

Gullah/Geechee Nation Ocean Action Plan

We, the citizens and leaders of the Gullah/Geechee Nation, have joined the *International Alliance to Combat Ocean Acidification* as one of the ways in which we seek to engage with global partners to ensure that the Paris Climate Agreement is reached and the United Nations Sustainable Development goals are implemented. We agree with the partners of the *OA Alliance* regarding the work that must be done to reduce carbon dioxide emissions and to reduce the acidification threats to our oceans.

Given that the Gullah/Geechee Nation exists from Jacksonville, NC to Jacksonville, FL and encompasses the Sea Islands which are directly in the Atlantic Ocean, our native population has witnessed first hand many of the changes that are happening to oceans and we agree that there are already unprecedented damages to oceans and marine ecosystems. Any continued negative impacts on our oceans will gravely affect the continuation of Gullah/Geechee culture and sustainability due to the fact that our culture is inextricably tied to the land and waters of the Sea Islands. Harm to the ocean in which we literally live adversely impacts commercial, subsistence, and ceremonial shellfish harvest, our fisheries, and the seafood industries which have sustained us since we were settled on these islands in the 1600s. Therefore, we know that it is vital for us to continue to expand our network of collaborators that seek to combat ocean acidification and other climate related harms that we are faced with. We know that several existing international networks coordinate science, research and monitoring efforts on ocean acidification regionally and around the world and the Gullah/Geechee Nation intends to be a part of increasing global participation in these science and monitoring networks which are essential in understanding and preparing for the threat posed to our oceans. To that end, we are calling on the citizens of the Gullah/Geechee Nation to participate in the **Gullah/Geechee Nation Ocean Acidification Call to Action**.



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Gullah/Geechee Nation Ocean Action Plan Guiding Principles

The Mission of the Gullah/Geechee Nation is “to preserve, protect, and promote our history, heritage, cultural, language, and homeland and to institute and demand official recognition of the governance rights necessary to accomplish our mission to take care of our community through collective efforts which will provide a healthy environment, care for the well beings of each person, and economic empowerment.” In order to act in accordance with our mission which is part of the opening of the **Gullah/Geechee Nation Declaration**, we are furthering our global partnerships to protect our oceans. Our work in regard to ocean action will be guided by these principles:

- **Gullah/Geechee actions should provide benefits for ecosystem and human communities alike and balance both human and ecological well being.**
- **Actions should align with existing goals to preserve Gullah/Geechee history, heritage, culture, lands, and language.**
- **As stated in the Goals of the Gullah/Geechee Nation Declaration: “We will preserve, maintain, and reclaim ALL elements of our homeland which will FOREVER be our base of existence as we carry out these goals.” To that end, we are taking action to protect the ocean which is a major part of our homeland.**



- **Actions should promote and integrate a shift to holistic and Earth Law-based management models (versus conventional models that have largely failed); models that recognize and respect the rights of the ocean and the rights of the Gullah/Geechee Nation, consider of the impacts of our actions on both current and future generations of systems and people, and maintain healthy and thriving ocean ecosystems. Considering the ocean as a being in its own right will help us to rethink our reciprocal responsibilities and achieve a proper balance between humans and the ocean.**
- **Actions must be grounded in values of interconnectedness between land and ocean, stewardship and respect for the ocean's well-being, rather than primarily from the context of the ocean's utility to humans.**
- **As members of the Gullah/Geechee Nation, we each have a responsibility to contribute to the health and integrity of our homeland and the ocean. In order to do so we will represent the oceans interests in Actions under the plan.**
- **As members of the Gullah/Geechee Nation we have a right to self-governance and the right to a healthy environment and sustainable climate and food systems; and natural ecosystems, and ocean, have inherent rights, including but not limited to: the right to integral health, sustainability, diversity, equilibrium, clean air and clean water.**

Gullah/Geechee Ocean Action Plan Goals

Goal 1- Advance the scientific understanding of ocean acidification

- Communicate Gullah/Geechee concerns over water quality and water chemistry to scientific research institutions such as local universities, government agencies, regional research labs, and science networks such as the *Southeast Ocean and Coastal Acidification Network*.*
- Use materials from the *International Alliance to Combat Ocean Acidification* to further disseminate global scientific findings to the citizens, organizations, and institutions in the Gullah/Geechee Nation.*
- Participate in local water quality monitoring efforts via efforts coordinated by the *Gullah/Geechee Sustainability Think Tank*.*
- Communicate to local water resource managers and scientists the need for biological monitoring and research of acidification impacts on organisms that are culturally and ecologically important to the Gullah/Geechee Nation. (see goal 4)
- Communicate to law makers at all levels the need to prioritize science in decision making regarding marine ecosystems.*

Goal 2- Reduce the causes of acidification

- Reduce carbon footprint of Gullah/Geechee seafood consumption by continuing to work with the *Gullah/Geechee Fishing Association*, the *Gullah/Geechee Sea Island Coalition*, and the *Gullah/Geechee Sustainability Think Tank* to promote consuming local, sustainably harvested seafood instead of imported seafood.*
- Advocate for climate jobs including those in the clean energy sector.*
- Advocate for and develop new legal perspectives and policy frameworks around Rights of Nature as defined by Earth Law, that develop new standards for sustainability under environmental law particular to the root causes of ocean acidification.

Goal 3- Protect the environment and coastal communities from the impacts of a changing ocean

- Build partnerships with government agencies, academics, industries and NGOs to create solutions to acidification and other ocean-climate changes to monitor water chemistry and water quality.*
- Undertake a public information campaign in order to build capacity in reducing water pollutants including single use plastics and chemicals contributing to runoff pollution that are used by households, businesses and organizations in our region.*
- Support living shorelines to protect the Gullah/Geechee Nation's coasts from local instances of coastal acidification, nutrient pollution, coastal erosion, storm surge impacts, and hurricanes e.g.
 - Promote and continue seagrass conservation and restoration.*
 - Promote and continue oyster reef conservation and restoration; continue participating in shell recycling programs.*

- Develop new laws that codify our communities rights to self governance and a healthy environment, as well as the Rights of Nature.
- Create a guardianship model, that identifies community members to represent the ocean and its species in policy decisions and encourages guardianship to be practiced by all and to be given opportunities to participate in guardianship activities such as regional coastal restoration projects.

Goal 4- Expand public awareness and understanding of acidification

- Communicate how climate change and ocean acidification negatively impacts the Gullah/Geechee and other communities that rely on the ocean for sustenance.*
- Globally discuss ways to address the threat of acidification, climate change and other environmental hazards to the Gullah/Geechee community.*
- Inform elected and non-elected representatives and government officials of the socio-economic and cultural importance of bivalves and ocean health generally to the Gullah/Geechee.*
- Survey the Gullah/Geechee community about what species of marine organisms are significant to its socio-economic well-being and cultural heritage and continue to promote seafood safety and human health.*

Goal 5- Build sustained support for tackling this global problem

- Support state, federal, and international funding for scientific research, water chemistry monitoring, and addressing acidification directly.*
- Participate in international climate change and ocean acidification activities.*
- Support education and outreach initiatives by the *Earth Law Center* that assist in transforming our governance systems to address the root cause of environmental problems.

*-Already underway

The Gullah/Geechee Nation believes

De wata bring we and de wata gwine tek we bak.

So, it is our duty to continue to work to heal and nurture the oceans so that they will in return continue to heal, nurture, and sustain us.



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