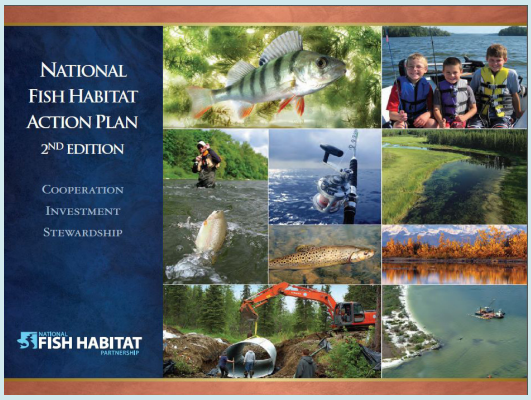
Report to the Secretary of Commerce

September 2012

Accomplishments in Support of the National Fish Habitat Action Plan FY 2006 - FY 2012



The second edition of the National Fish Habitat Action Plan, 2012.

Accomplishments in Support of the National Fish Habitat Action Plan FY 2006 - FY 2012

In March 2012, the Secretaries of Agriculture, Commerce, and the Interior signed a memorandum of understanding to promote collaborative, science-based conservation of the nation's waterways and fisheries through the National Fish Habitat Partnership and the implementation of the National Fish Habitat Action Plan.

The National Fish Habitat Action Plan (Action Plan) provides a national strategy to address aquatic habitat from the interior to the oceans. The Action Plan is a science-based, voluntary, and non-regulatory effort providing a nationwide strategy to harness the energies, expertise, and existing programs of Federal and state agencies, conservation organizations, foundations, and individuals. It supports cooperative, proactive, aquatic habitat protection and restoration goals at multiple geographic scales.

The mission of the National Fish Habitat Action Plan is to protect, restore and enhance the nation's fish and aquatic communities through partnerships that foster fish habitat conservation and improve the quality of life for the American people.

The goals of the National Fish Habitat Action Plan are:

1. Protect and maintain intact and healthy aquatic systems.
2. Prevent further degradation of fish habitats that have been adversely affected.
3. Reverse declines in the quality and quantity of aquatic habitats to improve the overall health of fish and other aquatic organisms.
4. Increase the quality and quantity of fish habitats that support a broad natural diversity of fish and other aquatic species.

Brandywine Creek Dam, DE.

Since 2006, NOAA has supported the goals of the National Fish Habitat Action Plan and the National Fish Habitat Partnership (NFHP) through in-kind contributions of staff and technical assistance and by using existing funding to support national and partnership activities that match NOAA's mission. To date, NOAA's investments in NFHP exceed $2.6 million of existing funds.

NOAA provides leadership to NFHP at the national level by:

- serving on the National Fish Habitat Board (Board),
- providing primary support to the Board,
- providing management and policy support to the Board executive team,
- providing science and technical leadership for the development and execution of the coastal assessments for the 2010 and 2015 Status of Fish Habitats Report,
- engaging other Federal agencies through the Federal Caucus,
- supporting NFHP communications initiatives,
- building fish habitat partnerships, and
- providing technical support and funding for on-the-ground project planning and implementation.

This report to the Secretary of Commerce on NOAA's accomplishments and progress in support of state-led efforts to achieve the goals of the National Fish Habitat Action Plan meets the reporting requirement established in the MOU. The report highlights NOAA's accomplishments and progress, through August 2012, in implementing the Action Plan through four key strategies:

- Supporting existing fish habitat partnerships and fostering new efforts.
- Mobilizing and focusing national and local support for achieving fish habitat conservation goals.
- Measuring and communicating the status and needs of aquatic habitats.
- Providing national leadership and coordination to conserve fish habitats.

Support existing fish habitat partnerships and foster new efforts

Since 2006, NOAA has provided extensive leadership, technical expertise, and financial support to promote the coastal and marine fish habitat partnerships and candidate partnerships. NOAA has actively engaged in the development and implementation of coastally-focused partnerships through staff support in our regional offices and by providing funding for activities like strategic planning workshops and partnership coordination. In addition, NOAA has supported on-the-ground habitat protection and restoration projects with several coastal partnerships. Since 2006 NOAA's support of projects has totaled close to $1.5 million.

There are nine coastal and marine Board-recognized Fish Habitat Partnerships:

Atlantic Coastal Fish Habitat Partnership
California Fish Passage Forum
Great Lakes Basin Fish Habitat Partnership
Hawaii Fish Habitat Partnership
Kenai Peninsula Fish Habitat Partnership
Matanuska-Susitna Basin Salmon Habitat Partnership
Pacific Marine and Estuarine Fish Habitat Partnership
Southeast Aquatic Fish Habitat Partnership
Southwest Alaska Salmon Habitat Partnership

NOAA also provides strong support and leadership in the two Candidate Fish Habitat Partnerships in coastal and marine areas:

Salmon in the City
North American Salmon Stronghold Partnership

Sardines swimming near kelp off the coast of California.

Pacific Marine and Estuarine Fish Habitat Partnership

NOAA Fisheries staff were instrumental in the establishment of the Pacific Marine and Estuarine Fish Habitat Partnership (PMEP), a partnership that supports priority habitat conservation work for fish along the Pacific Coast. In FY2010, NOAA provided support for a PMEP coordinator and a workshop that included federal and state agencies, tribes, local governments, recreational and commercial fishing representatives and non-governmental organizations to garner support for establishment of PMEP. This workshop, organized and implemented through the extensive support of NOAA staff, was successful in gaining significant support for the candidate partnership. PMEP was formally recognized by the National Fish Habitat Board in 2012 as one of eighteen fish habitat partnerships working to implement the National Fish Habitat Action Plan.

Leadership in PMEP:

NOAA Fisheries staff have participated on steering committees for PMEP since 2006. NOAA also serves as Chair of the PMEP Science and Technology Committee.

Technical expertise:

NOAA staff provided technical expertise for the Strategic Planning processes for this partnership, including drafting portions of the Strategic Plans and setting priorities. With NOAA support, PMEP finalized its Strategic Plan in 2012, with clear objectives for conservation of marine and estuarine juvenile fish habitat.

Financial support:

NOAA provided $102,500 from FY2010-FY2012 to support the PMEP coordinator and a PMEP workshop.

Cape Fear River, NC at sunset.

Southeast Aquatic Resources Partnership

In 2007, NOAA developed and mobilized the Southeast Aquatic Resources Partnership (SARP) to fund and deliver on-the-ground coastal fish habitat restoration projects in the nine Southeastern coastal states that border the Gulf of Mexico and the South Atlantic Coast. NOAA-sponsored projects have restored oyster reef, salt marsh, mangrove, and seagrass habitats.

Leadership in SARP

NOAA staff actively participate on the SARP Steering, Science and Data, and Outreach and Communications Committees.

Technical expertise:

NOAA has also dedicated considerable leadership, time, and technical expertise during development of the Southeast Aquatic Habitat Plan published in 2008. NOAA's continued contributions complement those of the Departments of the Interior and Agriculture to ensure the recognition of linkages between freshwater and saltwater habitats and incorporation of strategic ecosystem based management objectives aimed at preserving and restoring fish habitat from the headwaters, through estuaries, to the offshore marine environment.

Financial support:

NOAA provided $1,175,000 to SARP between FY07 and FY11 to fund 22 coastal restoration projects. These projects leveraged significant additional federal, state and local funding to catalyze community participation, and increase stakeholder interest in NFHP at the grass roots level. NOAA continues to provide technical expertise for ongoing projects and review of future project selection.

In FY2012, NOAA provided another $200,000 to SARP to continue restoration work with a focus on the South Atlantic and Cape Fear watershed in North Carolina.

In addition to funding on-the-ground habitat protection and restoration projects, NOAA provides approximately $5,000 each year to support the continued operation of SARP.

NOAA Helps Rescue North Carolina's "Living Dune"

Located on the Outer Banks, North Carolina, Jockey's Ridge is the tallest active sand dune system in the eastern United States. Jockey's Ridge is often referred to as "The Living Dune" because shifting winds are constantly reshaping it. However, damage to the dunes has allowed sand to blow directly on the fringing salt marsh, making it susceptible to wave and wind erosion.

NOAA Fisheries partnered with the Southeast Aquatics Resources Partnership, the North Carolina Coastal Federation, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, North Carolina Division of Marine Fisheries, The Nature Conservancy, and Friends of Jockey's Ridge to participate in the Jockey's Ridge Living Shoreline and Oyster Reef Restoration Project.

As a part of this multi-year conservation project, NOAA helped to construct a low-profile breakwater sill, oyster reefs and planted native grasses to reduce shoreline erosion and enhance the habitat for seabirds, fish, crustaceans, oysters and other mollusks.

The project area is the documented environment for more than 75 species, some of which are threatened or endangered.

This project was highlighted as one of NFHP's "10 Waters to Watch" in 2009.

http://www.habitat.noaa.gov/protection/nfhap/livingduness.html

Catch of the day: Striped Bass

Atlantic Coastal Fish Habitat Partnership

NOAA was a strong supporter in the development of the Atlantic Coastal Fish Habitat Partnership (ACFHP), a coast-wide collaborative effort to accelerate the conservation of habitat for native Atlantic coastal, estuarine-dependent, and diadromous fish. This partnership extends from Maine to the Florida Keys.

Leadership in ACFHP

NOAA is a voting member on the ACFHP Steering Committee, and also participates on the ACFHP Science and Data Committee, Finance Committee, Project Endorsement Workgroup, and the Project Selection Workgroup.

Recognizing the overlap of many coastal fish habitat partnerships, NOAA ensured the efficient use and leverage of resources by working with SARP and ACFHP to develop collaboration opportunities between the partnerships.

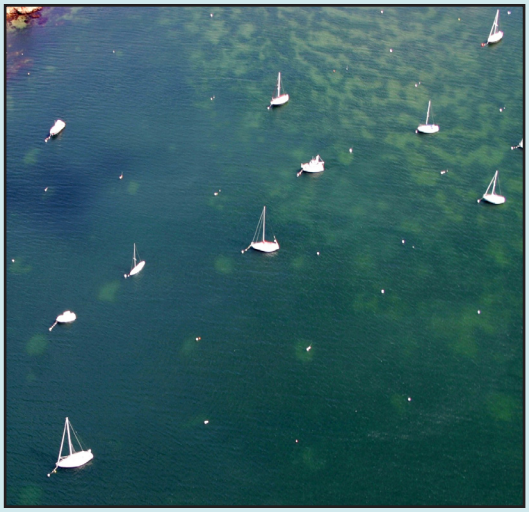
Technical expertise:

NOAA staff has significantly contributed to the development of the ACFHP Strategic Plan which specifies fish habitat types that are a priority for the Partnership, threats to those habitats and actions that can be undertaken to conserve those habitats. As a member of the Science and Data Committee, NOAA committed significant staff resources to assist in the development of the Fish/Habitat Matrix, the resource document that describes the specific habitat needs of approximately 120 Atlantic estuarine and diadromous fish species.

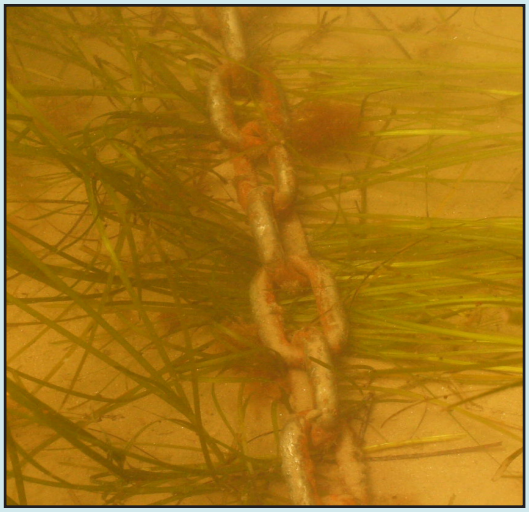
Financial support:

NOAA has provided funding in support of many ACFHP habitat conservation projects. NOAA partnered with the State of Massachusetts and other non-governmental organizations in the development of a pilot project to install and monitor the success of conservation moorings in the reestablishment of eel grass habitats that were scoured out by traditional boat mooring systems—the first project to receive an endorsement from ACFHP as a project that fulfilled actions within their Strategic Plan.

NOAA is currently partnering with ACFHP to transfer this technology to Mid-Atlantic waters to demonstrate its ability to conserve fish habitats and provide outreach to the boating community to seek voluntary use of this mooring technology. NOAA provided $15,000 to the Massachusetts conservation mooring project, and another $20,000 in 2012 to develop a similar project in the Mid-Atlantic region.



Visible scars in the eelgrass habitat from use of traditional chain boat moorings in MA.



Old style chain drag mooring responsible for damage to valuable eelgrass habitat.

Protecting Eelgrass Habitat Using Conservation Moorings

NOAA partnered with the Town of Tisbury, Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and The Nature Conservancy to protect important eelgrass habitat within the Town of Tisbury, MA by replacing traditional boat moorings with alternative moorings.

Eelgrass is an extremely valuable spawning and nursery habitat for a variety of fish and shellfish species, including winter flounder, summer flounder and bay scallop. It also is an important primary producer supporting the base of the food chain. Throughout Massachusetts and the Northeast, eelgrass meadows have been declining over the past 20 years. The decline is primarily from deteriorating water quality, but also as a result of a wide range of physical alterations such as dredging and filling, as well as boating related impacts.

Eelgrass habitat is vulnerable from a number of boating related activities, including the use of traditional chain moorings. Traditional chain moorings, when placed within or next to eelgrass beds, can severely damage habitat through scour. The disturbance to the seafloor by mooring chains also suspends sediment and decreases water clarity, which prevents light from reaching eelgrass.

What are conservation moorings?

Conservation mooring systems are designed to avoid contact with the seafloor, often through the use of flexible, floatable lines. Depending on the substrate, helical anchors may be used in place of a traditional concrete mooring block in order to reduce the footprint within eelgrass or shellfish habitat.

To determine the level of eelgrass recovery once conservation moorings have been deployed, researchers from NOAA, the Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency are conducting long-term monitoring. of the effectiveness of this technology as a coastal resource management tool.

This project was endorsed by the Atlantic Coastal Fish Habitat Partnership as a project that fulfilled actions within their Strategic Plan.

Fish Habitat Partnerships in Alaska

Kenai Fish Habitat Partnership, Mat-Su Fish Habitat Partnership, and Southwest Alaska Salmon Habitat Partnership

In response to the National Board's concern over the number of what were considered smaller partnerships in Alaska, NOAA, in partnership with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the State of Alaska, formed a state-wide umbrella group to coordinate the administrative and data needs of all the Alaska fish habitat partnerships.

NOAA has also supported the two candidate partnerships in Alaska: the Southeast Alaska Fish Habitat Partnership (SEAKFHP) and Salmon In The City. NOAA is working with the SEAKFHP to gain recognized partnership status.

Mat-Su restoration volunteers plant vegetation on Little Creek, AK.

Leadership in Alaska partnerships

AKR staff participate on steering committees of three of the four recognized Alaska partnerships (Kenai Fish Habitat Partnership, Mat-Su Fish Habitat Partnership, and Southwest Alaska Salmon Habitat Partnership).

Technical expertise:

NOAA has dedicated considerable staff time and technical expertise for the Strategic Planning processes for the Alaska partnerships, including drafting portions of the Strategic Plans and setting priorities. NOAA continues to support these partnerships through active participation in activities such as planning and execution of symposia to share the results of activities funded by the partnerships.

Financial support:

In support of SEAKFHP, NOAA provided $85,000 of Sustainable Salmon Funds to the Alaska Department of Fish and Game in 2011 to acquire a half-time coordinator. NOAA's contribution leveraged an additional $30,000 in matching funds from Trout Unlimited. Through this support, NOAA is assisting SEAKFHP as the partnership develops a strategic plan that identifies conservation and restoration priorities.

Hawaii Fish Habitat Partnership

NOAA worked with the Hawaii Fish Habitat Partnership as they were developing their application to the National Fish Habitat Board to broaden the Partnership's geographic focus from predominantly freshwater to one that includes freshwater, estuarine, and marine fish habitats. NOAA's leadership on the National Fish Habitat Board was pivotal in encouraging the Partnership to take this step, and NOAA staff in the Pacific Islands Region have been providing technical assistance to support the broadened focus. As a result, a key aspect of the Partnership's strategic plan is implementing the "Ahupua'a Approach"—a ridge-to-reef view of aquatic ecosystems in Hawaii.

Stream habitat, Yreka, CA

California Fish Passage Forum

NOAA has actively worked with the California Fish Passage Forum since 2009 to protect and revitalize anadromous fish populations. Through this collaboration, the Fish Passage Forum has developed criteria and a model to prioritize over 19,000 barriers identified in the California Passage Assessment Database and finalized a 5 year strategic plan. NOAA has also supported a fish passage barrier removal project on Connor Creek that opened previously inaccessible high quality spawning and rearing habitat for threatened coho salmon.

Coastal & Marine Fish Habitat Protection with the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation

Recognizing the limited funding opportunities specifically dedicated to voluntary approaches to coastal habitat protection, NOAA provided $150,000 to the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) in 2011 to establish the National Fish Habitat Partnership Coastal & Marine Fish Habitat Protection grant. Through this new funding opportunity, NOAA and NFWF will fund projects that promote the protection of coastal and marine fish habitats through the NFHP fish habitat partnerships using voluntary and non-regulatory approaches that maintain, or prevent the decline of, aquatic habitat and aquatic resources that depend on those habitats. The funding policy required that applicants obtain letters of support and/or endorsement from one of the NFHP fish habitat partnerships. Through this process, the fish habitat partnerships received greater visibility among other coastal fish habitat organizations and endorsed nine proposed projects. Final project selection will occur in the fall of 2012.

For more information on the NFHP Coastal & Marine Fish Habitat Protection funding opportunity, visit www.nfwf.org/nfhpcoastal

Mobilize and focus national and local support for achieving fish habitat conservation goals

NOAA has implemented many national and regional initiatives since 2006 to protect, restore, and enhance fish habitat, including strengthening and building new partnerships with local organizations.

Cape Fear River Partnership

In 2011, NOAA initiated the formation of the Cape Fear River Partnership, comprised of key federal, state, local, academic, industry, and non-governmental organizations in the Cape Fear River basin with keen interests and specific expertise in fish passage, habitat conservation, and water quality solutions. Recognizing the economic, ecological, social, and cultural importance of migratory fish in the Cape Fear River, and striving to create a spirit of focused collaboration that transcends political boundaries, the multiple stakeholders comprising the Cape Fear River Partnership are developing a Cape Fear River Basin Action Plan.

Annual Striped Bass Tournament on the Cape Fear River, NC

The newly-built rock arch ramp for fish passage at Lock & Dam #1 on the Cape Fear River.

The plan outlines specific actions the partners will implement within the Cape Fear River basin to improve conditions for migratory fish.

The Cape Fear River Basin Action Plan is conceived as a set of specific actions that can be taken, separately and yet in parallel, by the partnership members to restore fish passage and improve habitat and water quality to revitalize populations of migratory fish and improve the overall condition of the river for the benefit of human communities.

The plan includes actions that address migratory fish issues from the headwaters of the Deep and Haw Rivers to the mouth of the Cape Fear River in Brunswick County. The plan also includes actions designed to quantitatively and qualitatively measure the socioeconomic benefits of the conservation actions contemplated within this plan, and to effectively communicate those benefits to the public. NOAA anticipates the completion of this voluntary, partnership-based action plan in early 2013.

The Atlantic Coastal Fish Habitat Partnership is an active participant in the Cape Fear River Partnership. NOAA has also enlisted SARP's expertise to identify high priority migratory fish habitat conservation projects within the Cape Fear River watershed. These projects will be funded through $90,000 provided by NOAA to SARP in 2012.

For more information on the Cape Fear River Partnership, visit http://www.habitat.noaa.gov/protection/capefear/

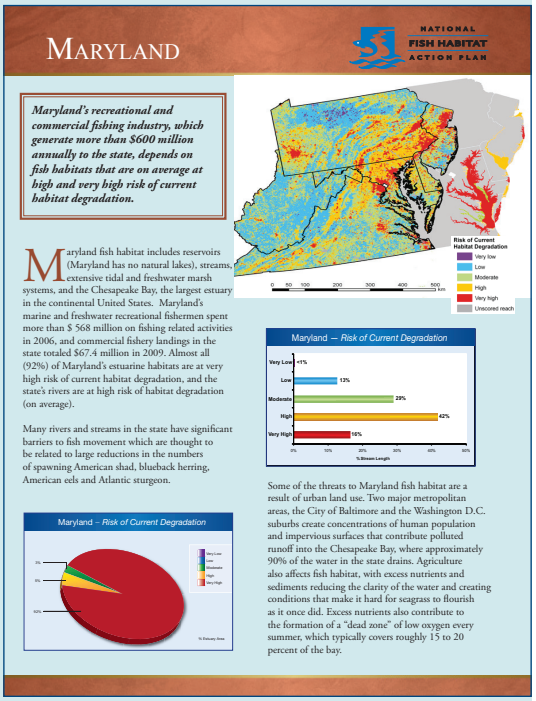
Measure and communicate the status and needs of aquatic habitats

NOAA has applied strong leadership, technical expertise, and funding for NFHP's scientific and communication activities. In 2012, NOAA provided over $220,000 in staff time and direct contracts in support of the NFHP Science and Data Committee. NOAA staff has contributed editorial and design support for many NFHP outreach products.

Through A Fish's Eye: The Status of Fish Habitats in the United States, 2010

Through a Fish's Eye: the Status of Fish Habitats in the United States, 2010

NOAA provided extensive leadership and expertise in the production of the 2010 National Fish Habitat Assessment and accompanying report, including in-kind support of $616,000. NOAA developed and completed the coastal portion of the assessment and a separate assessment for Alaska, both of which were incorporated into the Through a Fish's Eye report released by NFHP in April 2011. For the coastal assessment, the NOAA team refined existing NOAA coastal boundary data and analyzed disturbance variables occurring within the coastal watersheds.



MARYLAND

NATIONAL FISH HABITAT ACTION PLAN

Maryland's recreational and commercial fishing industry, which generate more than $600 million annually to the state, depends on fish habitats that are on average at high and very high risk of current habitat degradation.

Maryland fish habitat includes reservoirs (Maryland has no natural lakes), streams, extensive tidal and freshwater marsh systems, and the Chesapeake Bay, the largest estuary in the continental United States. Maryland's marine and freshwater recreational fishermen spent more than $ 568 million on fishing related activities in 2006, and commercial fishery landings in the state totaled $67.4 million in 2009. Almost all (92%) of Maryland's estuarine habitats are at very high risk of current habitat degradation, and the state's rivers are at high risk of habitat degradation (on average).

Many rivers and streams in the state have significant barriers to fish movement which are thought to be related to large reductions in the numbers of spawning American shad, blueback herring, American eels and Atlantic sturgeon.

Maryland – *Risk of Current Degradation*

Risk of Current Habitat Degradation: Very low, Low, Moderate, High, Very high, Unscored reach

Maryland – *Risk of Current Degradation*

Very Low <1%; Low 13%; Moderate 29%; High 42%; Very High 16%; % Stream Length

Maryland – *Risk of Current Degradation*

Very Low, Low, Moderate, High, Very High; % Estuary Area

Some of the threats to Maryland fish habitat are a result of urban land use. Two major metropolitan areas, the City of Baltimore and the Washington D.C. suburbs create concentrations of human population and impervious surfaces that contribute polluted runoff into the Chesapeake Bay, where approximately 90% of the water in the state drains. Agriculture also affects fish habitat, with excess nutrients and sediments reducing the clarity of the water and creating conditions that make it hard for seagrass to flourish as it once did. Excess nutrients also contribute to the formation of a "dead zone" of low oxygen every summer, which typically covers roughly 15 to 20 percent of the bay.

One of fifty state-by-state fact sheets designed by NOAA to accompany the Status of Fish Habitats Report.

In addition to its leadership on the coastal assessment, NOAA coordinated the final development of the Through a Fish's Eye report. NOAA managed the design, layout and production of the report and created and implemented an outreach campaign for the report release. NOAA provided $15,000 in 2010 and 2011 for printing and layout of the report and for re-printing of the Action Plan. NOAA's outreach campaign included the development of state fact sheets that summarize the assessment results and key fishing and fish habitat facts for each state. These products have been used by state, federal, and non-governmental organizations to convey the importance of fish habitat, highlight key threats to these habitats, and inform state and federal managers on the many ways that NFHP benefits fish habitats.

Additional assessment support

Through the PMEP Science and Technology committee, NOAA is leading the development of a plan to assess fish habitat in nearshore marine and estuarine areas along California, Oregon and Washington. The assessment will examine the distribution and density of fish and their habitats, as well as threats to those habitats. The assessment will also identify priority needs for fish habitat conservation. NOAA is working with the PMEP coordinator to compile resources needed to support the assessment.

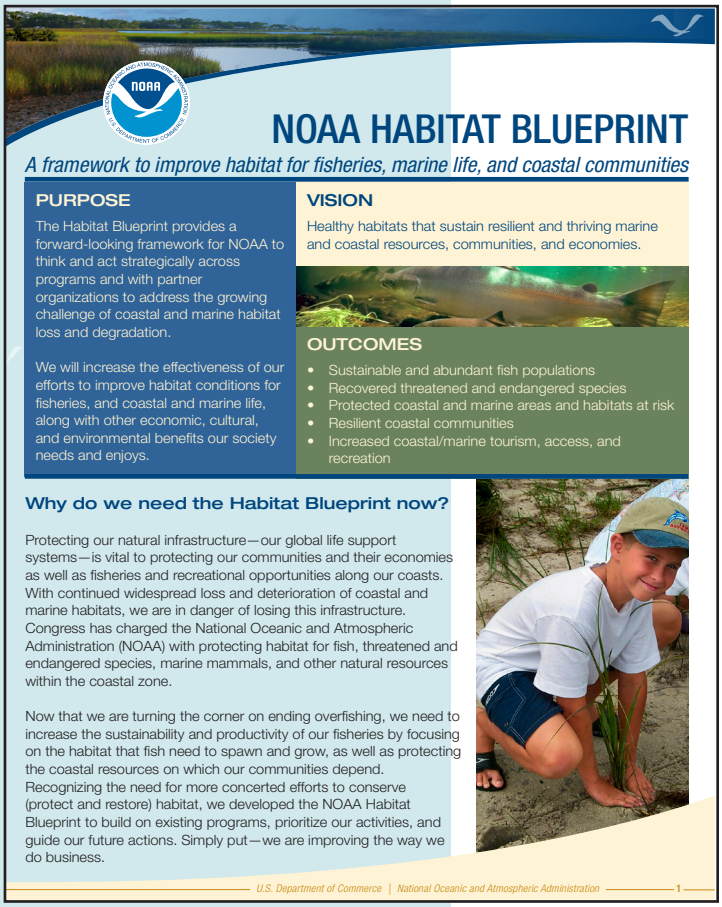
Since 2008, NOAA has assisted the SARP Science and Data Committee in their use of the extensive coastal habitat and fishery geospatial data available throughout the Southeast. This data is used to conduct a coastal assessment. The Science and Data Committee members are currently prioritizing these available data into a comprehensive, unified coastal assessment tool to help SARP further refine science-based decisions in achieving goals and objectives of the Southeast Aquatic Habitat Plan and NFHAP. Additional products NOAA has developed through the SARP Science and Data Committee include:

1. a riparian assessment analysis used to assess the current condition of riparian habitat within a 30 meter buffer along streams and rivers throughout the SARP region;
2. the Southern Instream Flow Network which addresses the impacts of flow alterations in the southeast region's aquatic ecosystems;
3. a southeastern aquatic nuisance species brochure; and
4. an assessment of the Tennessee/Cumberland/Ohio River Basins.

Provide national leadership and coordination to conserve fish habitats

Support for the National Fish Habitat Board

NOAA has provided extensive and significant leadership and coordination for the National Fish Habitat Partnership through its primary Board coordination support since the Board's creation in 2006. NOAA staff provide leadership support to the Board Chair and Vice-Chair on Board operations primarily through three annual Board meetings and one annual conference call. NOAA staff also leads Board staff coordination across committees and projects. NOAA does this by establishing a standing Board meeting schedule to ensure the Board fulfills its budget, oversight, and direction setting responsibilities; by ensuring the delivery of high quality, timely materials necessary for effective Board meetings and decision-making; and by ensuring the establishment of annual Board priorities for implementing the National Fish Habitat Action Plan. NOAA staff also provide primary staff support to the Chair, Vice-Chair and Executive Leadership Team on the regular review of Board membership. NOAA's leadership in implementing strong operation systems ensures transparent Board decision-making, which is critical to the success of a partnership-based effort such as the National Fish Habitat Partnership.



NOAA HABITAT BLUEPRINT

A framework to improve habitat for fisheries, marine life, and coastal communities

PURPOSE

The Habitat Blueprint provides a forward-looking framework for NOAA to think and act strategically across programs and with partner organizations to address the growing challenge of coastal and marine habitat loss and degradation.

We will increase the effectiveness of our efforts to improve habitat conditions for fisheries, and coastal and marine life, along with other economic, cultural, and environmental benefits our society needs and enjoys.

VISION

Healthy habitats that sustain resilient and thriving marine and coastal resources, communities, and economies.

OUTCOMES

- Sustainable and abundant fish populations
- Recovered threatened and endangered species
- Protected coastal and marine areas and habitats at risk
- Resilient coastal communities
- Increased coastal/marine tourism, access, and recreation

Why do we need the Habitat Blueprint now?

Protecting our natural infrastructure—our global life support systems—is vital to protecting our communities and their economies as well as fisheries and recreational opportunities along our coasts. With continued widespread loss and deterioration of coastal and marine habitats, we are in danger of losing this infrastructure. Congress has charged the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) with protecting habitat for fish, threatened and endangered species, marine mammals, and other natural resources within the coastal zone.

Now that we are turning the corner on ending overfishing, we need to increase the sustainability and productivity of our fisheries by focusing on the habitat that fish need to spawn and grow, as well as protecting the coastal resources on which our communities depend. Recognizing the need for more concerted efforts to conserve (protect and restore) habitat, we developed the NOAA Habitat Blueprint to build on existing programs, prioritize our activities, and guide our future actions. Simply put—we are improving the way we do business.

U.S. Department of Commerce | National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration 1

NOAA Habitat Blueprint

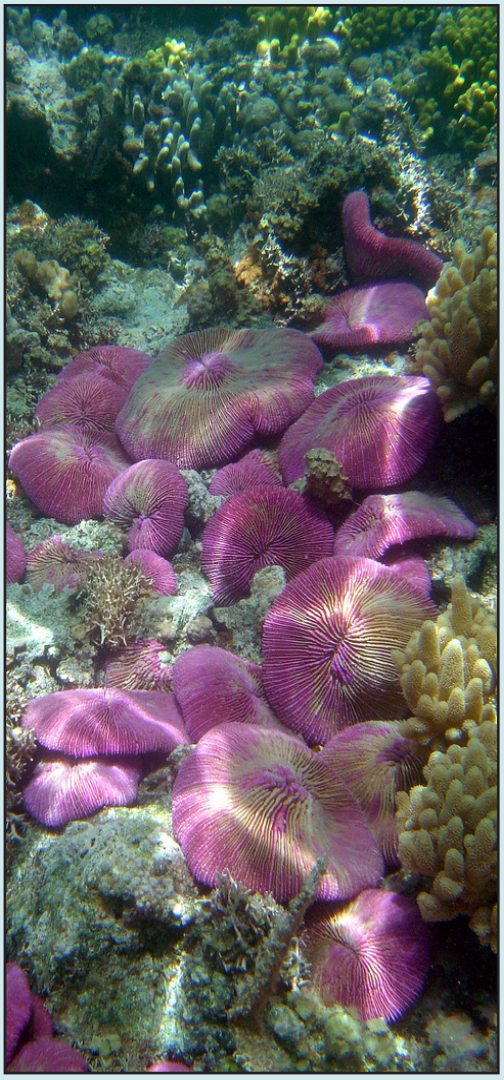
In 2011, NOAA's growing interest in improving the sustainability and productivity of our Nation's fisheries led to the creation of the NOAA Habitat Blueprint. Through this new effort, NOAA has made a concerted effort to focus on conserving the habitat that fish need to spawn and grow, as well as the coastal resources on which our communities depend. The NOAA Habitat Blueprint provides a forward looking framework for NOAA to think and act strategically across programs and with partner organizations to address the growing challenge of coastal and marine habitat loss and degradation. This framework builds on existing programs, prioritizes our activities, and guides our future actions.

Through the NOAA Habitat Blueprint, NOAA is implementing many of the actions called for in the NFHP MOU. The MOU directs NOAA to:

- ensure that its actions are consistent with and support the priorities of the Action Plan to improve the efficiency of its operations, and ensure effective coordination with partners and stakeholders;
- coordinate its activities in support of the Action Plan with other interagency efforts, such as the National Ocean Policy;
- and to ensure that its policies further the goals of the Action Plan.

The principles and approaches of the Habitat Blueprint also support the priority objectives of the National Ocean Policy, including for regional ecosystem protection and restoration, increased knowledge to improve management and policy decisions, and better coordinated and supported regional management of the nation's oceans, coasts and Great lakes.

For more information on NOAA's Habitat Blueprint, visit www.habitat.noaa.gov/blueprint



Coral Conservation in Guam is a Regional Initiative of the NOAA Habitat Blueprint.

Looking Forward: NOAA's Actions to Support the Goals of the National Fish Habitat Action Plan, 2013-2014

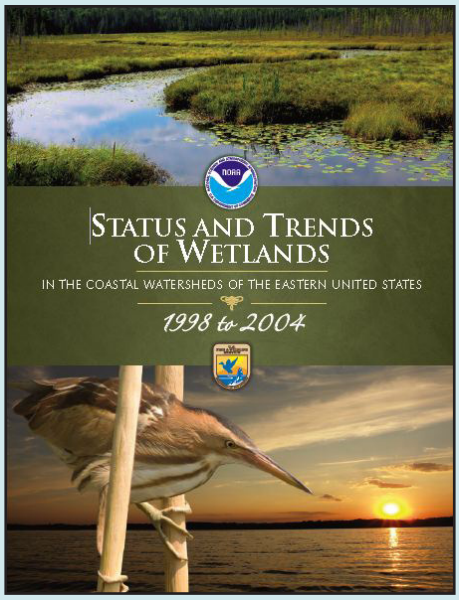
NOAA plans to increase the effectiveness of our habitat conservation programs and improve coordination with other federal agencies, states, and non-governmental partners in the next two years through many national and regional initiatives.

NOAA Habitat Blueprint: Habitat Focus Areas

Through the NOAA Habitat Blueprint, NOAA will select habitat focus areas in each of its coastal regions by identifying spatial intersections where collaboration among NOAA management and science programs and external partners will address multiple habitat-dependent objectives. These priorities will leverage additional resources and achieve conservation results with greater efficiency.

National Fish Habitat Assessment

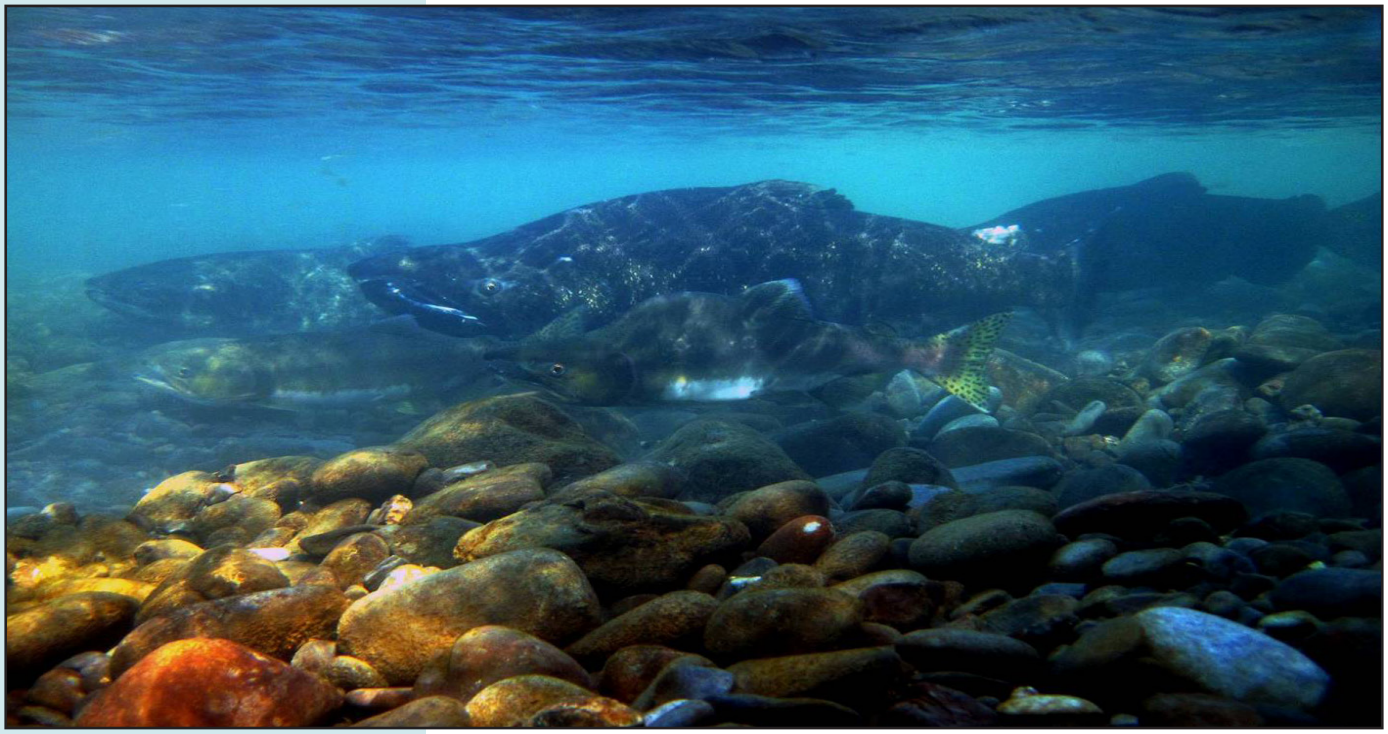
NOAA will continue its leadership in the development of the coastal portion of the next National Fish Habitat Assessment. The coastal team has already begun work on the assessment, which will include a more robust assessment model that incorporates additional information on physical, temporal, and biological components of fish habitat. This assessment will be regionally based to take advantage of regional variability and associated data sets. The assessment is anticipated to be completed in 2015.



Status and Trends of Wetlands in the Coastal Watersheds of the Eastern United States, 1998 to 2004

Interagency Coastal Wetlands Workgroup

NOAA is a co-lead with the Environmental Protection Agency of the Interagency Coastal Wetlands Workgroup. This workgroup, founded on the 2008 report published by NOAA and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Status and Trends of Wetlands in the Coastal Watersheds of the Eastern United States, 1998 to 2004, also includes representatives from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and the U.S. Geological Survey. In the coming year, the working group will continue looking at coastal wetlands across the country to determine what strategies can be used to better conserve these valuable fish habitats. The working group is using the foundation built from the past 3 years' work conducting seven workshops around the country to create an analytical framework to develop national strategies to better conserve coastal wetlands. The results from the application of the framework to select coastal wetlands in the Gulf of Mexico, and along the Atlantic and Pacific coasts will be used to provide national coordination for conserving coastal wetland habitats.

Increased Non-federal Stakeholder Engagement

NOAA will work closely with the recreational fishing community and stakeholders such as seafood distributors and processors to prioritize habitat conservation efforts and leverage resources to achieve strong, vibrant, and sustainable fisheries. Action will be taken to identify and address discrete conservation priorities and needs, such as funding collaborative scientific studies to clarify the linkages between habitat, forage fish, and species of recreational and commercial value.