Ed Note – This is the first of a multi-part series by Chad Nelsen, Surfrider Foundation’s Environmental Director, who will be looking at two valuable tools; The Pew Oceans Commission Report and the United States Commission on Ocean Policy Report, and how they can be used by Surfrider activists in fighting their local campaigns.

“You will not be able to stay home, brother. You will not be able to plug in, turn on and cop out. You will not be able to lose yourself on skag and skip, Skip out for beer during commercials, Because the [ocean] revolution will not be televised...

You will not have to worry about a dove in your bedroom, a tiger in your tank, or the giant in your toilet bowl. The revolution will not go better with Coke. The revolution will not fight the germs that may cause bad breath. The revolution will put you in the driver’s seat.

The revolution will not be televised, will not be televised, will not be televised, will not be televised. The revolution will be no re-run brothers; The [ocean] revolution will be live.”

Last May, Making Waves published an article celebrating the release of two incredibly important reports on the current condition and threats to our oceans, waves and beaches. These reports were written by the Bush-appointed United States Commission on Ocean Policy and the Pew Charitable Trust-assembled Pew Oceans Commission. Their findings represented the first comprehensive investigation in over thirty years of the condition of our oceans and how we are managing them. The last such effort, known as the Stratton Commission, made a similar assessment in 1969 in a report titled “Our Nation and the Sea.” That report provided a blueprint for ocean policy and was the catalyst for the creation of the National Ocean and Atmospheric Administration, the Coastal Zone Management Act, the Marine Mammal Protection Act and the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act – to name a few responses. That earlier “wake-up call” had a major impact on ocean policy at the federal level and provided many of the “tools” we use everyday at the local level for our chapter campaigns to protect our coasts and oceans. One would hope the new reports would create a similar revolution in the way we care for our coastal and ocean resources.

Perhaps the most remarkable thing about the current reports is that, despite the ideologically different backgrounds of the report sponsors, the conclusions and recommendations were very similar. Both reports have documented a disturbing trend in the on-going degradation of our coasts and oceans. Overdevelopment of our coastal zone, unabated pollution of our coastal waters, altered sediment flow, declining marine life populations, and a host of other threats are impacting our enjoyment of the coast and ocean, economies that rely on healthy coastal and marine natural resources, and the natural heritage we are leaving for future generations.

By all accounts the recent reports mandate an equal or greater level of response than we saw in the 1970’s. Unfortunately, that has not been the case. A Washington Post editorial dated January 23, 2006 summarizes the urgency of the threats, and the critical need for a federal response: “[Ocean] ecosystems are at a tipping point, verging on a collapse from which they won’t recover. The stakes are as immense as the oceans, which will not wait for the White House to gear up to save them.”

We agree that government at every level needs to respond to the call for dramatic change in our efforts to restore and protect our coasts and oceans. But we also know that effective change begins at the “grassroots” level – our local communities. Much of the degradation of our coasts and oceans is the cumulative effect of local actions that, in and of themselves, seem relatively insignificant. But, we know all too well that every acre of wetland filled, every home built in a coastal hazard zone, and every kilogram of pesticide and fertilizer applied to our lawns contributes to intractable local, regional, national and global problems. The reform required to reverse the distressing declines in ocean and coastal health will require a revolution in our thinking and actions – an ocean revolution. That revolution must occur at all levels, from the top down and from the bottom up.

What these Commissions were understandably unable to do was to illustrate how these cumulative impacts are the result of individual behavior and decisions made in our local communities. In other words, the President, or Congress, or your Governor cannot instigate the ocean revolution. The ocean revolution will not be televised. The ocean revolution will begin at the local level by people like Surfrider Foundation activists making incremental change. The ocean revolution will be live.

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful people could change the world. Indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has.”
—Margaret Meade

To illustrate just how the Surfrider Foundation Chapters are making this happen, over the next five issues we will feature a series that highlights chapter efforts that are embodying the solutions proposed by these reports. We will feature campaigns that are addressing the specific threats outlined in the reports, campaigns that are bridging the land-sea connection and are ecosystem-based, efforts that are improving governance, people who are advancing ocean literacy and bringing about a rebirth of an ocean ethic. These reports call for nothing short of an ocean revolution and Surfrider activists around the nation are part of that revolution.