

2022

# Surfrider Foundation Strategic Plan

Photo: Morgan Maasen



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**Clean and healthy coasts that support vibrant communities with equitable access for all people are worth fighting for.**

For more than 37 years, the Surfrider Foundation has taken thousands of actions to support a vision of clean water and healthy beaches. In the process, we have grown our network of chapters and activists, and our ability to win real tangible protection for our coasts and ocean. Our ocean and coasts are part of the public commons and we believe that access to a healthy and clean ocean should be for the benefit of all people.

We have a successful model that is replicable, transferable and scalable. However, the challenges that threaten our ocean, coasts and communities continue to significantly increase.

**This plan seeks to evoke a quantum leap in Surfrider’s ability to defend and protect our beloved coasts for all people. Forever.**

Through a 10-month strategic transformation process, we engaged our vast and passionate network, discovered key insights and developed ambitious goals to tackle the impacts of climate change, plastic

pollution and threats to clean water. Our ability to protect our coasts and ocean is strongest and most impactful with a diversity of voices and perspectives. We must support and amplify underrepresented communities and continue to build a more inclusive network in order to successfully achieve our goals.

We believe this combination of strategic focus, an inclusive approach and an ambitious growth mindset will enable us to set the national agenda on these issues and achieve our vision of clean water and healthy beaches for everyone, now and in the future.

We encourage (and need) you to join us.

For our ocean, waves and beaches,



Dr. Chad Nelsen  
Chief Executive Officer





# Executive Summary

The health of our ocean, coasts and communities is threatened by the interconnected issues of climate change, plastic waste and water pollution. These threats put our coastal ecosystems, public health and economies at risk. Although these challenges are daunting and global in nature, there are solutions to all of them and in almost all cases, they start at the local level. That is why the Surfrider Foundation, with our growing local and national grassroots network, is uniquely positioned to lead efforts to address these critical issues in our communities and scale solutions to state, federal and even global levels.

Furthermore, our ocean and coasts are part of the public commons and we believe that access to healthy and clean coasts and a vibrant ocean should be for the benefit of

all people. But around the world, too many people are excluded or not welcomed to our coasts and are disenfranchised from decisions made about the future of these shared resources. We must support and amplify all communities and continue to build a more inclusive network in order to successfully achieve our goals.

To think big and comprehensively, we pushed our goals out to 2035. We believe that these issues can and must be fundamentally addressed in that time frame. This plan sets us on a course to build on our past success and to continue to grow our expertise, influence and power to solve coastal climate, plastic and water pollution issues.



## VISION

To lead the movement for clean water and healthy beaches for all people. Always.

## STRATEGY

We will build **expertise, influence and power** to set the national agenda on critical coastal issues: climate change, plastic pollution and clean water.



Photo: Geoff Glenn

## GOALS



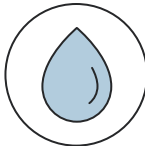
### Climate and Coasts

By 2035, all U.S. beaches, coastal habitats, coastal recreation areas and communities are protected because states are effectively managing their coasts and planning for sea level rise, resulting in “A” ratings in Surfrider’s State of the Beach Report.



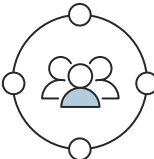
### Plastic Pollution

By 2035, all single-use plastic consumer products in the U.S. have been eliminated, preventing land-based plastic waste from entering the ocean.



### Clean Water

By 2035, every beach in the U.S. is safe to swim, surf and play in the water, as verified by robust and comprehensive testing, and water quality conditions support healthy coastal ecosystems.



### Expand the Network

To advance Surfrider’s mission and ensure that all people benefit from a healthy coastal environment, we will build a more inclusive culture and diverse network with 125 chapters, 400 clubs and one million active members, volunteers and online activists.







# Core Values

## HONOR THE MISSION

Surfrider is dedicated to the protection and enjoyment of the world's ocean, waves and beaches for all people, through a powerful activist network. At the center of every action we take is our mission, our grassroots structure and local perspectives. We aim for positive impacts and measurable results on behalf of the communities that we serve.

## WE ARE OPEN AND INCLUSIVE

Our ocean, waves and beaches belong to all of us, and we welcome all who are interested in joining our movement. Through our principles of Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (JEDI), we seek to engage and represent the communities that we work in, and to make space for diversity at all levels within our organization.

## WE CULTIVATE LEADERS

We believe that the most effective way to build a coastal protection movement is to provide leadership opportunities for our volunteers. By cultivating their voices and skills, we are preparing the next generation of coastal defenders to lead within their own communities.

## WE ARE PROBLEM SOLVERS

We are solution-oriented. Surfrider applies science, critical thinking and innovation to assess problems and develop practical long-term solutions that protect our coasts.

## THE SURFRIDER CULTURE IS YOURS TO CREATE

The Surfrider culture is defined by the people who show up with a love of the ocean and care deeply for its well-being. Through science, community and respect, we are people who joyfully take on the challenges before us. Our culture is one of selflessness, sharing, and bringing people together to achieve Surfrider's mission.

## THE BEACH IS FUN AND SURFRIDER SHOULD BE TOO

Surfrider comprises people who love the ocean, work hard to protect it, and need to enjoy it as part of keeping advocacy gratifying and fun. We are optimistic about the future of our ocean and coasts because our volunteers make a positive difference every day.





# A Winning Network

More than 37 years ago, a group of surfers from Malibu, California, were concerned about the health risks associated with environmental threats posed by escalating coastal development at their favorite local surf break. They took action. Not even they could have envisioned the history that they were making when they succeeded in protecting their beloved surf spot.

Since our inception in 1984, the Surfrider Foundation has evolved into one of the largest nonprofit grassroots organizations with a volunteer-activist network dedicated to our mission to protect and enjoy the world's oceans, waves and beaches.

Today, the Surfrider Foundation is measurably stronger, with more force and movement than ever before. We have 80 chapters, more than 100 student clubs and thousands of supporters, volunteers and activists fighting over 150 active campaigns around the country. Equipped with a model to defend our coasts, the organization has recorded nearly 800 victories since 2006.

We address five key coastal and ocean issues: climate and coasts, plastic pollution, clean water, ocean protection and beach access. We tackle

those issues in four primary ways: first, through extensive outreach and education to make the public aware of the problems and solutions that exist; second, through local stewardship, such as cleaning beaches, testing the water, transforming landscapes and working to green local businesses; third, through direct action organizing to influence key decision-making at local, state and federal levels; and finally, we use strategic litigation when necessary.

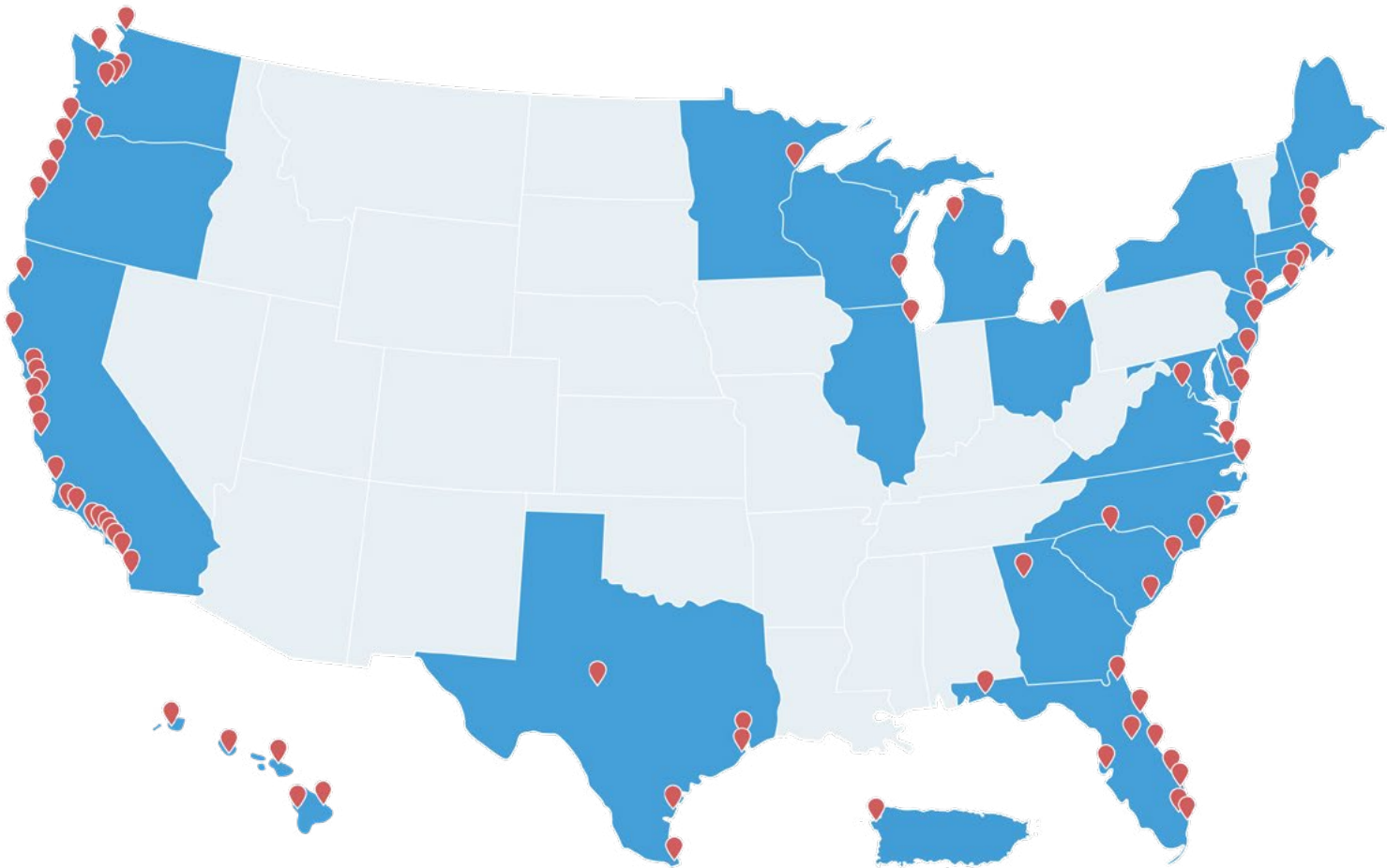
We fight threats to our ocean and coasts, including poorly-planned development, fossil fuel infrastructure and attempts to limit access. We also proactively take action to advance forward-looking protective policies that address issues at their source, such as plastic reduction legislation, coastal adaptation plans and policies, and the establishment of marine protected areas.

Through this work, we have protected hundreds of surfing and beach areas, eliminated sources of ocean pollution, stopped threats like the toll road at Trestles, established effective marine protection and stopped threats of offshore drilling.

Learn more about Surfrider's rich history at [history.surfrider.org](https://history.surfrider.org)

With over **200 chapters and clubs**, the Surfrider Foundation's powerful activist network is measurably stronger than ever before.

## CHAPTER NETWORK



Our efforts are paying off. See what we've accomplished so far:

- 200+**  
Chapters and Clubs
- 150+**  
Active Campaigns
- 800**  
Victories to Protect Our Coasts



# Justice, Equity, Diversity & Inclusion

For 35 years, the Surfrider Foundation has focused on grassroots organizing in communities across the U.S. to ensure that everyone has a voice when it comes to protecting and enjoying our coasts. A core tenet of our work has been to ensure the ocean, waves and beaches are safe and accessible to all people.

In 2019, we began our journey in earnest to dedicate more time and resources toward building a more just, equitable, diverse and inclusive (JEDI) organization, as well as to connect our mission more effectively to a broader range of communities and seek new mutually supportive partnerships. Our JEDI work is supported by Surfrider's leadership and a committee of board, staff

and chapter members — all of whom have perspectives to share on JEDI issues. We also continue to engage with outside experts to broaden our knowledge and expertise on these important issues.

## OUR COMMITMENT

The Surfrider Foundation is committed to fostering a just, equitable, diverse and inclusive organization for all people who protect and enjoy the world's ocean, waves and beaches. Our success and collective impact depend on learning from our community, standing in solidarity with our allies and working toward a more just future, both for our organization and the environmental movement as a whole.



Photo: Brady Lawrence







# A Transformative Plan

Over the last 20 years of Surfrider’s history, strategic planning has been at the core of our success. Strategic plans that were developed in 2000, 2006 and 2015 were catalytic in Surfrider’s organizational growth, focus, grassroots organizing, the building and support of our volunteer chapter network and ultimately, in our positive impacts and progress toward achieving our mission. Much of what we learned through those plans remains today, including our five key focus areas, our model for bottom-up and top-down coastal and ocean advocacy and our firm commitment to grassroots activism. Our most recent strategic plan (2015-2020) prioritized plastic pollution and clean water, focused

on the cumulative impacts of our collective actions and created measures for the real world improvements that we are making for our coasts and ocean. Over those five years, we secured hundreds of bills and regulations to eliminate plastic pollution, ensured that recreational water quality was monitored and successfully defended the Clean Water Act at the U.S. Supreme Court.

After years of unprecedented success in achieving our mission and building organizational capacity, it is time to create a more ambitious plan that asks what Surfrider’s ultimate goals are and what it will take to get there.

The goal of this plan is to **evoke a quantum leap** in Surfrider’s ability to defend and protect our beloved coasts for all people. Forever.

Given Surfrider’s long history of grassroots activism and the importance of our chapters and clubs, we knew that it was critically important to get input and buy-in from our network and our larger community of supporters. We also wanted a process that would challenge us to imagine what is possible and to think big about our impacts and the future we want to see.

We used an appreciative inquiry process because it is a strength-based approach that applies generative questions to drive ambitious thinking and strategic design. It’s also a participative and collaborative process that seeks to imagine and design a strategy together. It recognizes that the process is as important as the outcome because it is transformative and can strengthen bonds within the organization. Developing the plan took more than six months because we made a substantial effort to listen and understand the perspectives of our chapters, clubs, supporters, staff and Board of Directors.

Early on, we formed a Core Team of representatives from our key stakeholders, including our Board of Directors, chapters, student clubs, donors and staff. This group met weekly throughout the process and was fundamental to the success of the plan. We also repeatedly sought input from our network.

As a result, the process itself was transformative. The organization is now thinking less incrementally and more toward solving some of our biggest ocean and coastal challenges. Goals that seemed unreachable a year ago now seem possible and we are united across the organization to grow to a scale that is proportional to the challenges we face.

The goal of this plan is to evoke a quantum leap in Surfrider’s ability to defend and protect our beloved coasts for all people. Forever. We believe that it will.



Above: Surfrider’s Core Team used an appreciative inquiry process and generated questions to drive ambitious thinking and strategic design. Some of the unique aspects of the Surfrider Foundation were compiled to visually highlight the strengths and various elements of the organization’s nationwide network.





Photo: Adam Walker





# Key Insights

## WE ARE AT A UNIQUE MOMENT IN TIME

The urgency of coastal and ocean threats demands immediate action. At the same time, interest in surfing, outdoor recreation and activism is at an all-time high. This is an important moment to take action.

## WE ARE A LOVE-BASED ORGANIZATION

It is the love we feel toward our ocean and coasts, ocean recreation, our communities and Surfrider’s mission that draws us together and fuels our passion for action.

## WE ARE A CLIMATE CHANGE ORGANIZATION BUT NOT THE WAY YOU MIGHT THINK

Our role is to address the impacts of climate change on the coasts and to amplify the capacity of a clean, healthy ocean to mitigate climate change. Our ocean and coasts are at the center of the fight against climate change. We must ensure that coastal communities adapt to climate-driven impacts and that we protect coastal and ocean ecosystems so they can lessen those effects.

## OUR NETWORK IS GROWING IN POWER AS IT BECOMES YOUNGER, MORE INCLUSIVE AND INCREASINGLY DIVERSE

Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (JEDI) is not an option, it’s a mandate. Our Surfrider network of activists is becoming younger, more diverse and inclusive. Proactive work on JEDI is essential to creating positive change.

## THE VOLUNTEER NETWORK IS VAST, STOKED AND ENGAGED

There is a seemingly bottomless well of talented and motivated people who are willing to roll up their sleeves and protect our coasts.

## WE HAVE A PLAYBOOK ON COASTAL ACTIVISM THAT IS PROVEN, TRANSFERABLE AND SCALABLE

We know how to combine outreach and education, local stewardship, advocacy and strategic litigation to defend and protect our coasts. Our model can be applied to any coastal issue and scaled nationally and beyond.

## WE HAVE AN ABUNDANCE OF OPPORTUNITY BUT WE MUST FOCUS TO SUCCEED

There is no shortage of issues impacting our coasts and ocean at all geographic scales. However, we must focus on priority issues, such as coastal climate threats, plastic pollution and clean water, to succeed.

## OUR GREATEST CONSTRAINTS ARE INFRASTRUCTURE AND FUNDING

There is immense interest in our mission, a growing network ready to tackle critical coastal issues and we have the blueprint for success. We must continue to build expertise, power and influence if we are to set the national agenda on these priority issues.









# A Quantum Leap to Protect the Coasts

**GOAL**  
**Build expertise, influence and power to set the national agenda on climate and coasts.**

Surfrider's **Theory of Change** is to build local capacity through community building, local stewardship and advocacy with our chapters and clubs and then scale those efforts up to state, regional and national levels with the support of our organizing, science, policy and legal experts.

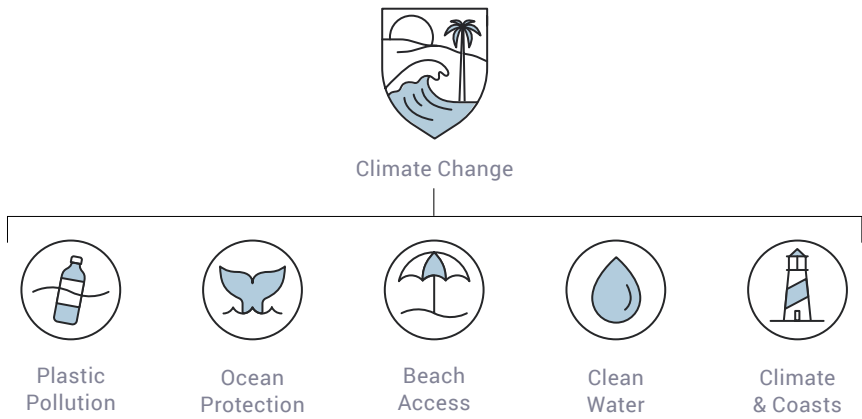


Photo: Erik Kabik



## WHAT

**Areas of Focus**  
Lead with our expertise in ocean conservation to protect clean water and healthy beaches for all people.



## HOW

**Our Approach**  
Leverage our proven scalable model to influence and advocate at local, state and federal levels.



## WHO

**People Power**  
Expand our inclusive network from grassroots to national levels to set the agenda.





# Climate & Coasts

## GOAL

By 2035, all U.S. beaches, coastal habitats, coastal recreation areas and communities are protected because states are effectively managing their coasts and planning for sea level rise, resulting in “A” ratings in Surfrider’s State of the Beach Report.

## STRATEGY



Educate elected officials, the public and supporters about climate change impacts on our ocean and coasts.



Work with states and local communities to plan for sea level rise and coastal adaptation.



Support local coastal habitat restoration and blue carbon efforts.



Advocate for strong climate laws and policies at local, state and federal levels.

Our ocean and coasts are at the center of the climate crisis. The ocean has absorbed nearly 30% of carbon dioxide emitted from burning fossil fuels and 90% of excess heat trapped in the atmosphere. Rising seas and more powerful storms are damaging community infrastructure, exacerbating pollution problems, shrinking our beaches and diminishing the public’s ability to enjoy special places. 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 coastlines are at high risk for ‘beach loss’ due to sea level rise and coastal erosion. In many cases, the most vulnerable communities are also the ones at the highest risk. Tackling these inequalities is fundamental

to our work. Beach access and coastal recreation, which drive our tourism and recreation economies and contribute billions of dollars to coastal communities, are at dire risk.

Surfrider has been fighting poorly-planned development and destructive responses to coastal erosion, such as shoreline armoring, for decades. While that work is still important, we must adapt to climate-driven sea level rise, protect coastal ecosystems that can buffer climate change impacts and sequester carbon, and ensure coastal states and local communities are taking the steps necessary to support these proactive efforts.





# Plastic Pollution

## GOAL

By 2035, **all single-use plastic** consumer products in the U.S. have been **eliminated**, preventing land-based plastic waste from entering the ocean.

## STRATEGY



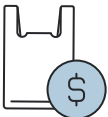
Advocate for strong laws and policies at local, state and federal levels to reduce the impacts of plastic pollution.



Develop the Ocean Friendly program to encompass more restaurants and different types of businesses.



Engage the Surfrider network in activities, such as beach cleanups, that address plastic pollution.



Assist consumer brands to go plastic-free and inform groundbreaking and effective corporate policy.

With more than 11 million metric tons of plastic entering the ocean every year, there is a compelling unmet need to stop the flow of plastic into our environment, including our waterways and ocean. Plastic has infiltrated nearly every realm of our lives and is now found in essentially all regions of the planet, from the bottom of the Mariana Trench to the summit of Mount Everest. Plastic, from its toxic production to polluting waste management, also disproportionately impacts vulnerable communities.

Plastic pollution harms human health and contributes to climate change as well. Despite public outrage and increased advocacy, there is still a projected rise in single-use plastic production.

We must address the rampant development of unneeded single-use plastic, turn off the tap of plastic production and stop making an overabundance of this harmful material. To achieve this, we must eliminate the market for single-use disposable plastic and make a switch to systems that are reusable.





# Clean Water

## GOAL

By 2035, every beach in the U.S. is safe to swim, surf and play in the water, as verified by robust and comprehensive testing, and water quality conditions support healthy coastal ecosystems.

## STRATEGY



Build awareness and community capacity around water pollution issues to drive solutions to pollution problems.



Advocate for strong laws and policies to address pollution problems.



Identify water quality issues through increased monitoring of U.S. beaches.



Pursue legal strategies when Clean Water Act violations occur.

Water quality at the beach and along our coasts is threatened by pollution from sewage, stormwater, industrial discharges and urban and agricultural runoff. These threats result in 20,000 health advisories each year to protect beachgoers from pollution. Pollution also fuels harmful algal blooms that endanger public health, threaten local economies and wreak havoc on coastal ecosystems.

Many communities are poorly equipped to identify and resolve their pollution problems. Water quality regulations and programs are often not adequately implemented and enforced. This is especially true in underserved communities along the coasts. In addition, many environmental rollbacks were enacted

under the previous federal administration that limit the scope of protections for water resources under the Clean Water Act, the nation’s premier water protection law. Meanwhile, annual budgets for the federal agencies responsible for protecting clean water and healthy coasts remain inadequate, including funding of the BEACH Act, which provides critical support to coastal states to monitor water quality at beaches.

Climate change will only continue to increase pollution concerns along our coasts as sea levels and temperatures rise and more frequent and severe coastal storms cause flooding, stormwater runoff and wastewater infrastructure failures.



Photo: Tahnei Roy



# Expand the Network

## GOAL

To advance Surfrider’s mission and ensure that all people benefit from a healthy coastal environment, we will build a more inclusive culture and **diverse network with 125 chapters, 400 clubs and one million active members, volunteers and online activists.**

## STRATEGY



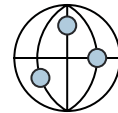
Strengthen our network to represent coastal communities across the nation by supporting 125 chapters in the U.S. and implementing a robust training program.



Develop an innovative program that enables students to engage in community science, leadership and direct action on climate change and ocean conservation.



Through increased inclusion of people and issues, grow and increase the diversity of our powerful grassroots network to a million members, volunteers and online activists by 2035.



Unify Surfrider’s global affiliates around ocean conservation issues, including climate change, plastic pollution and fossil fuel extraction.

Surfrider has a proven grassroots model that protects our ocean and coasts through a unified and collective approach. Although our local chapter and club network is strong, we must engage new activists that can speak for their communities, expand the commitment of ocean conservation to a broader public and be more inclusive to all people. Bold environmental action requires a larger and increasingly diverse network of chapters, clubs and members.

This is a unique moment in history and we are seeing an unprecedented level of commitment among youth

who care about environmental protection, including climate change and plastic pollution. Surfrider’s growing student club network represents the future of the organization and an opportunity for youth to contribute to more equitable and healthy coastal communities.

We are skilled at creating, acquiring and transferring knowledge and action to our network. This enables us to create leadership at local, state and federal levels, and to work across all sectors to protect our ocean and coastal communities.





The threats to our ocean, coasts, communities and planet from climate change, plastic waste and water pollution are enormous. As a result, the call to action is urgent and immediate. With more than 37 years of success, the Surfrider Foundation's dedicated and passionate grassroots network is tackling these challenges head-on. With leaders in local communities across the nation, we are increasingly positioned to drive change at local, state and federal levels. We invite you to join us as we work together to protect our ocean and coasts for all people for today, tomorrow and future generations.







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