

Ocean Planning Committee 2015-2016 Work Plan

The Ocean Planning Committee is one of three NROC Standing Committees. This committee was established to inform and recommend to the Council how best to approach regional issues and coordinate activities related to ocean planning in New England.

Goal: Assist in the development of a regional ocean plan to support ecosystem-based management of the Northeast's marine environment and its human uses by working collaboratively with federal, state and tribal government, NE Fisheries Management Council, and stakeholders.

Need for Action: The health of the ocean and the livelihoods that depend on it are vitally important to New England residents, visitors and businesses. In 2009, ocean-related economic activity totaled over \$11 billion in GDP for the region, providing over 190,000 jobs. People in New England greatly value this traditional ocean-related heritage and are seeking basic needs from the ocean—food, energy, and others—in new and increasingly complex ways. Simultaneously, there is much to learn about the ocean ecosystem, its natural resources, and existing uses that depend on those resources such as fishing, shipping, and recreation. Better scientific information and a better understanding of current and future human uses of the ocean will enable New England to achieve its economic goals and ensure healthy oceans.

To meet these needs, NROC continues to gather data and develop maps of human activities, such as commercial fishing, shipping, and recreational boating and other recreational activities. NROC also is helping to enhance understanding of the ocean ecosystem by developing maps of areas used by marine mammals, fish, and birds, and integrating this information in a baseline assessment. In addition, NROC has worked collaboratively to develop options for effective decision-making to ensure improved coordination among agencies, transparency of decisions, and use of ocean data portal information in ocean management decisions. For these projects, NROC is working with people directly involved with these activities: scientists, fishermen, boaters, and environmental groups, as well as leaders in the shipping, ports, and energy industries. This approach ensures that people who depend on the ocean are involved in NROC's work.

The National Ocean Policy states that a Regional Planning Body will have the responsibility of developing an ocean plan for New England. In spring 2012, New England's Governors, federal agencies, NE Fishery Management Council, and tribal governments named representatives to this Regional Planning Body. NROC shares membership with the Regional Planning Body, and thus NROC will be an important resource and contributor to the development of a New England ocean plan. While NROC, and this committee, will continue to be actively involved in the ongoing regional ocean planning projects, oversight during this work plan period will be with the NE Regional Planning Body. In addition, to avoid duplication, specific projects tasks and activities will be detailed and tracked in the RPB Framework found at: <http://neocceanplanning.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/NE-Regional-Ocean-Planning-Framework-February-2014.pdf>

Strategies: The committee has determined two strategies for working toward its goal. During 2015-2016, the committee will:

1. Support efforts of the NE RPB in development of a regional ocean plan
2. Connect and strengthen regional ocean planning efforts in NE through providing a forum for discussion, seeking new sources of capacity for NROC's work plan, and actively participating in the NE Regional Planning Body process and products.

Strategies and activities: Each of the two strategies has specific associated activities that the committee members will implement.

Strategy OP-1: Support efforts of the NE RPB in development of a regional ocean plan

As noted above, ongoing regional ocean planning efforts will be overseen and tracked by the NE Regional Planning Body. NROC will continue to support these efforts, which include stakeholder engagement, development of data and science projects, development of decision support tools, and preparation of a baseline characterization of the NE region. Please refer to the NE RPB Framework document for additional details.

<http://neoplan.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/NE-Regional-Ocean-Planning-Framework-February-2014.pdf>

Strategy OP-2: Connect and strengthen regional ocean planning efforts in NE through providing a forum for discussion, seeking new sources of capacity for NROC's work plan, and actively participating in the NE Regional Planning Body process and products.

Activities

OP 2.1 Consider regional ocean plan implementation opportunities

NROC will convene discussions on specific opportunities to achieve regional goals, such as coordinating efforts between federal and state programs around management of sand and gravel resources.

- 2.1.1 Regional Sand Management: A new committee of agency colleagues has been established to be co-chaired by Bob LaBelle, BOEM; Bill Hubbard, USACE; and State Co-chair TBD. Potential activities include:
 - Identify potential sand resources off shore as result of the new BOEM data acquisition contract and BOEM/state cooperative agreements, and incorporate findings into regional ocean data portal.
 - Identify matrix/list of coastal projects that need sand (quantities, timeframe, location).
 - Identify regional environmental issues or ocean uses that impact or are impacted by sand management (as opposed to considering on project by project basis).
 - Identify data and information gaps that hinder regional sand management.
 - Convene webinars/meetings to discuss leasing process, time frames, realities, sensitivities, and ways to improve the process (e.g., consider longer term regional use leases rather than 2 yr project leases) and decrease potential conflict on projects through early dialog and information sharing.

OP 2.2 Seek additional opportunities/grants/partners to pursue regional ocean planning priorities

NROC will work with existing partners and seek new opportunities to advance regional ocean planning work, including beyond the planning phase, which ends in 2016.

OP 2.3 Continue to identify and implement regional communications strategies

NROC will build on efforts to develop website capabilities, two-way online communications, and consider opportunities to synch messaging with RPB communication efforts.

OP 2.4 Continue to nurture Ocean Planning Committee meetings

Although the main dialogue for regional ocean planning will be led by the NE RPB for this 2015-2016 work plan period, the NROC Ocean Planning Committee will begin to position itself to refine its role beyond this planning effort to assist with implementation of the regional ocean plan.

Resources:

All tasks described above are supported by NROC grants. NROC will continue to seek additional opportunities in support of regional ocean planning work.

Implementation Leads:

NROC has three full-time staff responsible for implementing NROC's work plan, particularly as it relates to supporting NE RPB progress. In addition to these staff resources, NROC members serve on the ocean planning committee and share responsibility for conducting NROC business such as developing Requests for Proposals, reviewing proposals, and other related tasks.

Past Accomplishments:

Below is a summary of past accomplishments of the Ocean Planning Committee.

➤ **Funding to support the NROC and regional ocean planning activities**

NROC has been awarded five separate grants, and has also leveraged a significant amount of in-kind resources, in support of its work plan.

➤ **Progress towards Northeast Regional Ocean Plan**

Through its support role for the Northeast RPB, NROC members and staff have enabled:

- Publically approved 'Framework for Ocean Planning in the Northeast,' which includes principles, engagement strategy, goals, objectives and work plan.
- Progress towards the characterization of human activities, the ocean and coastal economy, cultural resources and marine life and habitats through work including a baseline assessment, marine life characterization, maritime commerce, fisheries, and recreational characterization projects.
- Progress towards specific recommendations for improving effective decision making, which includes:
 - Enhance effectiveness of pre-application consultation between agencies and project proponents;
 - Use ocean plan to advance regulatory decision-making effectiveness;
 - Develop agency guidance for review and permitting actions;

- Use ocean plan and interagency guidance to support state and federal objectives under the CZMA; and
 - Use ocean plan data and agency guidance to enhance management of deep water aquaculture.
- Robust Northeast Ocean Data Portal providing access to over 800 data layers of integrated ocean information (ocean use patterns, administration and cultural information, habitat, and physical/oceanographic information). The Northeast Ocean Data Portal Working Group, comprised of NROC agencies and staff, TNC, GMRI, SeaPlan, NERACOOS and ASA continues to meet to manage ongoing portal development.