

117TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

S. 1894

To designate Regional Ocean Partnerships of the National Oceanic and
Atmospheric Administration, and for other purposes.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

MAY 27, 2021

Mr. WICKER introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred
to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation

A BILL

To designate Regional Ocean Partnerships of the National
Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and for other
purposes.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Regional Ocean Part-
5 nership Act”.

6 **SEC. 2. FINDINGS; SENSE OF CONGRESS; PURPOSES.**

7 (a) FINDINGS.—Congress makes the following find-
8 ings:

9 (1) The ocean and coastal waters of the United
10 States are foundational to the economy, security,

1 global competitiveness, and well-being of the United
2 States and continuously serve the people of the
3 United States and other countries as an important
4 source of food, energy, economic productivity, recre-
5 ation, beauty, and enjoyment.

6 (2) Over many years, the resource productivity
7 and water quality of the ocean and coastal areas of
8 the United States have been diminished by pollution,
9 increasing population demands, economic develop-
10 ment, and natural and man-made hazard events,
11 both acute and chronic.

12 (3) Ocean and coastal areas of the United
13 States are managed by State and Federal resource
14 agencies and regulated on an interstate and regional
15 scale by various overlapping Federal authorities,
16 thereby creating a significant need for interstate co-
17 ordination to enhance regional priorities, including
18 the ecological and economic health of those areas.

19 (4) Tribal governments have unique expertise
20 and knowledge important for the stewardship of the
21 ocean and coastal waters of the United States.

22 (b) SENSE OF CONGRESS.—It is the sense of Con-
23 gress that—

24 (1) the United States should seek to support
25 interstate coordination of shared regional priorities

1 relating to the management, conservation, resilience,
2 and restoration of ocean and coastal areas to maxi-
3 mize efficiencies through collaborative regional ef-
4 forts by Regional Ocean Partnerships, in consulta-
5 tion with Federal and State agencies, Tribal govern-
6 ments, and local authorities;

7 (2) such efforts would enhance existing and ef-
8 fective State coastal management efforts based on
9 shared regional priorities; and

10 (3) Regional Ocean Partnerships should consult
11 with Tribal governments and may include represen-
12 tation from Tribal governments.

13 (c) PURPOSES.—The purposes of this Act are as fol-
14 lows:

15 (1) To complement and expand cooperative vol-
16 untary efforts intended to manage and restore ocean
17 and coastal areas spanning across multiple State
18 boundaries.

19 (2) To expand Federal support for monitoring,
20 data management, and restoration activities in ocean
21 and coastal areas.

22 (3) To commit the United States to a com-
23 prehensive cooperative program to achieve improved
24 water quality in, and improvements in the produc-
25 tivity of living resources of, all coastal ecosystems.

1 (4) To authorize Regional Ocean Partnerships
2 as intergovernmental coordinators for shared inter-
3 state and regional priorities relating to the collabo-
4 rative management of the large marine ecosystems,
5 thereby reducing duplication of efforts and maxi-
6 mizing opportunities to leverage support in the
7 ocean and coastal regions.

8 (5) To empower States to take a lead role in
9 managing oceans and coasts.

10 (6) To incorporate Tribal interests in the man-
11 agement of oceans and coasts and provide funding
12 to support Tribal ocean and coastal resiliency activi-
13 ties in coordination with Regional Ocean Partner-
14 ships.

15 (7) To enable Regional Ocean Partnerships, or
16 designated fiscal management entities of such part-
17 nerships, to receive Federal funding to conduct the
18 scientific research, conservation and restoration ac-
19 tivities, and priority coordination on shared regional
20 priorities necessary to achieve the purposes described
21 in paragraphs (1) through (6).

22 **SEC. 3. REGIONAL OCEAN PARTNERSHIPS.**

23 (a) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

1 (1) ADMINISTRATOR.—The term “Adminis-
2 trator” means the Administrator of the National
3 Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

4 (2) COASTAL STATE.—The term “coastal state”
5 has the meaning given that term in section 304 of
6 the Coastal Zone Management Act of 1972 (16
7 U.S.C. 1453).

8 (3) INDIAN TRIBE.—The term “Indian Tribe”
9 has the meaning given that term in section 4 of the
10 Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance
11 Act (25 U.S.C. 5304).

12 (4) INSTITUTION OF HIGHER EDUCATION.—The
13 term “institution of higher education” has the
14 meaning given that term in section 101 of the High-
15 er Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 1001).

16 (b) REGIONAL OCEAN PARTNERSHIPS.—

17 (1) IN GENERAL.—A coastal state may partici-
18 pate in a Regional Ocean Partnership with one or
19 more other coastal states that share a common
20 ocean or coastal area with the coastal state, without
21 regard to whether the coastal states are contiguous.

22 (2) APPLICATION.—The Governor of a coastal
23 state or the Governors of a group of coastal states
24 may apply to the Secretary of Commerce, on behalf
25 of a partnership, for the partnership to receive des-

1 ignation as a Regional Ocean Partnership if the
2 partnership—

3 (A) meets the requirements under para-
4 graph (3); and

5 (B) submits an application for such des-
6 ignation in such manner, in such form, and
7 containing such information as the Secretary
8 may require.

9 (3) REQUIREMENTS.—A partnership is eligible
10 for designation as a Regional Ocean Partnership by
11 the Secretary under paragraph (2) if the partner-
12 ship—

13 (A) is established to coordinate the inter-
14 state management of ocean and coastal re-
15 sources;

16 (B) focuses on the environmental issues af-
17 fecting the ocean and coastal areas of the mem-
18 bers participating in the partnership;

19 (C) complements existing State coastal and
20 ocean management efforts on an interstate
21 scale, focusing on shared regional priorities;

22 (D) does not have a regulatory function;
23 and

1 (E) is not duplicative of an existing Re-
 2 gional Ocean Partnership designated under
 3 paragraph (4), as determined by the Secretary.

4 (4) DESIGNATION OF CERTAIN ENTITIES AS RE-
 5 GIONAL OCEAN PARTNERSHIPS.—Notwithstanding
 6 paragraph (2) or (3), the following entities are des-
 7 ignated as Regional Ocean Partnerships:

8 (A) The Gulf of Mexico Alliance, comprised
 9 of the States of Alabama, Florida, Louisiana,
 10 Mississippi, and Texas.

11 (B) The Northeast Regional Ocean Coun-
 12 cil, comprised of the States of Maine, Vermont,
 13 New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Connecticut,
 14 and Rhode Island.

15 (C) The Mid-Atlantic Regional Council on
 16 the Ocean, comprised of the States of New
 17 York, New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland, and
 18 Virginia.

19 (D) The West Coast Ocean Alliance, com-
 20 prised of the States of California, Oregon, and
 21 Washington and the coastal Indian Tribes
 22 therein.

23 (c) GOVERNING BODIES OF REGIONAL OCEAN PART-
 24 NERSHIPS.—

1 (1) IN GENERAL.—A Regional Ocean Partner-
 2 ship designated under subsection (b) shall be gov-
 3 erned by a governing body.

4 (2) MEMBERSHIP.—A governing body described
 5 in paragraph (1)—

6 (A) shall be comprised, at a minimum, of
 7 voting members from each coastal state partici-
 8 pating in the Regional Ocean Partnership, des-
 9 ignated by the Governor of the coastal state;
 10 and

11 (B) may include such other members as
 12 the partnership considers appropriate.

13 (d) FUNCTIONS.—A Regional Ocean Partnership des-
 14 ignated under subsection (b) may perform the following
 15 functions:

16 (1) Promote coordination of the actions of the
 17 agencies of coastal states participating in the part-
 18 nership with the actions of the appropriate officials
 19 of Federal agencies and State and Tribal govern-
 20 ments in developing strategies—

21 (A) to conserve living resources, increase
 22 valuable habitats, enhance coastal resilience and
 23 ocean management, promote ecological and eco-
 24 nomic health, and address such other issues re-
 25 lated to the shared ocean or coastal area as are

1 determined to be a shared, regional priority by
2 those states; and

3 (B) to manage regional data portals and
4 develop associated data products for purposes
5 that support the priorities of the partnership.

6 (2) In cooperation with appropriate Federal and
7 State agencies, Tribal governments, and local au-
8 thorities, develop and implement specific action
9 plans to carry out coordination goals.

10 (3) Coordinate and implement priority plans
11 and projects, and facilitate science, research, mod-
12 eling, monitoring, data collection, and other activi-
13 ties that support the goals of the partnership
14 through the provision of grants and contracts under
15 subsection (f).

16 (4) Engage, coordinate, and collaborate with
17 relevant governmental entities and stakeholders to
18 address ocean and coastal related matters that re-
19 quire interagency or intergovernmental solutions.

20 (5) Implement outreach programs for public in-
21 formation, education, and participation to foster
22 stewardship of the resources of the ocean and coast-
23 al areas, as relevant.

24 (6) Develop and make available, through publi-
25 cations, technical assistance, and other appropriate

1 means, information pertaining to cross-jurisdictional
2 issues being addressed through the coordinated ac-
3 tivities of the partnership.

4 (7) Serve as a liaison with, and provide infor-
5 mation to, international counterparts, as appropriate
6 on priority issues for the partnership.

7 (e) CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT.—A Regional
8 Ocean Partnership designated under subsection (b) shall
9 maintain mechanisms for consultation and engagement
10 with the following:

11 (1) The Federal Government.

12 (2) Tribal governments.

13 (3) Nongovernmental entities, including aca-
14 demic organizations, nonprofit organizations, and
15 businesses.

16 (f) GRANTS AND CONTRACTS.—

17 (1) IN GENERAL.—A Regional Ocean Partner-
18 ship designated under subsection (b) may, in coordi-
19 nation with existing Federal and State management
20 programs, from amounts made available to the part-
21 nership by the Administrator or the head of another
22 Federal agency provide grants and enter into con-
23 tracts for the purposes described in paragraph (2).

24 (2) PURPOSES.—The purposes described in this
25 paragraph include any of the following:

1 (A) Monitoring the water quality and living
2 resources of multi-State ocean and coastal eco-
3 systems and coastal communities.

4 (B) Researching and addressing the effects
5 of natural and human-induced environmental
6 changes on—

- 7 (i) ocean and coastal ecosystems; and
8 (ii) coastal communities.

9 (C) Developing and executing cooperative
10 strategies that—

- 11 (i) address regional data issues identi-
12 fied by the partnership; and

- 13 (ii) will result in more effective man-
14 agement of common ocean and coastal
15 areas.

16 (g) REPORT REQUIRED.—

17 (1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 5 years after
18 the date of the enactment of this Act, the Adminis-
19 trator, in coordination with the Regional Ocean
20 Partnerships designated under subsection (b), shall
21 submit to Congress a report on the partnerships.

22 (2) REPORT REQUIREMENTS.—The report re-
23 quired by paragraph (1) shall include the following:

1 (A) An assessment of the overall status of
2 the work of the Regional Ocean Partnerships
3 designated under subsection (b).

4 (B) An assessment of the effectiveness of
5 the partnerships in supporting regional prior-
6 ities relating to the management of common
7 ocean and coastal areas.

8 (C) An identification of any duplication of
9 efforts between the partnerships and other enti-
10 ties.

11 (D) An assessment of the benefits and
12 costs of the partnerships.

13 (E) An assessment of the effectiveness of
14 the strategies that the partnerships are sup-
15 porting or implementing and the extent to
16 which the priority needs of the regions covered
17 by the partnerships are being met through such
18 strategies.

19 (F) An assessment of how the efforts of
20 the partnerships support or enhance Federal
21 and State efforts consistent with the purposes
22 of this Act.

23 (G) Such recommendations as the Admin-
24 istrator may have for improving—

1 (i) efforts of the partnerships to sup-
2 port the purposes of this Act; and

3 (ii) collective strategies that support
4 the purposes of this Act in coordination
5 and consultation with all relevant Federal,
6 State, and Tribal entities.

7 (H) The distribution of funds from each
8 partnership for each fiscal year covered by the
9 report.

10 (h) AVAILABILITY OF FEDERAL FUNDS.—In addition
11 to amounts made available to the Regional Ocean Partner-
12 ships designated under subsection (b) by the Adminis-
13 trator under this section, the head of any other Federal
14 agency may provide grants to, enter into contracts with,
15 or otherwise provide funding to such partnerships.

16 (i) AUTHORITIES.—Nothing in this section estab-
17 lishes any new legal or regulatory authority of the Na-
18 tional Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration or of the
19 Regional Ocean Partnerships designated under subsection
20 (b), other than—

21 (1) the authority of the Administrator to pro-
22 vide amounts to the partnerships; and

23 (2) the authority of the partnerships to provide
24 grants and enter into contracts under subsection (f).

25 (j) FUNDING.—

1 (1) REGIONAL OCEAN PARTNERSHIPS.—There
2 are authorized to be appropriated to the National
3 Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration the fol-
4 lowing amounts to be made available to the Regional
5 Ocean Partnerships designated under subsection (b)
6 or designated fiscal management entities of such
7 partnerships to carry out activities of the partner-
8 ships under this Act:

9 (A) \$10,100,000 for fiscal year 2022.

10 (B) \$10,202,000 for fiscal year 2023.

11 (C) \$10,306,040 for fiscal year 2024.

12 (D) \$10,412,160 for fiscal year 2025.

13 (E) \$10,520,404 for fiscal year 2026.

14 (2) DISTRIBUTION OF AMOUNTS.—Amounts
15 made available under paragraph (1) shall be divided
16 evenly among the Regional Ocean Partnerships des-
17 ignated under subsection (b).

18 (3) TRIBAL CONSULTATION.—There is author-
19 ized to be appropriated to the National Oceanic and
20 Atmospheric Administration \$1,000,000 for each of
21 fiscal years 2022 through 2026 for Indian Tribes to
22 be distributed for purposes of participation in or en-
23 gagement with the Regional Ocean Partnerships.

24 (4) DERIVATION.—Funds to carry out the ac-
25 tivities under this Act shall be derived from amounts

1 authorized to be appropriated pursuant to para-
2 graphs (1) and (3) that are appropriated after the
3 date of the enactment of this Act.

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