April 15, 2008

The Honorable Diane Feinstein
The Honorable Wayne Allard
Committee on Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
SD-131 Dirksen Senate Office Building
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairwoman Feinstein and Ranking Member Allard:

On behalf of the 95 Member Institutions of the Consortium for Ocean Leadership, I am writing to share our recommendations for the FY2009 Interior, Environment and Related Agencies Appropriations Act.

Over half of the U.S. population lives in coastal and watershed counties and more than half of the nation’s gross domestic product is generated in those counties and in adjacent waters. The Consortium for Ocean Leadership supports the ocean science and conservation programs in the Department of Interior. However, we feel that the President’s overall budget request for DOI falls far short of that necessary for the Department to succeed. Furthermore, we respectfully request a $1.3 billion budget for the U.S. Geologic Survey (USGS) in FY09 as proposed by the USGS Coalition.

Within DOI the USGS provides scientific information to describe and understand the Earth, minimize loss of life and property from natural disasters, and manage water, biological, energy and mineral resources. The USGS Coastal and Marine Geology program field centers collect data and monitor conditions related to geologic processes and hazards, environmental conditions, habitats, and energy and mineral resources.

Ocean Leadership supports the President’s request of $7.9 million to launch the Ocean and Coastal Frontiers Initiative. The initiative would create partnerships to clean up marine debris, conserve coral reefs, improve ocean science and map vital areas of the U.S. extended continental shelf. This increase is part of the Department’s contribution to implement the Ocean Action Plan.
While Ocean Leadership supports the Ocean and Coastal Frontiers Initiative, we are concerned that the President has proposed to cut the USGS National Water Quality Assessment by $11 million. These water quality assessments are a critical component to understanding long-term trends in water quality and as part of the integrated ocean observing system.

Part of the Ocean and Coastal Frontiers Initiative, Ocean Leadership supports an increase of $4 million to define U.S. jurisdiction of the extended continental shelf under Law of the Sea requirements. Many nations that border the Arctic are now staking seabed claims beyond 200 mile limit to secure rights to minerals and energy resources in the area. Ocean Leadership strongly supports mapping efforts to determine extended continental shelf boundaries and encourages close coordination with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

The President has proposed a $2.9 million reduction (70% cut from the FY06 level) in the National Biological Information Infrastructure (NBII) and the Biological Information Management and Delivery line. Ocean Leadership opposes this decrease, particularly at a time when we are asking NBII to integrate biodiversity data sets to support the Ocean Biogeographic Information System -- information critical to improving our understanding and monitoring marine biodiversity.

Ocean Leadership strongly supports an increase of $1 million to enhance existing regional coastal ocean observing systems and apply USGS’ capabilities to develop science-based decision-support tools for coastal managers, and to implement the National Water Quality Monitoring Network. We also support an additional $2 million to fund research to meet the goals and objectives of the Ocean Research Priorities Plan.

The Department of Interior has extensive ocean and coastal responsibilities, managing more than 35,000 miles of coastline, 1.8 billion acres of seabed on the Outer Continental Shelf and sharing oversight with other federal agencies of millions of square miles of Exclusive Economic Zones, including those surrounding U.S. Territories in the Pacific and Caribbean.

Given rapid changes occurring in coastal environments, USGS research and monitoring programs provide critical information for resource managers as they develop adaptive management strategies for restoration and long-term use of the nation’s natural resources.

We appreciate your consideration of our requests.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Robert B. Gagosian, Ph.D
President and CEO
Consortium for Ocean Leadership