

Executive Summary

THE CRITICAL NEED FOR A STRATEGIC POLICY PLAN

Florida's Blue Economy is based on its ocean and coastal resources. It is large, diversified, and critical to the state's prosperity and people's quality of life. However, due to declining water quality, damaged natural habitats, and vulnerability of both human-built and natural infrastructure, Florida's Blue Economy is at risk. To generate a roadmap for Florida's leaders and policymakers to protect, restore, and grow the state's Blue Economy, the Florida Legislature awarded a grant to the Florida Ocean Alliance to create a Strategic Policy Plan for Florida's Oceans and Coasts (referred to as the Strategic Policy Plan or Plan).

This Strategic Policy Plan builds on efforts by citizens, governmental agencies, legislators, and Governor DeSantis, including the 2020 Florida Legislature Clean Waterways Act (Senate Bill 712) and Public Financing of Construction Projects (Senate Bill 178). This Plan and its recommendations are a call for bold actions to implement a comprehensive and integrated ocean and coastal policy for Florida's Blue Economy.

Florida has essential, valuable, and iconic natural resources and human-built infrastructure along its 8,436 miles of coastline, the second longest coastline among U.S. states and territories (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, 2019a). These assets create a sustainable and profitable economy in the state. An economic analysis undertaken by the Florida Ocean Alliance, using the most recent annual economic data available from 2018, reveals the magnitude and importance of Florida's Blue Economy:

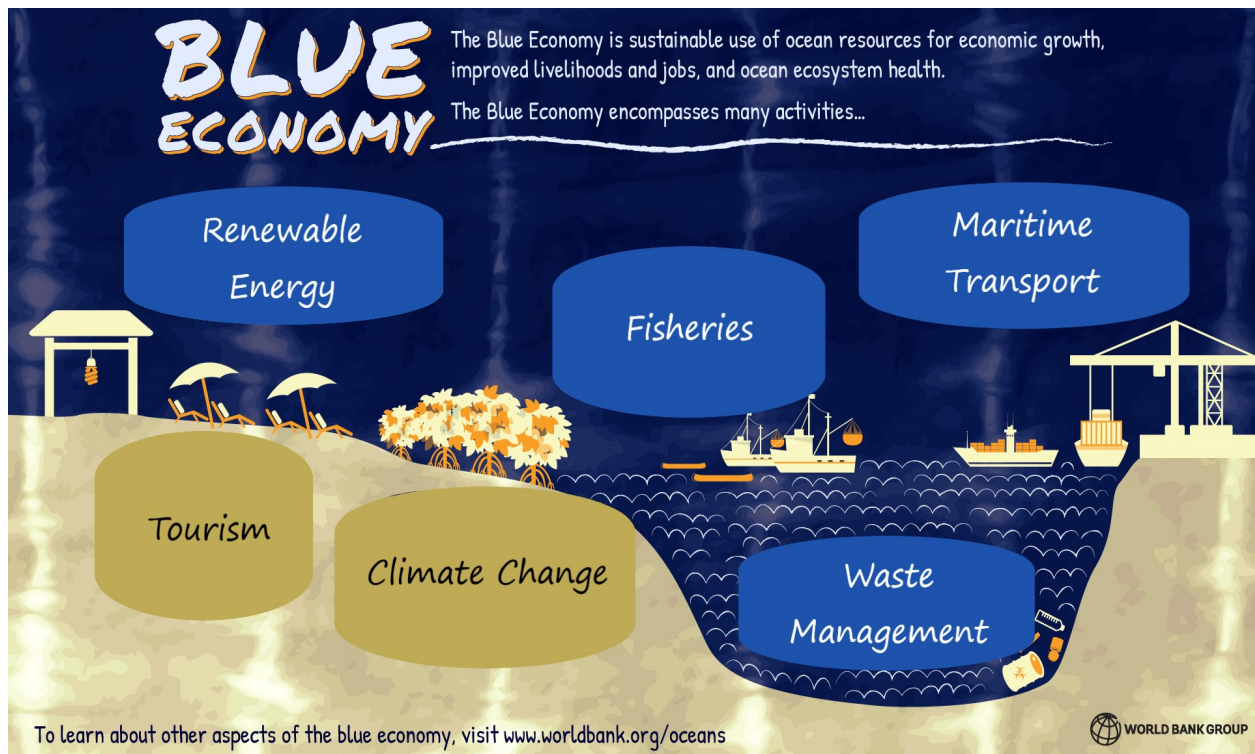
- Florida's coastal counties generated more than \$797 billion of economic value or 77% of the state's more than \$1 trillion economy.
- Direct and indirect use of ocean and coastal resources contributed \$73.9 billion to the state's economy.
- More than one million jobs in Florida were directly and indirectly created by activities that used ocean and coastal resources.

Understanding the threats to Florida's Blue Economy is critical to mitigation and effective planning. Two important types of threats are those primarily generated locally, such as pollution, failing and inadequate infrastructure, and poverty, and those arising from global changes or events, such as sea level rise, increase in extreme storms, and pandemics. Beyond their individual impacts, global threats can exacerbate the effects of local threats. Now, more than ever, strategic planning and actions are needed to address these threats and reduce their impacts on Florida's Blue Economy.



The Blue Economy consists of a diverse range of established and emerging ocean and coastal industry sectors that include tourism, commercial and recreational fisheries, aquaculture, ports, maritime industries, transportation, communications, and energy.

The COVID-19 pandemic that began affecting Florida in March 2020 has resulted in tragic loss of life and significant direct and indirect economic losses. As public and private agencies move from emergency response to recovery, long-term investment and management solutions are needed. Florida has an opportunity to make strategic decisions and investments in its Blue Economy to restore prosperity, improve resilience, and promote sustainability. This Plan focuses on vulnerabilities, threats, and opportunities that existed before the pandemic and will persist after it. In addition, the supporting economic report provides an essential baseline for the pre-COVID Blue Economy that can be used to evaluate short-term economic impacts and long-term recovery.



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FOUR KEY ISSUES AND CROSS-CUTTING THEMES

Created with public and private input, this Strategic Policy Plan outlines strategies and actions that will lead to a stronger Blue Economy and more secure future. It focuses on four key interrelated issues:

- **Blue Economy** – Developing and expanding the resources that support a major portion of Florida's economy.
- **Ocean and coastal resilience** – Ensuring the elements of Florida's Blue Economy are more resilient to the effects of local and global threats.
- **Human and natural infrastructure** – Improving the water, wastewater, stormwater, power infrastructure, and natural habitats that support Florida's diverse and valuable living resources.
- **Implementation, outreach, and financing** – Building and sustaining broad support and partnerships for executing the Plan with accountability and transparency.

Several cross-cutting themes were identified as vital to success of this Plan:

- **Transformational action** – Provide resilience for Florida's oceans and coasts and obtain associated economic benefits via partnerships among state and local governments, industries and businesses, non-governmental organizations, universities and research institutions, and the public to implement fundamental changes.
- **Innovation** – Incentivize technologies; develop a highly trained and skilled workforce; and applying bold and new approaches to planning, regulation, and management of Florida's oceans and coasts.
- **Equity** – Ensure the costs and benefits associated with actions are distributed fairly to all socioeconomic categories and communities.
- **Integration** – Maximize beneficial outcomes by establishing a statewide framework for communication of proposed actions, coordination to ensure compatibility, cooperation for effective and efficient use of resources, and collaboration to achieve success.
- **Education and outreach** – Promote awareness, understanding, and active engagement through clear, consistent, and factual messages to the public.
- **Funding** – Develop a talented workforce, improve aging infrastructure, enhance coastal community resilience, improve data collection and monitoring, and use clean technologies by leveraging existing resources and making strategic investments.

VISION OF SUCCESS

As Florida, the nation, and the world recover from COVID-19, strategic planning, action, and investment are imperative to position the state for a more rapid recovery, sustained economic stability, growth, and prosperity. By integrating the high-priority actions of this Plan and building on the actions taken by the 2020 Florida Legislature, we envision the following Florida of the future:

In the year 2030, Florida has become an international leader in ocean and coastal issues by investing in innovative technologies and solutions that address resilience and sustainability, restore clean coastal waters, improve air quality, and deliver measurable ecological and economic value and returns to the state. Floridians recognize and embrace oceans, coasts, bays, estuaries, and beaches as the heart of the state's identity, quality of life, and economy, and they support investments in sustainable actions.

With a common vision and by working together, we can accomplish these goals.

HIGH-PRIORITY STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS

High-priority strategies and actions have been identified that can be implemented in the near-term, without a need for extensive resources (**Table 1**). Taking these steps, as soon as possible, will allow for economic expansion and improved resilience.

The top priority action is to create a forward-thinking, innovative, statewide, public-private partnership under the Executive Office of the Governor, similar to Space Florida, CareerSource Florida, and other executive-level state partnerships. The purpose of this public-private partnership is to bring together key representatives from the public sector and private industry so they can apply their experience, expertise, and resources to solving ocean and coastal issues. This structure would provide a connected leadership that is critical to the implementation of the Plan.

Creation of a public-private partnership under the Executive Office of the Governor is the critical first step to implementing the Plan and building a stronger Blue Economy.

Table 1. High-Priority Strategies and Actions for the New Public-Private Partnership

After the public-private partnership is established, the following strategies and actions for the four key issues are the priority for implementation.		
Issue	Strategy	Actions
Blue Economy	Understand, support, and expand Florida’s Blue Economy.	Evaluate risk-based vulnerabilities in ocean and coastal industries, small businesses, and supply chains to determine where key investments will increase resilience and protect the economy.
		Prepare a sustainable blueprint for Florida’s Blue Economy that focuses on resilience, innovation, and synergies between key ocean and coastal industry sectors and the workforce.
Ocean and Coastal Resilience	Foster resilience to local and global threats.	Make policy changes to position Florida as a leader in identifying, developing, and using clean technologies to improve community health and economic resilience.
		Prepare a statewide analysis of current and future risks and vulnerabilities in human-built and natural infrastructure and devise actions to ameliorate risks, including funding and incentives for implementation.
		Update standards and permits for human-built and natural infrastructure to incorporate designs and practices that provide better protection from the impacts of climate change and other local and global threats.
Human and Natural Infrastructure	Ignite and sustain the Blue Economy by investing in 21 st century approaches to restoring, protecting, and improving human and natural systems.	Prioritize replacement and upgrades to coastal human-built and natural infrastructure (e.g. wastewater, stormwater, potable water, bridges, roads, energy networks, living shorelines, coral reefs, beach nourishment) to improve water and air quality, treatment efficiencies, and resilience.
		Engage with state and federal partners to invest in ocean and coastal clean water and air infrastructure projects that create jobs, diversify the workforce, advance the Blue Economy, and improve human and ecological health.
		Protect, restore, and manage coastal and marine habitats and living resources that have a critical need for intervention by reducing pollution and other local threats, and mitigating impacts from climate change.
Implementation, Outreach, and Financing	Develop partnerships that leverage resources.	Coordinate with all partners and the Florida Legislature to establish new and innovative mechanisms to incentivize investments in ocean and coastal planning, restoration, and stewardship.
		Require accountability and transparency from all partners responsible for implementing actions.

For further actions, recommendations, and details, see the full report: “Securing Florida’s Blue Economy: Strategic Policy Plan for Florida’s Oceans and Coasts” at the FOA website: <http://www.floridaoceanalliance.org/>.

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