

SOLVING THE CLIMATE CRISIS

The Congressional Action Plan for a Clean Energy Economy and a Healthy, Resilient, and Just America

Maximizing Ocean-Based Climate Solutions

Ocean and wetland ecosystems provide critical climate benefits, serving as highly effective carbon sinks and protecting shorelines from flooding and storms. However, the quality and quantity of wetlands in America are rapidly declining. Approximately half of the wetlands in the contiguous United States have been lost or degraded, primarily to agricultural uses and human development. When wetlands disappear, so does their ability to sequester carbon and buffer the impacts of climate change for communities and wildlife. At the same time, warming temperatures are threatening the health of these “blue carbon” ecosystems, causing ocean acidification, harmful algal blooms, biodiversity decline, and shifting fish stocks.



PROTECT AND RESTORE OCEAN AND WETLAND ECOSYSTEMS FOR CLIMATE MITIGATION AND RESILIENCE

To maximize the climate benefits of blue carbon ecosystems and help them adapt to a warming climate, the United States must expand protections for existing ocean and coastal areas, increase investments in wetland restoration, and establish strong interagency coordination for conservation and research in ocean and coastal health.

CONGRESS SHOULD:

Establish a national goal of protecting at least 30% of U.S. wetlands and ocean areas by 2030, including increasing Marine Protected Areas and investments in new and existing programs aimed at ocean and wetland conservation and restoration.

Foster coordination among ocean management agencies, states, and tribes that oversee marine health, conservation, and development by restoring, strengthening, and codifying a National Ocean Policy.

Bolster climate resilience of ocean and coastal ecosystems and aquatic wildlife by addressing ocean acidification and harmful algal blooms and ensuring responsibly sited ocean-based renewable energy to minimize impacts on marine mammals and fisheries.

Prepare American fisheries and fishing communities for climate change impacts by incorporating climate adaptation into fisheries management.

Increase investments in natural infrastructure to protect coastal communities and ecosystems while providing valuable co-benefits, such as climate mitigation, wildlife habitat, and water quality.

Advance understanding of the climate benefits of ocean and coastal ecosystems by increasing support and investments in research, data collection, and mapping of blue carbon ecosystems.