

Northeast Regional Ocean Council Annual Progress Report

Accomplishments: January 2009 - June 2010

Marine Spatial Planning Workshop, Fall 2009 - The Northeast is a nationally recognized area for marine spatial planning activity and innovative partnerships to encourage integrated ocean use management approaches and improved decision-making. To capitalize on potential synergies among ocean planning efforts within the region and to offer pragmatic input at the national level as the Interagency Ocean Policy Task Force prepares a coastal and marine spatial planning framework, the Northeast Regional Ocean Council (NROC) convened a working session on ecosystem-based marine spatial planning (EB-MSP) on October 26-27, 2009 in Gloucester, MA. The scope of this workshop was to advance shared objectives of ocean planning through discussion of data and research coordination needs and regulatory efficiency possibilities.

Participants generated three main outcomes during the workshop:

1. Participants supported working as a region to articulate and demonstrate the NE region's competitiveness/preparedness for potential funding, including federal money that may result from OPTF actions.
2. There was broad agreement about the priority data, products and decision support tools needed to *do* MSP and that stakeholder engagement is a necessary accompaniment to the science.
3. Notwithstanding genuine differences among state staff, federal representatives, academics and NGOs regarding drivers, constraints and opportunities for MSP, participants cautiously embraced the concept of a coarse-level regional ocean plan within 3-5 years. Caveats included the need for:
 - a. starting from a shared framework that leverages existing efforts from the ground-up as opposed to a top-down approach,
 - b. a "data plan" for sharing information and tools,
 - c. a coordinated federal response for planning and permitting phases,
 - d. approach must be flexible enough to accommodate differing state needs and priorities, and
 - e. NROC to grow into its role as a regional convener for regulatory coordination, edge-matching of ocean plans across scales, and sharing/standardizing solutions to gain efficiencies and provide value added at a regional level.

Comments to Ocean Policy Task Force – Based on state experiences and the collective outcomes from the fall MSP workshop, NROC submitted detailed comments to the Ocean Policy Task Force (OPTF) on the development of the National Ocean Policy and the Framework for Coastal and Marine Spatial Planning. NROC participated in the regional OPTF stakeholder meeting in Providence, RI in September 2009.

High Resolution Elevation Data for New England – NROC and USGS hosted a two-day workshop May 5-7, 2009 in Woods Hole, MA. This workshop provided an overview of the current state of LiDAR (Light Detection and Ranging) data acquisition technologies and discussed applications and availability of high-resolution topographic data for meeting local and regional coastal needs in the New England.

The resulting relationships and need for a regional dataset led the New England region to pull together a proposal for coastal high-resolution LiDAR data. New England successfully competed for ARRA funds available through USGS for LiDAR collection. Collection of the data will begin in fall 2010, with processed bare earth DEMs available by July 2011.

NROC is currently developing a list of recommended projects that would take advantage of this new data and support its priority areas of ecosystem health, hazards resilience, and ocean energy. Project ideas include flood elevation maps, sea level rise risk maps, and wetland and marsh migration maps.

MOUs with Northeast Regional Association of Coastal Ocean Observing Systems (NERACOOS) and Gulf of Maine Council (GOMC) – In 2009 and 2010, NROC developed two MOUs with regional ocean and coastal organizations. The MOUs clearly define opportunities for collaboration around common priorities.

NROC and NERACOOS agreed to partner on developing regional priorities annually, share information across Committees, support joint projects when funding is available, and submit periodic progress reports to boards on implementation of this MOU. NROC and GOMC agreed to six areas of collaboration including coordinated strategic planning, ecosystem health activities, climate change activities, support joint projects when funding is available, submit periodic progress reports to boards on implementation of this MOU, and when appropriate the organizations will work cooperatively on funding requests and disbursing regional funds.

Supporting Existing Regional Workgroups – NROC continued to promote participation by federal and state agencies in existing regional workgroups for priority water quality and habitat restoration efforts, including the Regional Technical Advisory Group for numeric nutrient criteria for estuarine and marine waters; Coastal America for coastal habitat restoration; and the Regional Dredging Team to coordinate dredging and dredged material management efforts.

2010 Appropriations Request – NROC state members organized a regional FY11 request for appropriations. The request identified water quality, restoration, and regional partnership projects totaling \$70 million across the region, from the Gulf of Maine to Long Island Sound, including Lake Champlain.

The Year Ahead: July 2010 – December 2011

Marine Spatial Planning – MSP continues to be a focal point for the New England region. NROC will sponsor a second regional workshop to move forward with the concept of a regional plan as outlined in the Interim Framework for Coastal and Marine Spatial Planning. NOAA has provided the funding for Eastern Research Group and Massachusetts Ocean Partnership to organize and facilitate the workshop on NROC's behalf. State and federal agencies will be developing the workshop agenda during the summer of 2010.

Northeast Data Portal – NROC and a group of other regional organizations have developed a proposal for a regional data portal that would support the data needs of a regional coastal and marine spatial plan.

Climate Adaptation – NROC's Coastal Hazards Resilience Committee will be launching a webinar series that provides coastal managers with information and regional lessons learned on the topics of resilience and adaptation. The series will be linked to the launch of a new interactive web resource, Storm Smart Coast Network for New England.

Conservation – NROC's Ocean and Coastal Ecosystem Health Committee will support NEGC's regional conservation initiative by taking the lead role in facilitating a collaborative demonstration project to integrate state coastal conservation plans and develop regional coastal conservation priorities that incorporate climate change adaptation and wildlife protection strategies. This project is directly connected to the NEGC Commission on Land Conservation Initiative.