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## Our precious oceans

One of the best actions President Bush has taken toward environmental preservation was appointing a 16-member U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy in 2001. Our oceans are in trouble, the commission said this week.

It has listened to 440 presenters at public meetings held in 10 cities speak about the pressing issues involved, such as pollution, invasive species, coastal development, overfishing, habitat alteration, bycatch and climate change. This week, the commission submitted a 500-page draft report to governors and certain congressional leaders to solicit their comments. Their final report is due to Congress and the president early this summer.

The draft report outlines a new ocean policy, starting with the creation of the National Ocean Council to coordinate the patchwork of ocean programs currently directed by more than a dozen agencies. An assistant to the president would lead the

council, which would include certain cabinet secretaries, the EPA and other independent ocean-management agencies.

A presidential council of advisers on ocean policy also would be established from public interest groups, educators, businesses and local governments. There would be a new system of volunteer regional councils.

Likewise, the commission recommends managing the ocean as an ecosystem, rather than myriad separate areas and species.

This report echoes last year's findings by the Pew Oceans Commission, which concluded that our oceans are in trouble and governance must improve if we are to restore and protect our living marine resources. "The United States' oceans span nearly 4.5 million square miles, an area 23 percent larger than the land area of the nation. Their biological riches surpass that of our public lands," the Pew report says.

We must safeguard this precious resource for future generations.