



An illustration of how potential conflicts make ocean planning valuable. Credit: NOAA

It's not exactly been the best of weeks for those of us committed to environmental protection, and it doesn't look like the best of years coming up. But there is some good news, even in these difficult times. Two items in particular have helped lift the gloom for me this week.

First, the [National Ocean Council](#), a little-known group of cabinet-level officials and White House personnel [created by President Obama in 2010](#), approved Regional Ocean plans for the [northeast](#) and [mid-Atlantic](#) regions. These plans, the first to be finalized, are the concrete products of the outgoing administration's National Ocean Policy. They were produced by regional planning bodies — voluntary, non-regulatory groups that bring together the many entities, federal, state, and tribal, with authority over ocean uses. The planning bodies have facilitated agreement on ocean management goals, proved to be effective nodes for communication with a wide range of stakeholders, and established impressive data portals for compiling and sharing information about ocean resources.

Of course, the National Ocean Policy and National Ocean Council, which were established by Executive Order, may meet a quick end in the next administration. David Helvarg, writing for National Geographic's [Ocean Views blog](#), expects the National Ocean Policy to be “scuttled” because, in his words, “[some Republicans consider it the Obamacare of the Ocean](#).” As with Obamacare, however, key elements of the National Ocean Policy may prove sticky. The coordination it established seems likely to survive in some form because it has proven useful to agencies, industry, and other key stakeholders. Both the Vice Commandant

of the Coast Guard and the Vice President for Permitting at Deepwater Wind made that point at a [recent briefing on ocean policy](#) at the [Center for American Progress](#).

Second, California's Department of Fish and Wildlife released its final [Gray Wolf Conservation Plan](#). Gray wolves, which were listed under the California Endangered Species Act in 2014, are not exactly common in California at the moment. A pair seem to be living in Lassen County, and another pair produced pups last year in Siskiyou County. That's about it. To its credit, CDFW is thinking ahead to how it might manage both wolves and controversy should a larger population become established in the state. To that end, the agency has engaged a wide variety of stakeholders, including agricultural, hunting, animal welfare, and conservation organizations. Its efforts are a welcome reminder that state conservation efforts don't have to stop in an unfriendly federal climate, and that conservation need not be a partisan or divisive issue.



A gray wolf photographed in Lassen County, California, in 2015. Credit: California Department of Fish and Wildlife