



July 21, 2016

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Mr. Grover Fugate
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Chief Richard Getchell
Tribal Co-Lead, NE Regional Planning Body
All Nations Consulting
P.O. Box 326
Mapleton, ME 04757

RE: Comments on Draft Northeast Regional Ocean Plan

Dear Regional Planning Body Co-leads:

The New England Science & Sailing (NESS) Foundation is a non-profit ocean adventure education program which teaches marine science through on-the-water learning to engage the minds and expand the horizons of everyone who comes through our program. Our students, both young and old, come from all across Connecticut to get out on the water through fun, recreational activities, increase their ocean science literacy, and become stewards for environment. The NESS program shows outstanding results, teaching students to love and appreciate the ocean while expanding their knowledge of science and their states most prized natural resource.

NESS has a strong interest in preserving the quality of our states coastal resources. A healthy, ecologically diverse ocean is vital to our mission, which ultimately depends on the long-term health of the northeastern Atlantic and the Long Island Sound. We know the experiential education and opportunity for personal transformation that our programs provide are doing a world of good for the audience we reach. Our interest in ocean planning is thus to ensure continued access to ecologically diverse areas for education. By ensuring access to important locations we will continue to foster a love

and appreciation for our ocean and coastal ecosystems, and build a strong future of engaged users who will benefit from and be invested in ocean management for decades to come. It is with that in mind, that we submit our comments on the Northeast Regional Ocean Plan.

We would like to commend the Northeast Regional Planning Body (RPB) for their efforts to characterize, to the fullest extent possible, the recreational uses that comprise New England's coastal and marine regions. Particularly, the inclusion of maps portraying water trails, boat launches, wildlife management areas and national wildlife refuges, as well as nearshore and offshore recreational activity points, board and paddle events, and SCUBA locations are exceptionally beneficial to our organizations long-term functionality. Further, we appreciate the efforts the RPB undertook to collect data on recreational boaters through the Northeast Recreational Boater Survey. This is an important step to keeping all recreational users at the table when important decisions are being made, and ensure locations that we use for education and value for their ecological beauty and diversity are not compromised by changing uses. By ensuring that locations of key interest to the recreational and educational community are represented through the Northeast Ocean Data Portal, we are given the opportunity to be fully considered when decisions are being made which, before now, has not been fully realized. Ensuring recreation is considered in permitting decisions in the coastal or offshore space is of the upmost importance to NESS. **We ask the RPB to hold firm on its commitments to consider recreation in management decisions.**

While we value the RPB's efforts to collect recreational data, we ask the RPB to continue to characterize the recreational community and enhance the information available, and urge frequent updates on this data. Specifically, in the recreation sub-chapter, the RPB agencies commit under Action One and Two to maintain existing maps and data on the portal and develop and incorporate additional data about recreational activities when available. As recreational boaters and ocean users, these commitments are essential to ensuring the safety and security of the youth who participate in our programs. We are pleased to see a strong characterization of the recreational community, and look forward to helping identify and fill information gaps. By ensuring the data currently in the plan is updated at frequent intervals to characterize where and how recreational users, such as NESS, use the ocean as well as ensuring agencies follow through on their commitments, we can ensure our students continue to reap the benefits of such a diverse living classroom. Moreover, we urge the RPB to commit the appropriate funding to ensure successful revisions and updates to recreational data occur. **The data portal must be maintained with appropriate funding for the ocean plan to be successful long-term.**

As the plan enters in to the implementation phase, we ask the RPB to ensure the various agency commitments are fully adhered to, especially with respect to recreational stakeholder engagement. As recreational users in a highly trafficked region, we are frequently concerned about changes and modifications to marine transportation routes and densities. In the plan, agencies have committed to fully consider whether new offshore projects or management activities may affect existing recreational activities, including areas that are highly trafficked by recreational vessels. Further, the Northeast Ocean Data Portal contains information on a wide range of recreational activities, which will enable regulatory agencies to find those activities or events that are most likely to be impacted and to identify the appropriate stakeholders to engage for additional information. **We urge the RPB to hold firm on their commitments to engage stakeholders early in the decision-making process.**

While fully committing to updating existing data is essential, we are very pleased to see Chapter Five include a goal of improving the regions understanding of human activities and coastal communities, and particularly for calling out the recreational community as a primary research target. Our program

provides through education, social interactions, and cultural ties for students both young and old numerous non-marked values. We are proud of these non-market values and know the benefit they provide to the community. NESS looks forward to working with the RPB to help better characterize these recreational non-market values and further characterize recreational ocean uses as part of the research and science agenda for the region.

Again, we thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Draft Northeast Regional Ocean Plan, and congratulate the RPB on the tremendous work it has accomplished thus far. We look forward to continuing to work with the RPB to make the plan and its implementation as strong and successful as possible for all ocean users.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mary Ann Horrigan". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Mary Ann Horrigan
NESS Program Director