

June 12, 2000

President Clinton Launches A New Era of Ocean Exploration

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

---

For Immediate Release

June 12, 2000

Today, at a White House Millennium Council Millennium Matinee entitled Exploration Under the Sea ò Beyond the Stars, President Clinton will announce steps to launch a new era of ocean exploration. The President will announce that in collaboration with marine research institutions and universities, federal researchers will explore the Hudson Canyon off New York-New Jersey, deep reefs and seeps off the Gulf coast of Florida, and the Davidson Seamount off central California. The President will also direct the Commerce Department to convene a panel of leading ocean explorers, educators, and scientists to develop recommendations for a national oceans exploration strategy.

A LEGACY OF OCEAN PROTECTION. Two years ago today, President Clinton, the First Lady, and Vice President Gore joined members of the Cabinet and hundreds of others from across the country at the National Ocean Conference in Monterey. At the conference, the President announced new efforts to restore coral reefs, rebuild marine fisheries, and protect our coasts from oil drilling. The President also directed his Cabinet to develop recommendations for a coordinated, disciplined, long-term federal ocean policy. In its report last year, Turning to the Sea: America's Ocean Future, the Cabinet outlined an ambitious strategy to protect and sustainably use our ocean resources. On Memorial Day weekend, President Clinton took a major step in implementing that strategy with an Executive Order directing agencies to expand and strengthen the nation's network of marine protected areas.

A NEW ERA OF OCEAN EXPLORATION. Even though the oceans cover 70% of the planet, scientists estimate that over 90% of our underwater world remains unknown and unseen. What remains to be explored could hold clues to the origins to life on Earth, cures for human diseases, answers to the sustainable use of the oceans, links to our history, and information to protect the endangered species of the sea. Today, acting on another key recommendation of his Cabinet, the President will announce two

major actions to establish a national strategy to expand exploration of the oceans:

Launching three undersea expeditions. The President will announce that the Commerce Department will lead three expeditions in collaboration with leading marine research institutions over the coming months:

Davidson Seamount off central California. Researchers will explore the 30-mile long, 9000-foot high seamount that rises from the ocean floor roughly 80 miles southwest from Monterey. Davidson Seamount's rock surfaces are home to a mixture of unusual deep sea animals, including large, dense patches of sponges and extremely old coral forests.

Hudson River Canyon off New York, New Jersey. Less than 100 miles southeast of New York City lies the most predominant underwater feature on the eastern seaboard. Initial explorations of Hudson Canyon reveal that it is home to many economically and ecologically valuable species.

Deep reefs and seeps off Florida's Gulf coast. Deep beneath the Gulf of Mexico, far below the reach of sunlight, dense thickets of giant worms and mussel beds, and thick mats of bacteria thrive on chemicals venting, seeping, and oozing from the seafloor. Although far from shore, these creatures may be the oldest life forms on the planet.

Charting a new era of exploration. In addition, the President will direct Secretary of Commerce William Daley to convene a panel of leading ocean explorers, educators, and scientists and report within 120 days on recommendations for a national oceans exploration strategy. Specifically, the strategy should:

Define objectives and priorities, and note important scientific, historic, and cultural sites;

Promote collaboration with education, research, and private-sector organizations;

Examine the potential for new technologies;

Ensure coordination with the newly established Marine Protected Area Center; and

Ensure that newly discovered organisms with medicinal or commercial potential are identified for possible research and development.