

Obama launches ocean protection plan

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The Bluewater bridge is seen, joining the U.S (L) and Sarnia, Canada, from a U.S. Customs and Border Protection Blackhawk helicopter in Port Huron, Michigan August 6, 2008.

REUTERS/Rebecca Cook

By [Doug Palmer](#)

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - President [Barack Obama](#) launched a plan on Friday to protect the oceans, U.S. coasts and Great Lakes from the threats of climate change, pollution and overfishing.

"The oceans are critical to supporting life," Obama said in statement designating June as National Oceans Month. "The base of the oceanic ecosystem provides most of the oxygen we breathe, so oceans are critical to our survival."

Obama set up a task force led by chief White House environmental adviser Nancy Sutley to recommend a national policy to protect and

restore "the health of ocean, coastal and Great Lakes ecosystems and resources" within 90 days.

The initiative comes as Obama is pressing Congress to pass sweeping new legislation to reduce the use of fossil fuels that emit carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases blamed for global climate change.

Oceans cover 70 percent of the Earth's surface and are a major source of jobs, food and energy resources. They are also critical to the transportation of people and goods and the mobility of U.S. armed forces.

Oceans "not only affect climate processes, but they are also under stress from the impacts of climate change," the White House said in a statement.

Other challenges are pollution, degraded coastal water quality, habitat loss, fishing impacts, invasive species, disease, rising sea levels and acidification, it said.

The environmental group **Oceana** praised Obama's action, hoping it would bring a "unifying vision" to the 140 U.S. laws and 20 federal agencies involved in oceans management.

"With the oceans facing the triple threats of overfishing, pollution and climate change, they

need attention at the highest levels of government," **Oceana** chief executive Andy Sharpless said.

(Reporting by Doug Palmer; editing by Anthony Boadle)