



Advancing Ocean Planning in the Northeast

Northeast Regional Ocean Council work plan summary

January 2012

Summary – In the Fall 2010, the Northeast Regional Ocean Council (NROC)¹ published a framework for ocean planning in New England. This framework outlines a five-year process for implementing ocean planning and putting into practice the related elements of the National Ocean Policy to meet the region's needs. Since 2010, NROC has successfully sought funding for critical Phase I foundational work to begin this effort and, based on available funds, has drafted a general two-year work plan. As future funding becomes available, the other elements of the framework will be implemented. Beginning in the winter of 2012, NROC anticipates issuing Requests for Proposals to secure contractor services to help accomplish much of its work plan. The main elements of the NROC work plan are:

1. **Design and implement stakeholder and “user community” engagement**, initially to define ocean planning goals and ensure public involvement throughout the planning process. This element will include outreach across the New England states, employing interactive meetings and internet technology to maximize participation. Additional emphasis will be placed on outreach to specific user groups to ensure participation and input from key sectors. This process will include a participatory effort to define the needs of particular human uses, as they relate to physical space and associated infrastructure requirements, and as they may be subject to change in the future based on technological trends and economic drivers.
2. **Compile, analyze and, enhance existing data through the creation of new data products, and continue to serve data products through the Northeast ocean data portal.** NROC's regional data portal team developed a regional data portal (a publicly-accessible on-line spatial data server—www.northeastoceandata.org) in 2010. NROC will continue to work with this team to further develop priority data sets for ocean planning purposes. Additionally, new data products will be developed to fill gaps in information, i.e. related to spatial patterns of recreational uses and commercial fishing.
3. **Complete a baseline characterization to provide a comprehensive overview of the ecological, social and economic characteristics of the planning area.** NROC will prepare a baseline characterization summarizing the extent of knowledge about marine waters offshore New England. NROC will investigate existing models and tools with potential for application in such a characterization and that could be used in future planning activities (for example, to analyze human use scenarios). Special emphasis will be placed on methods to characterize the region's marine habitats. It is anticipated that sub-regions or special areas of focus within the larger planning area will emerge as the baseline characterization is vetted by scientific advisors, stakeholders, and staff.
4. **Preliminary look at approaches to address identified issues and implement a future ocean plan for the Northeast.** This project element is a key aspect of Phase I to ensure that, as the region's goals and issues are identified, regulatory and non-regulatory approaches to meeting goals and resolving issues are simultaneously being discussed.

Questions about this work plan summary may be sent to:

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¹ NROC is a state-federal partnership that reaches across state boundaries to find and implement solutions to the region's most pressing ocean and coastal issues. NROC members include the New England coastal states (Connecticut, Rhode Island, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Maine) and federal agencies, including the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, several line agencies within the Department of the Interior (including the Bureau of Offshore Energy Management, the US Geological Survey, National Park Service, and US Fish and Wildlife Service), US Environmental Protection Agency, the US Coast Guard, the US Army Corps of Engineers, and the US Department of Agriculture.