

# Climate Action Program: Chapter & Club Toolkit



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## Introduction

Welcome to the Surfrider Foundation's Climate Action Program toolkit. This comprehensive guide is designed to support Surfrider chapters and clubs in planning and executing successful coastal restoration events and projects. The Climate Action Program Manager will be your dedicated partner throughout this process, offering assistance, guidance, and expertise. This toolkit serves as a practical resource for chapters and clubs to contribute to the broader goal of addressing the climate crisis and promoting the health and resilience of coastal ecosystems through hands-on action. Ready to get your hands dirty? Let's begin!

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# **Program Overview**

The Climate Action Program is designed to empower and support Surfrider chapters and clubs to restore our coastlines' natural resilience by mitigating and adapting to the coastal impacts of climate change, protecting our coastal environments and communities for future generations through nature-based solutions. Naturebased solutions acknowledge the invaluable benefits a healthy ecosystem provides, and harness nature's power to address environmental challenges to benefit both people and nature.

### THE FIRST LINE OF DEFENSE AGAINST CLIMATE CHANGE

Surfrider's Climate Action Program is designed to provide the first line of defense against the impacts of climate change on our coasts. Climate change is unleashing a range of devastating consequences, such as rising sea levels, increasingly intense storms, and the loss of biodiversity - all of which threaten the future viability of our coastal communities and ecosystems. Approximately 3 billion people live along the coast worldwide and are already facing the perilous impacts of climate change. Through the Climate Action Program, we can take meaningful steps towards mitigating and adapting to these impacts by enhancing coastal resilience through ecosystem restoration. Nature-based solutions, including the restoration of coastal ecosystems such as mangroves, coastal dunes, wetlands, and surrounding habitats, help to address the many impacts of climate change along our coasts.

## COMPREHENSIVE CLIMATE ACTION

It's important to note that while nature-based solutions play a crucial role, addressing the challenges of climate change also requires a comprehensive strategy to reduce our economy's reliance on fossil fuels and facilitate the transition to renewable energy sources. Surfider's work against offshore oil drilling, relentless efforts to reduce plastic pollution, and ongoing advocacy for sustainable policies are integral parts of this comprehensive strategy and our longstanding commitment to broader climate action.

## **RESTORING TODAY, FOR TOMORROW**

Surfrider's nationwide network is actively engaged in addressing the climate crisis through nature-based solutions. Surfrider chapters have led hundreds of restoration events, inspiring the formalization of the Climate Action Program. Climate change is one of the greatest challenges of our time, but together, we have the power to turn the tide and create positive change. Join us in the Surfrider Climate Action Program and be part of the solution. Together, we can restore our coasts' natural resilience, protect our communities, and secure a sustainable future for generations to come.

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## Nature-Based Solutions for Climate Action

### THE PROBLEM

The fight to protect our ocean is taking on a new urgency driven by climate change, and our coasts are on the frontlines. Rising sea levels, stronger storms, and warming waters - these are not distant warnings of some potential dystopian future, but realities we face today. The effects of climate change are already damaging community infrastructure, exacerbating pollution problems, shrinking our beaches, and diminishing the public's ability to enjoy coastal resources. Global sea level is projected to rise by six feet or possibly more by 2100. U.S. scientists estimate that about 50% to 70% of our coastlines are at high risk for 'beach loss' due to sea level rise and coastal erosion. Beach access and coastal recreation, which drive our tourism and recreation economies and contribute billions of dollars to coastal communities, are at dire risk. These changes threaten

the very essence of what makes the ocean so special: its beauty, its biodiversity, and the coastal communities that depend on it.

## Climate change harms coastal environments in various ways, including:

- Temperature Extremes
- Altered Precipitation Patterns
- Sea-Level Rise
- Ocean Acidification
- Biodiversity Loss
- Increased Wildfires
- Melting Ice and Glaciers
- Spread of Invasive Species
- Stressed Ecosystem Services

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### THE NATURE-BASED SOLUTION

Nature-based solutions protect, sustainably manage, and restore degraded ecosystems with an emphasis on working with nature to address the coastal impacts of climate change to benefit both communities and the environment. Nature-based solutions enhance ecosystem resilience by harnessing the power of nature to address the environmental challenges associated with climate change. Nature-based solutions play a crucial role in climate action by offering effective, proactive strategies to mitigate and adapt to the coastal impacts of climate change.

#### **BENEFITS OF NATURE-BASED SOLUTIONS**

#### **Carbon Sequestration**

Coastal ecosystems, such as mangroves, seagrass beds, and salt marshes, are incredibly efficient at capturing and storing carbon from the atmosphere. Blue carbon refers to the carbon sequestered by the ocean and coastal ecosystems. Despite being significantly smaller in area than the Earth's forests, coastal ecosystems capture and store carbon at a much more rapid pace. For example, mangroves are estimated to sequester carbon at a rate of up to ten times that of tropical rainforests. Coastal ecosystems accumulate carbon in their biomass and in the sediment below them, acting as "carbon sinks." This carbon can remain stored for millennia if the habitat is left undisturbed. By restoring these coastal habitats, we can enhance their capacity to sequester and store carbon, helping to mitigate the effects of climate change.

#### **Coastal Resilience**

Coastal nature-based solutions, such as wetland and dune restoration, enhance the resilience of coastal communities against sea-level rise and increasingly intense storms. Healthy coastal ecosystems provide natural buffers against coastal erosion and flooding. Wetlands and dunes can help absorb and dissipate wave energy, reducing the impact of storms on coastal communities and infrastructure. By restoring these ecosystems, we ensure their continued ability to protect coastal areas from the impacts of climate change.



#### **Biodiversity Conservation**

Many coastal ecosystems are biodiversity hotspots, supporting a wide variety of marine and terrestrial species. Restoring these habitats safeguards critical biodiversity, increasing ecosystem resilience to climate variability. Healthy ecosystems are better equipped to adapt to changing environmental conditions, benefiting both the wildlife and human communities that rely on these resources.

#### **Community Well-Being**

Nature-based solutions contribute to ocean health and coastal communities by reducing pollution, enhancing water quality, and improving habitats and biodiversity. Oyster bed restoration is a prime example of how these solutions offer diverse benefits. Beyond providing essential habitat, oyster beds enhance coastal resilience, improve water quality, and reduce erosion. Nature-based solutions often involve the restoration of green spaces, which can enhance overall community well-being as well. Routine access to natural environments has been proven to promote mental health by reducing stress and contributing to a sense of community.

As climate change continues to threaten coastal areas, these natural solutions offer an environmentally sustainable and economically viable way to address climate challenges while fostering healthier and more resilient coastal ecosystems and communities.

Nature-based solutions play a crucial role in climate action by offering effective, proactive strategies to mitigate and adapt to the coastal impacts of climate change.

## **Coastal Restoration for Climate Action**

### WHAT IS RESTORATION?

Ecological restoration is the process of assisting the recovery of an ecosystem that has been degraded, damaged, or destroyed (SER and Policy Working Group 2004). This nature-based solution typically involves actions aimed at enhancing ecological balance, biodiversity, and functionality of the ecosystem. Restoration takes center stage as we implement naturebased solutions under the Climate Action Program.

### WHY IS RESTORATION IMPORTANT?

Restoring ecosystems helps preserve and enhance biodiversity and helps communities mitigate and adapt to the effects of climate change in the following ways:

#### **Restored ecosystems:**

- Deliver and revive essential ecosystem services like air and water purification
- Increase native species richness and eradicate invasive species
- Increase carbon sequestration
- Provide vital services like flood control
- Improve public health
- Bolster resilience to environmental challenges
- Increase biodiversity
- Decrease erosion
- Support local economies
- Support community stewardship, empowerment, and autonomy

Restoration is a strategic and sustainable means of improving the overall quality of life for humans and the health of the planet while reducing the need for costly human-made infrastructure and maintenance.

### WHAT DOES RESTORATION LOOK LIKE?

Restoration efforts come in different levels of complexity, from basic tasks like removing invasive species and replanting native ones to more detailed engineered projects. Surfrider programs like Ocean Friendly Gardens, featuring native plants, serve as effective mini-restoration projects accessible to all communities. The complexity depends on factors such as how degraded the ecosystem is, the desired outcome, available resources, and the expertise of those involved. Whether simple or complex, restoration is vital for enhancing biodiversity, improving ecosystem services, and healing environmental damage.



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### COASTAL RESTORATION HABITAT TYPES

Coastal restoration covers various habitats that protect and preserve coastal communities, strengthening their resilience. Many of these habitats face significant threats from development, pollution, climate change, and other human activities.

#### Here are some typical coastal restoration efforts:

- · Coral reef restoration
- Dune restoration
- · Kelp forest restoration
- · Living shorelines
- Mangrove restoration
- · Ocean Friendly Gardens
- Riparian restoration
- · Salt marsh restoration
- · Seagrass restoration
- Wetland restoration

#### CORAL REEF RESTORATION

Coral reefs are incredibly biodiverse ecosystems that support marine life and provide food and livelihoods for millions of people. They also protect coastlines from erosion and storm damage. Climate change has triggered devastating coral bleaching events, endangering the survival of coral reefs worldwide. Without urgent action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, scientists warn that we could lose more than 90% of our coral reefs by 2050. Restoring coral reefs is critical for maintaining ecosystem services and preserving biodiversity. Coral reef restoration rehabilitates damaged or declining coral reefs through invasive species removal and by growing and planting healthy corals to encourage new growth and enhance their resilience to environmental stressors. Coral restoration efforts can start on land, such as planting native vegetation along coastlines to trap sediment runoff, preventing it from reaching and harming coral reefs.

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#### DUNE RESTORATION

Healthy dunes play a critical role in enhancing coastal resilience to climate change impacts such as sea level rise and extreme weather events. Dunes are natural barriers formed by wind-blown sand and vegetation along the coast. Human activities, particularly coastal development, and increasingly intense storms, have significantly degraded dune habitat - diminishing the natural resilience of coastal ecosystems to climaterelated challenges. Dune restoration involves repairing and enhancing these sandy areas to provide protection against coastal erosion and storm surge. This can include planting native vegetation, stabilizing sand, and creating pathways to reduce human impact. Dune restoration helps maintain the natural balance of coastal ecosystems and provides habitat for various plants and animals, while providing protection to coastal communities.

#### **Case Studies:**

Restoring Coastal Resilience: Surfrider's Impact at Atwater Beach

Restoring Coastal Resilience: Surfrider Foundation's Dune Revitalization in South Padre Island

Enhancing Miami's Shores: Surfrider's Ongoing Dune Restoration Efforts

Restoring Coastal Resilience: Surfrider Foundation Partners with Carolina Beach for Christmas Tree Dune Restoration

#### **KELP FOREST RESTORATION**

Kelp forests are essential for carbon sequestration and stabilizing shorelines against rising sea levels, mitigating ocean currents, and diminishing wave impact. However, a concerning 38% of these critical ecosystems are diminishing due to ocean warming, leading to a significant reduction in carbon absorption. Kelp forests are composed of rapidly growing large brown algae. This highly productive habitat supports a wide variety of fish, invertebrates, and marine mammals, providing the foundation for a rich ecosystem. Kelp forests provide habitat, oxygen, and food for a diverse array of marine species, and like seagrasses, kelp forests reduce coastal erosion by stabilizing sediment. Kelp forest restoration includes invasive species removal, seeding, and planting. Restoring kelp forests is crucial for maintaining marine biodiversity and the health of coastal ecosystems.

#### LIVING SHORELINES

Living shorelines are nature-based alternatives to hard armoring structures like seawalls and rock revetments. They involve using native plants, sand, and other natural materials to stabilize and protect coastal areas. Living shorelines provide habitat for marine life, absorb wave energy, and adapt to changing conditions, making them more resilient to storms and sea-level rise compared to hard armoring structures, which inhibit natural sediment flows and have been proven to accelerate erosion rates. Living shorelines differ from conventional restoration projects by placing a greater focus on restoring ecosystem services including coastal community protection. Implementing living shorelines as a part of our climate resilience strategy involves collaboration among environmental agencies, communities, and local governments. This approach contributes to the sustainable and adaptive management of coastal areas in the face of ongoing climate challenges.

#### **Case Study:**

#### The Surfers' Point Managed Shoreline Retreat

#### MANGROVES

Mangroves are salt-tolerant trees that grow in coastal areas, forming dense forests along the shoreline. Mangrove forests are a type of wetland. They offer valuable protection against coastal erosion, storm surge, and even tsunamis due to their complex root systems. Mangroves also provide essential habitats for various marine species and contribute to carbon sequestration, making them important tools in climate change mitigation and coastal conservation. Unfortunately, mangroves, renowned for storing up to five times more carbon per acre than tropical forests, are facing dire threats including climate change, coastal development, and pollution from upstream. With half of indigenous mangroves already lost in the past 50 years, urgent action is needed to slow and restore the loss of this critical coastal ecosystem. Please note that red mangroves are an invasive species in Hawai'i and are therefore removed to restore the natural habitat there.

#### **Case Study:**

Restoring Puerto Rico's Mangroves: A Journey of Restoration and Community Empowerment



#### OCEAN FRIENDLY GARDENS

Ocean Friendly Gardens (OFGs) is Surfrider's sustainable landscaping program that offers nature-based solutions such as rain gardens, native plants, and contouring to reduce stormwater pollution and help restore healthy, resilient watersheds. OFGs provide alternatives to traditional landscaping practices that are heavily dependent on toxic chemicals, excessive amounts of water, and frequent maintenance. Whether you live near the beach or along the headwaters of your local watershed, you can transform your yard and community spaces into an Ocean Friendly Garden to protect clean water and create wildlife habitat. Healthy soils and native plants soak up rain and runoff while sequestering carbon from the air to reduce pollution. Sustainable land stewardship practices can also reduce climate emissions from energy-intensive maintenance. OFGs offer equitable access to nature in underserved areas, empowering volunteers with skills needed for a more resilient future. Learn how you can bring Ocean Friendly Gardens to your yard and neighborhood here.

#### Case study:

Sustainable Transformations: Ocean Friendly Gardens as Nature-Based Solutions on Eastern Long Island.

#### **RIPARIAN RESTORATION**

Riparian habitat is the area of land adjacent to rivers, streams, and other water bodies. It's a critical interface between terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems, playing a vital role in maintaining water quality, preventing erosion, and supporting diverse plant and animal species downstream. Restoring riparian habitat offers significant benefits downstream to coastal ecosystems. Healthy riparian zones help regulate water temperature, reducing the stress on aquatic ecosystems in the face of warming temperatures. Riparian habitat restoration involves activities like planting native vegetation to stabilize riverbanks, removing invasive species, implementing nature-based erosion control measures, and reducing pollution runoff. By restoring riparian habitats, we not only protect water quality but also create healthier ecosystems that benefit both wildlife and human communities living along these waterways. Riparian habitat restoration can provide benefits for the upland migration of coastal wetlands with rising sea levels.

#### **Case Study:**

Restoring Ecosystem Harmony: Northern Ohio Chapter Helps Eliminate Invasive Plant Frog-bit





#### SALT MARSH

Salt marshes are coastal ecosystems dominated by salt-tolerant plants, typically grasses and sedges. These marshes exist in the transition zone between land and water, experiencing regular tidal flooding. Salt marshes provide crucial ecological services, serving as buffers against storm surge and flooding, and their dense vegetation stabilizes the shoreline, preventing erosion. These ecosystems also contribute to carbon sequestration, playing a role in mitigating climate change impacts. A recent study using satellite imagery revealed that between 2000 and 2019, 561 square miles of salt marsh were lost resulting in annual emissions of 16.3 teragrams of carbon, roughly equivalent to the emissions of about 3.5 million cars. Restoration methods may include invasive species removal, native species planting, and/or restoring the wetland's hydrology if it has been severely impacted.

#### SEAGRASS RESTORATION

Seagrass beds provide essential habitat for juvenile fish and other marine species, help stabilize sediment, and improve water quality by absorbing nutrients from runoff and filtering pollution. They also play a role in carbon sequestration, making them valuable for climate change mitigation. It captures carbon on a global scale up to 35 times faster than tropical rainforests, contributing to 10-18% of total ocean carbon storage despite occupying less than 0.1% of the seafloor. Seagrass restoration focuses on restoring underwater seagrass meadows. This typically involves replanting seagrass species in areas where they have been lost or damaged. This may also include the dispersal or planting of seagrass seeds and the use of coastal engineering.

#### WETLAND RESTORATION

Wetlands are critical coastal ecosystems that serve as buffers against flooding, filter pollutants, and provide habitat for diverse wildlife. Varied estimates suggest that wetlands only span approximately 5-8% of the Earth's land surface, but astonishingly, they hold a substantial 20-30% of the world's sequestered carbon pool (Mitsch et al., 2013). Wetlands encompass a diverse range of ecosystems, including marshes, swamps, bogs, and fens, each characterized by its unique hydrology, vegetation, and ecological functions. Wetland restoration involves restoring degraded wetlands through activities like removing invasive species, reestablishing native plants, and restoring natural hydrology. This helps enhance water quality, protects against coastal erosion, and supports a variety of aquatic species.

## COASTAL RESTORATION IN YOUR COMMUNITY

Restoration efforts vary greatly depending on the unique topographical characteristics of your region. From the lush coasts of Puerto Rico to the rugged shores of Oregon, each locale presents its own set of challenges and opportunities for restoration. The Climate Action Program Manager will be your go-to resource for navigating the nuances of restoration in your region. Need to identify native plants that thrive in your region? Wondering what invasive species might be causing trouble? The program manager has got you covered. By understanding the unique characteristics of your region and leveraging the guidance of the Climate Action Program Manager, you can ensure that your restoration efforts are not only effective but also well-suited to your local environment and community needs.

# **Environmental Justice**

Environmental justice is a fundamental consideration in Surfrider's restoration projects, emphasizing the importance of equitable access to a healthy environment for all communities. It is not only about rehabilitating ecosystems but also about ensuring that the benefits of restoration efforts are distributed fairly. Overlooking environmental justice may perpetuate historical inequalities, disproportionately affecting marginalized communities. In contrast, when restoration projects are designed with environmental justice in mind, they can empower local communities by improving well-being and building resilience in the face of environmental challenges. Integrating environmental justice principles is crucial for creating sustainable and inclusive outcomes that benefit both nature and people.

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# **Tribal Engagement**

Meaningful tribal engagement is a cornerstone of successful restoration projects, embodying principles of respect, collaboration, and cultural sensitivity. Recognizing and honoring the sovereignty of tribal nations is essential, as it ensures that restoration efforts align with the needs and values of indigenous nations. By engaging tribes from project inception through implementation to management, we forge strong partnerships and enrich our own understanding of the interconnectedness of land, culture, and the historical heritage of ecosystem stewardship. This inclusive approach not only respects tribal rights but also enhances the effectiveness and sustainability of restoration initiatives, fostering a shared commitment to the preservation of our natural world.



## **Getting Started: Organizing Restoration Events**

Surfrider Foundation chapters and student clubs are at the forefront of dynamic coastal restoration initiatives nationwide. The Florida and New Jersey chapters are blazing trails with their dynamic dune restoration efforts, while in Puerto Rico Surfrider is leading the revitalization of mangrove habitats destroyed by coastal development and climate change impacts. Across the country, numerous chapters are driving impactful restoration events in their local communities, showcasing an unwavering commitment to bolstering coastal ecosystem resilience.

This section is your trusty guide – whether it's your first time or you're seeking a refresher – offering step-by-step insights to confidently navigate the restoration event planning process for your chapter/club.



### **BEFORE YOU BEGIN**

#### Here Are a Few Questions To Consider...

- · How can my actions enhance coastal resilience?
- Who does this unhealthy ecosystem impact the most within my community?
- Whose unceded ancestral lands am I proposing to restore?
- What will the restored ecosystem mean to the community?
- Could my actions possibly have unintended negative impacts on others?
- Who is already taking action at this location?
- · Are there larger problems at play that require addressing?

### **GETTING STARTED**

#### STEP 1

## Introduction to Coastal Restoration and The Climate Action Program

So you want to host a restoration event? Great! Start by familiarizing yourself with coastal restoration and the Climate Action Program by reading through the toolkit.

#### STEP 2

#### **Consider Your Capacity**

There are various ways to get involved in restoration, and you can lead a restoration effort no matter your level of experience or capacity. Restoration events can be as easy as volunteering or partnering in another group's effort, or as involved as organizing and leading your own initiative.

- Surfrider restoration events can be led by Surfrider chapters/clubs, other environmental organizations, or in partnership with local groups.
- Surfrider staff, including the Climate Action Program Manager, can assist in developing more complex projects that may require more in-depth planning and engineering expertise – so don't let the scale of a large restoration area deter your efforts.

#### STEP 3 Identify Your Restoration Location

Next, identify a coastal location where you envision a restoration project. Skip to the next step if you would like help identifying a restoration site.

## Ask yourself the following questions to see if the location may benefit from restoration:

- Have you noticed any changes in the coastal ecosystem during your time in the area?
- · Has it experienced serious erosion?
- Do you know if and how this location has been affected or altered by humans?
- Have you observed a decrease in the number of animals or plants during your time there?
- Is the water quality poor?

If you've answered yes to any of these questions, the site may benefit from restoration.

#### STEP 4 Fill Out the Intake Form

Complete the Climate Action Program intake form at the link provided below. Inform your regional manager that you are filling out this form to ensure they are included in the process. This intake form captures essential details to help us tailor our support to your specific needs.

#### Climate Action Program Intake Form

#### STEP 5

#### Meet with the Climate Action Program Manager

The Climate Action Program Manager will set up a meeting with you. This personalized consultation will allow us to understand your goals, provide insights, and align our support with your vision to provide the best next steps.

How the Climate Action Program Manager Supports Restoration Events



#### STEP 6

#### Identify a Climate Action Program Chapter/Club Lead(s)

Identify a Climate Action Program Chapter/Club Lead(s) who will take the lead in coordinating with the Climate Action Program Manager to plan and implement impactful coastal restoration events.

#### Climate Action Program Chapter/Club Lead(s) Guide

#### STEP 7

#### **Develop a Restoration Event Plan**

The Climate Action Program Manager will help you create a restoration plan outlining steps, timelines, and identifying resources needed to successfully implement your project.

#### **Climate Action Restoration Event Planning Guide**

The restoration plan serves as a strategic guide, assisting the chapter/club in navigating the correct steps to ensure effective and impactful restoration efforts.

#### **STEP 8**

#### **Implement Your Restoration Event Plan**

This is where your vision becomes action. Dive into the practical steps outlined in your plan to secure resources and oversee the efforts that bring your restoration goals to life. These steps include:

• Collaborating with Other Organizations: The Climate Action Program Manager will help you explore collaboration opportunities with local organizations, community groups, and government agencies. A united effort amplifies the impact of your restoration project.

#### Connecting With Local Organizations

• Finding Funding Opportunities: Identify the cost of leading or participating in a restoration event. The Climate Action Program Manager can assist in identifying grants, sponsorships, or other financial resources if needed.

#### **Funding Your Restoration Event**

• Securing Necessary Permits: Understand local regulations and secure the required permits. The Climate Action Program Manager can offer guidance to ensure compliance with environmental standards.

#### Securing Permits for Your Restoration Event

 Other Planning Resources: <u>Tools for Community Restoration Events</u>





#### STEP 9 Lead Your Restoration Event

Time to roll up your sleeves and bring your restoration project to life! Follow the steps outlined in your restoration plan, and don't hesitate to lean on the Climate Action Program Manager for support.

#### STEP 10 Measure Impact

After the project, fill out the Restoration Event Data Collection Form to measure the impact of your project. The Climate Action Program Manager can help guide you in filling out the Data Collection Form.

Restoration Event Data Collection Form Surfrider Restoration Data Collection Form Guide

#### STEP 11 Celebrate Achievements

Congratulations – celebrate your hard work and share your achievements with the Surfrider community! Your dedication contributes to a healthier coastline for everyone.

Your commitment to restoring coastal environments is a crucial step toward building resilience in the face of climate change. Remember, every restoration effort, big or small, contributes to a healthier planet and communities for generations to come. As you move forward, know that the Surfrider community, along with the Climate Action Program Manager, is here to support you every step of the way. Together, we can make a lasting impact on our coasts, fostering a sustainable future. Thank you for being an integral part of the solution, and working with Surfrider's Climate Action Program. Let's continue working together to protect our oceans and preserve the beauty of our coastlines.

