic fee will be distributed as block grants to coastal states, tribal nations, and territorial governments on a formula that reflects coastline mileage, plastic loading in adjacent waters, and fishing-community economic exposure. Each grantee will administer its own cleanup contracts, gear retrieval cooperatives, and recycling partnerships within national protocols. Performance metrics covering tons of plastic recovered, ghost gear retrieved, recycling capacity built, and jobs created will determine the next cycle's allocation. The communities that get the money and do the work will have every reason to defend the program in future Congresses.

National EPR rules that capitalize the recycling buildout. The new advanced recycling industry will need reliable feedstock and customers across the country. Seven states have enacted Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) laws, rules that make producers financially responsible for the waste their packaging generates, and major compliance milestones are taking effect in 2026. Those state laws are driving a growing domestic advanced recycling market, but 50 different sets of state rules are hard for companies to follow, and the other 43 states have none. Congress will establish a national EPR standard for packaging, replacing the patchwork with a single set of rules. Producers will meet the standard mainly by paying into the RFC-financed recycling network, so their compliance payments will build the new industry's customer base.

Build the advanced recycling industry. The RFC will provide direct loans for the construction of advanced recycling facilities that can break down recovered marine plastic into raw material for new products. These plants will take plastic collected from the ocean, process it in the United States, and send it back to manufacturers. RFC loans will cover the upfront cost that has kept advanced recycling small, while the virgin plastic fee makes new plastic more expensive and the EPR standard makes producers pay for their packaging waste. The RFC finances the plants, and the fee and EPR create the market for what they produce. Physically, an advanced recycling plant looks like a compact chemical works, with feedstock sorting and shredding at one end, reactors that cook or dissolve the plastic back into its building blocks in the middle, and clean raw material for manufacturers coming out the other end. They run best near where the plastic lands and where industry already sits, so the natural homes are port cities and the existing chemical corridors of the Gulf and the coasts, close to the collection fleets, rail, power, and a trained workforce.

A federal gear retrieval program for the fishing industry. The RFC will finance the fishing industry's own gear-retrieval fleets and lend directly to fishing communities for gear replacement and tracking technology, repaid over time, while the block-grant cooperatives funded by the Ocean Cleanup Fund handle community-wide cleanup. Gear-tracking technology for traps and nets exists, but it is expensive for working fishers. Reporting lost gear will become a condition of every federal fishing permit, so any vessel that fishes federal waters must report the gear it loses, where, and what type, whether or not it takes a dollar of RFC financing. For the first time, the country will have a national record of how much gear is lost and where, which tells retrieval crews where to work. RFC financing and cost-share will pay for the tracking technology, so the new rule does not become a new cost for working fishers.

Build the cleanup fleet. The RFC will issue pay-for-performance contracts for the development and domestic manufacturing of robotic ocean skimmers and autonomous collection systems. The technology is early-stage, and no one yet tracks how many of these machines are in use. Pay-for-performance contracts suit that situation. Several companies will compete, the government will pay for tons of plastic collected per month, and companies that fall short will be replaced. These machines range from small solar-powered surface drones that skim floating debris into onboard bins, to larger uncrewed boats that tow collection booms, to fixed interceptors anchored at river mouths where much of the plastic first washes out to sea. They run on their own for days at a time, radioing their position and their haul back to shore.

The cleanup contracts themselves will go to private firms and nonprofits operating collection vessels and systems across the EEZ. A first-year national survey will measure how much large floating plastic sits in U.S. waters and how much enters each year, setting the baseline the target is measured against. Against that baseline, the target is 90 percent annual removal of large floating plastic from U.S. waters by 2039, combined with full retrieval of newly lost ghost gear each year.

What this delivers: A domestic advanced recycling industry scaled to process marine plastic. A mandatory gear reporting and retrieval system. A domestically manufactured fleet of cleanup technology. Tens of thousands of jobs in recycling, manufacturing, collection, and marine operations.

Solution 2: Rebuild the Living Coast

Coastal ecosystems do work that engineered substitutes cannot match. Oyster reefs filter water and buffer coastlines from storms. Kelp forests shelter fish nurseries and absorb CO2. Mangroves prevent billions of dollars in flood damage every year. Coral reefs support fisheries that feed hundreds of millions of people worldwide. Seagrass meadows hold sediment in place, store carbon, and provide habitat for fish and other sea life.

Decades of pollution, overharvesting, and warming have destroyed or degraded most of these ecosystems, but restoration has a strong record of bringing them back.

In the Chesapeake Bay, almost all of the rebuilt oyster reefs studied after six years were thriving. The transplanted oysters had survived, bred, and grown into reefs that clean the water and shelter other sea life. The problem is cost. Rebuilding a single hectare of oyster reef can cost anywhere from $150,000 to more than $400,000, and kelp forests and mangroves carry their own price tags. Today the federal government spends only a few hundred million dollars a year on all coastal restoration combined, a small fraction of what the coasts need.

Restoration as infrastructure investment. The RFC will finance coastal restoration the way it finances a road or a power plant, because storm protection, healthier fisheries, cleaner water, and stored carbon all have economic value. Most of the lending will come straight from the RFC, and to reach the small operators and local outfits a federal lender would usually pass over, it will also work through state public banks and community lenders. The money pays for the supply side of restoration, the nurseries that raise young oysters and coral to transplanting size, the specialized boats, the monitoring gear, and the crews who do the work. The demand comes from government purchasing, as federal and state agencies contract for finished results, so many acres of oyster reef, so many miles of replanted seagrass. Those contracts, along with the restoration credits operators earn from the market described in Solution 3, give operators steady income to repay a 30-year loan.

A 2:1 federal match for state, tribal, and philanthropic dollars. Alongside the RFC's loan programs, the Mission will stand up a Coastal Restoration Match Fund that puts two federal dollars behind every one dollar raised by states, tribes, and philanthropic partners for qualifying restoration projects. The country already has restoration operators, conservation districts, and tribal nations with their own funds and political support, and the match will triple what they can spend while leaving them in charge.

The current restoration model runs on competitive grants and philanthropic matching funds. Those will continue alongside the RFC and the Match Fund. But grant cycles are slow, they can be cut in any budget year, and they are too small for the scale needed. The RFC can move faster, and its 30-year loans match the time a restored ecosystem takes to pay back, from an institution that survives changes in administration.

Drive down costs through scale. Today's price of $150,000 to $400,000 per hectare for oyster reef comes from doing restoration one project at a time. Costs will fall with scale, as they do in manufacturing. Standardized nursery protocols, purpose-built deployment vessels, and trained crews working multiple sites all bring per-hectare costs down. The RFC will finance restoration at a scale that creates these efficiencies, the same way it finances factory construction.

The kelp economy. Kelp farming restores habitat and sells a product. Americans already buy billions of dollars of seaweed a year, almost all of it imported, and domestic farming is only a small, fast-growing fraction of that demand. Kelp grows fast, absorbs CO2, and requires no freshwater, fertilizer, or arable land. Most kelp today goes into food and hydrocolloids, the thickeners used in processed food and other goods. Two growing industrial uses make it worth financing at scale.

- **Bioplastic feedstock.** Kelp-based bioplastics displace petroleum-derived materials. The Industry chapter creates the manufacturing demand.
- **Soil amendments.** Kelp-based soil amendments help crops take up nutrients, and the Farming chapter runs them through its nutrient-management programs.

The Mission will also finance the farming of Asparagopsis, a red seaweed whose oils have sharply cut the methane cattle belch in feedlot trials. Asparagopsis is a different plant from kelp and a riskier investment. It has not been proven at commercial scale, and the FDA has not approved it. The RFC will fund production capacity and offer advance purchases to get it through that stage, while the Farming chapter handles the rollout to farms. None of the chapter's core targets depend on it.

The RFC will finance industrial-scale kelp farming operations along the Pacific and Atlantic coasts, including nursery infrastructure, harvest equipment, and processing facilities. The case for kelp farming rests on its products and markets. Whether kelp farms pull meaningful amounts of carbon out of the air is still unproven, and the Mission does not count on it.

Sustainable aquaculture expansion. U.S. aquaculture sells about $2 billion of fish and shellfish a year and contributes around $4 billion to the economy once processing and sales are counted, growing about 4 percent a year and still small next to the seafood the country imports. NOAA's Aquaculture Opportunity Areas program is identifying suitable sites for offshore fish and shellfish farming. Consumer demand for sustainable protein is driving growth, alongside advances in land-based recirculating systems, indoor facilities that raise fish in filtered, recycled water and keep the pollution of ocean fish farms out of the sea. The RFC will provide direct loans for aquaculture facility construction and for the small operators who struggle to access capital. At scale, aquaculture will produce protein without clearing forests, depleting freshwater, or acidifying soil.

Coral resilience through research. Coral is the hardest case in this chapter. America's reefs are dying faster than restoration can rebuild them, because the water is now too warm and too acidic. That includes the Florida Reef Tract, the only barrier reef in the continental United States, and the reefs of Hawaii, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands, Guam, the Northern Marianas, American Samoa, and the Flower Garden Banks. Transplanting cannot keep up, and only cutting the carbon dioxide that heats and acidifies the ocean will save them. Until then, the Mission will keep as much coral alive as it can. The Manhattan Projects chapter's Advanced Research Division will coordinate frontier research in coral genetic resilience, breeding and selecting heat-tolerant strains. The RFC will finance the deployment of what that research produces, growing hardier coral in nurseries and transplanting it onto degraded reefs, and, when a marine heat wave hits, rescuing living coral into gene banks and land-based tanks the way Florida did in 2023, so the genetic stock survives to reseed reefs later. The Mission's coral target is survival, measured reef by reef. Recovery depends on cooling the water.

Defend the shellfish coast against acidification. Open-ocean acidification is driven by the carbon dioxide in the air, and the only lasting fix is to stop emitting it, which is the work of the rest of the Mission for America. In the meantime, shellfish growers can protect themselves. When corrosive, low-pH water welled up along the Oregon coast between 2006 and 2008, it killed as much as 80 percent of the oyster larvae at hatcheries like Whiskey Creek on Netarts Bay and nearly took down Washington's shellfish industry, a $270-million-a-year business that supports thousands of jobs across the Pacific Northwest. Growers saved it by adapting. They monitored the chemistry of the incoming water, timed their intake to the hours when photosynthesis had drawn the acid down, buffered the water in their tanks, and bred tougher oysters to spawn from. The Mission will bring those defenses to every shellfish region. The EEZ monitoring network will feed real-time water-chemistry data to every shellfish hatchery and grower, an early-warning system that flags corrosive water a day or two before it arrives, and the RFC will finance the intake treatment, buffering equipment, and selective-breeding programs that let operations ride it out. The nutrient cuts and the kelp and seagrass beds funded elsewhere in this chapter will also help, because they lower the acidity of the coastal water around shellfish beds and reefs.

Cut the nutrient runoff that kills coastal waters. The Gulf of Mexico dead zone, which reached 6,705 square miles in August 2024, is caused by agricultural runoff from the Mississippi basin. Restored coastal ecosystems will not last if the runoff that suffocates them continues. The Mission will work with the Farming chapter on a Mississippi-basin nutrient reduction program that pays for cover cropping, precision fertilization, and wetland buffer restoration across the upstream watersheds that feed the Gulf. The same approach applies to the Chesapeake, Long Island Sound, and other coastal dead zones fed by inland agriculture. Where possible, restoration protocols will be validated through controlled trials, testing different nursery designs, deployment methods, and watershed interventions against each other, to find out which methods work best.

A cautious line on ocean carbon removal. Using the ocean to pull carbon dioxide out of the air, by fertilizing plankton, altering seawater chemistry, or sinking seaweed, is still a research question. The Manhattan Projects and Cooldown chapters fund that research, and the Mission will finance commercial deployment of an ocean carbon-removal method only once the science on measuring it, verifying it, and its effects on marine life is settled.

What this delivers: Coastal ecosystem restoration at a scale that reverses the trend of loss. A kelp farming industry supplying bioplastic feedstock and soil amendments. Expanded sustainable aquaculture. A shellfish coast defended against acidification. Tens of thousands of jobs in restoration, farming, and marine operations, concentrated in coastal communities that need them most.

Solution 3: Map and Govern the EEZ

The Exclusive Economic Zone holds a wide range of sea life, deposits of critical minerals, and large areas no one has ever surveyed. As of 2025, roughly 44 percent of U.S. ocean and coastal waters remain unmapped to modern standards. The federal government's own mapping strategy, published in 2020, set a goal of mapping all deep waters by 2030 and all nearshore waters by 2040. At the current pace, with

NOAA's ocean exploration budget at roughly $46 million per year, neither target will be met. Before the country can designate new Marine Protected Areas, set rules for seafloor mining, or monitor the health of its marine ecosystems, it needs to know what is down there.

Coastal authority is also fractured. Restoration sits in one corner of NOAA, marine protected area siting in another, offshore wind permitting at Interior, fisheries management at the regional councils, and dredging and shoreline work at the Army Corps, with coastal states and tribes holding their own jurisdictions over much of the same water. Decisions get made in parallel, often in conflict, and almost never on a shared map. The country had a coordinating body for this problem, the Water Resources Council and its River Basin Commissions, and it was defunded in 1981.

Stand up a National Coastal Coordination Council on Day One. The President will issue an executive order on Day One re-establishing a coordinating body for coastal and ocean governance, modeled on the Water Resources Council and its regional commissions. The National Coastal Coordination Council will sit in the Executive Office of the President and bring together NOAA, Interior, the Army Corps, EPA, the Coast Guard, the regional fishery management councils, coastal-state governors, and tribal nations. Underneath it, regional ocean councils covering the Atlantic, Gulf, Pacific, Alaska, Pacific Islands, and Caribbean will handle the actual coordination of restoration siting, MPA designation, offshore wind layout, dredge spoil, and fisheries management within each ocean basin. The agencies will keep their own roles, and the Council will settle conflicts among them before they end up in court. Congress will authorize and fund the Council in the first legislative package, following the abandoned-mine-cleanup model, so that it sends money to the regions doing the work and builds lasting support in both parties.

Map the entire EEZ. NOAA will run a full habitat survey of the EEZ, charting the shape of the seafloor along with the sea life, the seabed material, and the water chemistry that decide what lives where. The RFC will pay for the survey directly. The United Kingdom spends approximately £103 million (about $130 million) per year on seabed mapping and has documented a return of £86 in economic value for every pound invested, from better navigation charts, smarter offshore energy siting, more productive fisheries, and more effective conservation.

The technology to do this fast already exists. Autonomous survey vessels, uncrewed ships carrying sonar systems, can map vast areas at a fraction of the cost of traditional crewed research ships. In 2025, a single autonomous vessel mapped the entire Cayman Islands EEZ, 90,000 square kilometers, in roughly 300 mission days. A fleet of 15 to 20 similar vehicles, supplemented by underwater drones for high-priority habitat areas, could complete the remaining U.S. survey in five to seven years. The RFC will finance the procurement of this autonomous fleet through pay-for-performance contracts, alongside upgrades to NOAA's existing research vessels. Full coverage means charting the depth and shape of the seafloor, the material it is made of, whether rock, sand, or mud, and the chemistry of the water, everywhere, with the detailed cataloging of marine life done first in the most important habitats and phased across the rest as the fleet grows.

NOAA will publish the data openly and for free, and every later decision on governance, conservation, and extraction will rest on it. The mapping program will identify sensitive ecosystems, record where species live, locate mineral deposits, and set the baseline for the rest of this solution. The live feeds,

seafloor sonar, habitat surveys, sea surface temperature, acidity, salinity, and current patterns, will flow into the Planetary Dashboard described in the Cooldown chapter, extending that same constellation of satellites, buoys, and sensors underwater and along the coast.

Protect 30 percent of the EEZ. The Mission will designate 30 percent of U.S. coastal and EEZ waters as fully protected Marine Protected Areas by 2039. Thirty percent by 2030 is the international target, and as of 2026 the world is far from meeting it. The United States will reach 30 percent in its own waters.

MPA designation will follow the mapping data and ecological science. Protected areas will be linked by migratory blue corridors that follow the routes traveled by whales, sea turtles, tuna, and other species that move across vast distances.

Fund enforcement directly, and build a mandate-driven market for restoration. Enforcement is the weakest part of ocean conservation everywhere, and the public should pay for it directly. The Mission will fund Coast Guard patrols, satellite surveillance, and the monitoring network out of the federal budget, so protection does not depend on the price of a credit.

America already runs the largest restoration market on Earth. For 50 years, anyone who destroys a wetland under the Clean Water Act, or an endangered species' habitat under the Endangered Species Act, has been required to pay to restore an equivalent one somewhere else, through mitigation and conservation banks. It is a multi-billion-dollar industry, and it works because the law creates the demand. Every purely voluntary version tried abroad, from Australia's national scheme to the international credit market, has stalled for lack of buyers. The Mission will extend that proven model to the sea. Any activity that disturbs habitat in the EEZ, from offshore wind foundations and dredging to port expansion, cable-laying, and permitted seabed pilots, will have to offset the damage by buying certified marine restoration credits, on the same offset-multiplier principle applied to seabed mining below. That requirement will create buyers, and the buyers will bring private money into oyster reef, seagrass, and kelp restoration alongside the RFC's loans.

Each role will sit with a different body to avoid a conflict of interest. NOAA sets the biodiversity metric and certifies credits against it. An independent public registry publishes every credit and every transaction openly and claws credits back when monitoring shows a restoration has failed to deliver. The RFC finances the restoration operators who supply the credits, and stands ready as a buyer of last resort to hold a floor under the market, but it does not grade its own borrowers' work. Because marine restoration is harder to measure than a wetland on land, the metric will be tested before the market scales up, and directly funded enforcement will carry the early years while the measurement science matures and the market grows.

Support fishing communities through the transition. New MPAs will close some waters to fishing. Well-managed protected areas also grow more fish and shellfish, which spill over into the surrounding waters and improve nearby catches, so over time protection will support the fishing communities that depend on those waters. Where a closure displaces fishing, fishers get the fair transition detailed in Solution 4, grant-funded payments and voluntary buyouts, along with help reaching the waters where

stocks are healthiest. Tribal fishing rights and sovereignty will be respected in all MPA designations, and no protected area will override treaty-protected access without the consent of the affected nation.

Site offshore wind using the map. Floating offshore wind arrays, sited 30 to 60 kilometers off the coast, are among the largest clean-power resources the country has left to build. The Clean Power chapter details the generation buildout, and the Oceans chapter governs the siting. The same EEZ survey that informs MPA designation and seafloor extraction decisions determines where wind arrays belong, outside sensitive habitats, clear of migratory blue corridors, and in coordination with fishing communities whose waters they will share.

Study the seafloor before mining it. The ocean floor within the U.S. EEZ contains deposits of manganese, cobalt, nickel, copper, and other minerals essential to the clean energy transition, much of it locked in polymetallic nodules, the potato-sized metal lumps scattered across the deep seafloor. It also contains ecosystems that are among the least understood on Earth, and early commercial-scale mining tests have shown serious damage, a 37 percent reduction in seafloor organisms two months after disturbance in one nodule-mining test, that may take decades or centuries to recover. More than 40 nations have called for a moratorium. The United States should not rush into mining it, and it should not leave the rules to an International Seabed Authority that has stalled for years.

The Mission will halt commercial deep-sea mining in the U.S. EEZ and keep it halted until the research is done. There will be no commercial extraction until rigorous, independent science can show it can happen without lasting harm. NOAA will conduct the biological surveys, high-resolution seafloor maps, and ecosystem-impact studies that the world does not yet have. Small pilots, under one square kilometer per test site, will be allowed under strict monitoring, with every finding made public.

If commercial mining is ultimately permitted, the regulatory framework will carry strict environmental standards, comprehensive prior mapping, an offset multiplier requiring protection of a multiplied area of equivalent habitat for every unit disturbed, and real-time monitoring with automatic suspension triggers if measured impacts exceed predicted levels. That framework will give other countries a standard for deciding whether, and how, to mine the seabed.

What this delivers: The first comprehensive map of the U.S. EEZ. Thirty percent of U.S. waters fully protected and enforced. Enforcement paid for directly from the federal budget, and a mandate-driven restoration-credit market bringing private money into habitat recovery. A deep-sea mining moratorium that keeps a potentially enormous mineral resource in reserve and off-limits until the science says whether it can ever be taken without irreversible damage. A governance model that other nations can adopt.

Solution 4: Rebuild the Fisheries

American fisheries are already one of the country's great renewable industries, a harvest that replenishes itself every year as long as it is not overfished, and one of the clearest proofs that public management works. Science-based catch limits rebuilt 50 stocks since 2000 and drove overfishing to record lows. But

dozens of stocks are still overfished, and warming water is moving fish into new ranges faster than management can follow.

Fund the science that sets the limits. Accurate catch limits require accurate stock assessments, and too many stocks are assessed rarely or not at all. NOAA, financed by the RFC, will modernize and fully fund the national stock-assessment program, feeding it real-time data from the EEZ mapping and monitoring network built in Solution 3, closing the data gap on data-poor stocks, and building the models to track fish as warming water shifts them into new ranges. The Workforce chapter trains the stock-assessment scientists and at-sea monitors this requires.

Put monitoring on the water. Catch limits only work if someone checks the catch. The Mission will finance electronic monitoring, cameras and sensors on vessels, and human observer coverage, with the RFC and cost-share carrying the cost so the cost does not fall on small boats. The same monitoring cuts bycatch, the untargeted fish, turtles, and marine mammals killed in gear, and works alongside the gear-tracking program in Solution 1.

End overfishing and rebuild every depleted stock on a deadline. Every federally managed stock will fish within science-based limits, and every overfished stock will carry a rebuilding plan with a hard date, on the model that already returned 50 stocks to health. A rebuilt stock yields more fish every year, so a smaller catch now means a larger catch later.

A fair transition for fishers. Where catch limits or new protected areas shrink how much can be caught, the Mission will offer grant-funded payments and voluntary permit and vessel buyouts to right-size overcapitalized fleets, alongside RFC loans for those who modernize and stay. The buyouts will use the same tool that retired 90 boats from the Pacific groundfish fleet and left the survivors more profitable. The fishers there repaid that buyback themselves over 30 years, and this time the public will pay for it. The goal is a smaller fleet that catches healthier stocks and makes money.

Back the small boats. Federal money will favor owner-operators and community fisheries, with permit banks that keep access in the hands of working fishing communities. A rebuilt fishery should stay with the people who fish it.

Push illegal fishing out of American waters. The mapping and monitoring network will also help enforcement. The Coast Guard and the monitoring network will detect and interdict illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing in U.S. waters, and expanded seafood-import monitoring will keep illegally caught fish from undercutting American fishers at the dock, in step with the Foreign Policy chapter's oceans work.

What this delivers: Overfishing ended and every depleted stock rebuilt or on a firm timeline. Catch limits grounded in modern, near-real-time science. Monitored, accountable fisheries with less bycatch. A paid, voluntary transition that right-sizes fleets without bankrupting fishers. Illegal fishing pushed out of U.S. waters. An American fishing industry that lands more, from healthier stocks, decade over decade.

Presidential Leadership

The president will treat the ocean as America's largest territory. The ocean economy adds more than $500 billion a year to the nation's GDP, yet the ocean has been allowed to decline because few people ever see it. The president will say plainly what has gone wrong. Plastic producers pay nothing toward removing the plastic in the water. Mining companies want to dig up a seafloor no one has mapped. Fishing towns are hurt by ecological damage they did not cause and cannot fix on their own. And the agencies responsible for the ocean have lost staff and funding. The president will fix all four.

During the Campaign

The candidate makes the case in person. The candidate will promise the American public the cleanest, best-mapped, and most productive ocean on Earth, and will spell out what will happen in the first term. The companies that make plastic will start paying to clean it up. The first new marine monuments will be proclaimed. No one will mine the deep seafloor before the science is in. And the buybacks and rebuilding plans will start bringing the fishing communities back. Those first-term steps lead to the 10-year goal of 30 percent of American waters protected and the fisheries restored. The candidate will also go to the water in person, standing on a working fishing boat, walking through a shellfish hatchery that acidification nearly killed, and diving first a bleaching reef and then a restored oyster reef, showing the country what is being lost and naming the year each place will recover.

Long-lead groundwork. Because the mapping and coordination take time to stand up, the groundwork starts during the campaign. Volunteer ocean engineers, private survey firms, fishermen's cooperatives, shellfish growers, and coastal-state officials will pre-identify the priority survey areas, the first marine-monument candidates, and the first cleanup, restoration, and hatchery sites, so NOAA and the RFC can move the day the new administration is cleared to act. Private survey companies are already mapping seabed on their own, and the campaign will point to their work as an example of what a national effort will do.

The Transition

Name the people. The president-elect will pick an activist NOAA Administrator with a mandate to rebuild the agency and reopen the grants and enforcement that were frozen. The RFC's ocean team will be led by someone who has built a marine restoration or fishing business. The Interior Secretary will be ready to withdraw the seafloor from mining on Day One, and the Coast Guard will get a commandant who will make enforcement a priority.

Settle the first moves. The team will choose the first survey priority areas, the first marine national monuments, drawn from the under-protected continental-shelf and coastal waters since the remote Pacific is already largely protected, the first cleanup and restoration sites, the shellfish regions for the acidification-defense rollout, and the priority fisheries for the transition fund and the first voluntary buybacks.

Lock the tools with the RFC. With the RFC, the team will set the loan terms, the Ocean Cleanup Fund design, the marine restoration-credit metric and the offset-purchase rule that gives it demand, the fishery transition fund and buyback terms, and the pay-for-performance contracts for the mapping and cleanup fleets.

Draft the legislation. Counsel will write the opening legislative package during the transition so it is ready to go to Congress in the first weeks. It will authorize the RFC's ocean financing, create the Ocean Cleanup Fund and the fee on new plastic that pays for it, set the national packaging-waste standard, fund the Coordination Council and the 2:1 Match Fund, write the marine restoration-credit market into law, modernize the Magnuson-Stevens Act and fund the fishery transition, and lock the protected areas and the mining moratorium into statute so a later administration cannot quietly undo them.

Day One

The president will establish the National Coastal Coordination Council and its regional ocean councils by executive order, and direct NOAA to launch the EEZ mapping program, stand up the acidification early-warning network, and reopen the frozen conservation grants and enforcement. Using the Antiquities Act, the president will proclaim the first marine national monuments over the under-protected continental-shelf waters, drawn around the canyon and seamount habitats, coldwater corals, and spawning and migratory grounds that warrant protection, the fastest lawful step toward the 30-percent goal and one component of the protected-area network Congress will codify. Using the Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act, the president will withdraw the U.S. seafloor from commercial mineral leasing and direct NOAA to run the research needed to decide whether mining can ever be allowed. The president will direct the RFC to open ocean applications and stand up its mission team under existing authority, announcing the first commitments with named sites, dollars, and dates, the first recycling plants, the first restoration operators, the first mapping vessels, and the first hatcheries to be fitted against acidification. A procurement order will direct federal buyers toward recovered-plastic content, and a directive will make lost-gear reporting a condition of every federal fishing permit.

The First 100 Days

The legislation drafted during the transition will reach Congress, and the president will work the votes in person. The package will include the RFC's ocean financing line, the Ocean Cleanup Fund and its fee on new plastic, the national packaging-waste standard, the Coordination Council and the 2:1 Match Fund, the restoration-credit market, a modernized Magnuson-Stevens Act with money for the fishery transition, and the protected-area network and mining moratorium written into law so that a marine monument cannot be quietly reopened the way the Northeast Canyons monument was. The president will say publicly who is fighting it. The plastics and petrochemical industry will spend heavily against the fee and the packaging standard, and that will be the hardest fight. The deep-sea mining companies will fight the moratorium. And where commercial fishing resists new protected areas, the answer is the fair transition and the rebuilt stocks the Mission puts on the table, with confrontation saved for the holdouts. Members of Congress who block the Mission will find the president campaigning in their districts to replace them.

Running the Mission, Years 1–10

The president will publicly mark each new protected area, rebuilt reef, recovered fish stock, and cleared beach, and use each one to make the case for the Mission again. The president will defend the plastic fee, the packaging standard, and the restored protections against the industries that want them gone, and will fight in the open whenever a member of Congress or a coastal interest moves to stall a fix. Day to day, the RFC's mission team runs the financing and the long build, NOAA runs the science and the survey and the stock assessments, the Coast Guard enforces the protected areas and pushes out illegal fishing, and the Coordination Council settles the conflicts that used to end in court. By 2039 the country will have made its own waters the healthiest, best-monitored, and most productive large marine area on Earth.

What the 10-Year Mission Delivers

The ocean mission will cost on the order of tens of billions of dollars a year over a decade. That is roughly 10 times what the country now spends on ocean science, fisheries, and coastal management, and still well below the cost of rebuilding the power grid. Most of that money will be repaid. The industries that earn revenue, which are advanced recycling, kelp and aquaculture, and the supply side of restoration, will borrow from the RFC and repay the loans from their sales or from the contracts and credits they earn. The fee on new plastic will pay for the cleanup, and the Match Fund and the restoration-credit market will bring in state, tribal, philanthropic, and private dollars. The public will pay outright for the work that earns no revenue. That includes surveying the whole EEZ, running the monitoring and early-warning network, enforcing the protected areas, funding the stock science behind accurate catch limits, and carrying fishers through the transition. The country will pay for those the same way it pays for roads and coastal defense. A full 10-year cost estimate will accompany the legislation.

Foundations by Year 1 (2030)

- NOAA EEZ mapping program launched, first priority areas (known mineral deposits, proposed MPA sites) under survey
- National Coastal Coordination Council established by executive order, with regional ocean councils standing up
- RFC direct loan programs chartered and open for advanced recycling, coastal restoration, and kelp farming, with first capital committed
- First advanced recycling facilities financed by RFC loans and breaking ground, with state EPR fees providing demand
- Ocean Cleanup Fund capitalized through the virgin-plastic fee, and national EPR standard enacted
- National plastic-loading baseline survey completed, setting the measured total the 90 percent removal target is defined against

- Lost-gear reporting required as a condition of every federal fishing permit, and first retrieval programs standing up in priority fisheries (New England, Gulf, Pacific Northwest)
- Pay-for-performance contracts awarded for robotic skimmer prototypes, with the first domestic manufacturing facilities under development
- Coastal restoration lending established through state agencies and community lenders, with the first wave of projects funded
- Kelp farming loans closed and first new operations breaking ground along the Pacific and Atlantic coasts
- MPA designation process launched using NOAA mapping data, and first new fully protected areas established
- First offshore wind lease areas screened against the mapping data for habitat and migratory-corridor conflicts through the regional ocean councils
- First marine monitoring buoys deployed in priority areas, with data beginning to flow to Cooldown's Planetary Dashboard
- Ocean-acidification early-warning network stood up, and first Pacific Northwest shellfish hatcheries fitted with RFC-financed intake buffering
- First MPAs enforced with directly funded patrols and satellite monitoring
- NOAA marine restoration-credit metric in pilot, and the offset-purchase requirement drafted for EEZ impact permits
- Stock-assessment modernization funded and underway, starting with data-poor stocks
- Fishery transition fund stood up, with the first voluntary buyouts and income-support payments
- Electronic-monitoring rollout beginning in priority fisheries
- Workforce training programs launched at coastal community colleges and technical schools

Scale Up by Year 5 (2034)

- EEZ habitat survey 50%+ complete, with detailed habitat data publicly available for surveyed areas
- Advanced recycling industry processing recovered marine plastic at commercial scale, with feedstock constraints easing
- Robotic skimmer fleet in production, with the first units deployed across priority cleanup zones
- Ghost-gear retrieval programs operating across priority fisheries on both coasts and the Gulf
- Coastal restoration spending at $2 billion or more per year through combined RFC, federal, state, and philanthropic funding
- Mississippi-basin nutrient reduction program underway with the Farming chapter, and the Gulf dead zone trending toward the federal-state target
- Oyster reef restoration costs declining as standardized nursery and deployment methods reach scale
- Heat-tolerant coral strains in nursery production, with the first pilot transplants onto degraded reefs in Florida and Hawaii under survival monitoring
- Coral gene-banking capacity in place for marine heat-wave rescue
- Kelp farming industry at first industrial-scale harvest and processing, supplying bioplastic feedstock and soil amendments to domestic markets

- Asparagopsis production piloted as a livestock methane additive, pending commercial validation
- 15%+ of U.S. EEZ designated as fully protected MPAs, enforced by directly funded patrols and monitoring
- Offset-purchase requirement in force and the marine restoration-credit market operating
- Migratory blue corridors established linking MPAs along Atlantic, Pacific, and Gulf migration routes
- New offshore wind lease areas sited through the regional ocean councils on the EEZ map, clear of sensitive habitat and blue corridors
- NOAA deep-sea research program operational, with commercial mining on hold until the science is in
- Marine monitoring network at initial operating capability across priority regions
- Aquaculture expansion underway in NOAA Opportunity Areas
- Ocean-acidification early-warning data flowing to shellfish hatcheries and growers coastwide
- RFC-financed intake buffering and resistant-oyster breeding programs operating in the Pacific Northwest and expanding to other shellfish regions
- Overfishing ended on all but a handful of federally managed stocks, with rebuilding plans on deadline for those still depleted
- Electronic monitoring across the major fleets, with illegal-fishing detection built into the monitoring network

The Mission Delivered by Year 10 (2039)

- Full EEZ map complete, with every square nautical mile surveyed and the data published openly
- 90% of large floating plastic removed annually from U.S. waters, and ghost gear retrieval at full scale
- Domestic advanced recycling industry self-sustaining, processing marine and land-sourced plastic
- Coastal ecosystems in net recovery: loss rates reversed across oyster reefs, kelp forests, mangroves, salt marshes, and seagrass meadows
- Coral held alive, with heat-tolerant strains deployed and monitored at reefs across Florida, Hawaii, and the territories, and the genetic stock secured in gene banks, while full recovery waits on falling ocean temperatures
- Kelp farming industry at industrial scale, integrated into bioplastics and agricultural supply chains
- Sustainable aquaculture expanded significantly, producing affordable protein without depleting freshwater or arable land
- Acidification early-warning and intake-buffering operating coastwide across shellfish regions
- Overfishing ended and depleted stocks rebuilt or on firm rebuilding trajectories, with catch limits set by modern, near-real-time science
- American fisheries landing more from healthier stocks than at the Mission's start
- 30% of U.S. EEZ fully protected and enforced through direct public funding
- Mandate-driven restoration-credit market bringing private money into habitat recovery at scale
- Deep-sea mining decision reached on the basis of years of open scientific study, with any commercial framework carrying the strictest environmental standards in the world
- Marine monitoring network fully operational, feeding real-time data to the Planetary Dashboard
- 115,000+ new workers employed across the ocean economy

- U.S. EEZ governance model published as an open framework, with the United States convening international partners on ocean mapping, MPA, and seabed-mining standards
- The U.S. EEZ is the healthiest, best-monitored, and most economically productive large marine area on Earth