

Draft Goals for Northeast Regional Ocean Planning

Introduction

At the April 2013 meeting of the [Northeast Regional Planning Body](http://northeastoceancouncil.org/regional-planning-body/public-meetings/) (RPB), state, federal, New England Fishery Management Council, and tribal RPB members¹ discussed regional ocean planning goals. A key outcome of this meeting was a set of draft goals, for which preliminary actions and potential outcomes have been developed for discussion with stakeholders and the public. This document outlines this information to be presented at a series of public meetings in May and June throughout New England (see this website for meeting details: <http://northeastoceancouncil.org/regional-planning-body/public-meetings/>). The Northeast RPB is convening these public meetings to continue operating in a transparent manner with broad stakeholder participation. At its next meeting in the fall of 2013, the Northeast RPB will consider public input received and revise these draft goals, actions, and outcomes.

The goals, potential actions, and outcomes described below incorporate extensive stakeholder input to date. They are a starting point to help identify and prioritize discrete actions and progress that can be made on ocean management issues in New England.

Specifically, the Northeast RPB would like your feedback on the following questions:

1. *Which aspect of each goal (and its accompanying actions and outcomes) do you like and why? Which aspects would you change?*
2. *What should the priority outcomes and actions be for each goal for the next two years, and why?*

As you think more about these questions, please consider the following framing principles:

1. The ocean and its resources are managed for the benefit of the public, now and in the future.
2. The historic, cultural and spiritual importance of the ocean are important to consider.
3. The present and past connection between communities, watersheds and ocean is important.
4. New ocean uses are emerging and existing ocean uses are changing.
5. There is concern about changing ocean “health” and ecosystem conditions.
6. Better data and information, including traditional knowledge, will lead to better understanding and decision making.
7. There is a need for improved government efficiencies and transparency.
8. We need to adapt as environmental, social and economic conditions change.
9. Importantly, regional ocean planning outcomes must be implemented through existing authorities and regulations. Neither the National Ocean Policy nor regional ocean planning create or change existing authorities.

¹ The Northeast Regional Planning Body has convened pursuant to the National Ocean Policy, which President Obama signed in June of 2010 (for more information: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/administration/eop/oceans>). More information on the Northeast Regional Planning Body, including its work to date and membership, can be found here: <http://northeastoceancouncil.org/regional-planning-body/>.

The remainder of this document provides three draft goals for regional ocean planning in New England, accompanied by potential outcomes for consideration. Possible actions to achieve these outcomes are presented for illustration purposes.

Goal: Effective Decision Making

Improve management effectiveness, intergovernmental decision making, engagement, collaboration, and integration of best available knowledge. Reflect ever changing social, environmental, and technological conditions.

Potential Outcomes:

1. Improved decision-making time as a result of better coordination among agencies and increased availability and accuracy of information
2. Reduced appeals and conflicts during permitting
3. Increased transparency and better public understanding of decision-maker roles and opportunities for input
4. Decisions made with improved respect for the customs and traditions of the indigenous peoples concerned
5. Consistent regional data, maps and other information contributing to efficiencies in project review, project-specific studies, mitigation, and timing
6. Regional data and science priorities addressed and incorporated into management decisions on an ongoing, adaptive basis
7. Better understanding of the cumulative impacts of different potential uses at varying scales

The following actions could be undertaken to achieve the outcomes listed above.

Potential Actions:

1. Incorporate regional data and maps into regulatory processes
2. Increase interagency coordination across management and regulatory programs
3. Inform and engage the public for better decision making
4. Coordinate and leverage science, traditional knowledge, and data development to address regional priorities
5. Conduct regional cumulative impacts analysis utilizing improved environmental and ocean use information and data

Goal: Healthy Ocean and Coastal Ecosystems

Develop a planning framework to protect, restore, and maintain healthy ocean and coastal ecosystems that provide social, cultural, spiritual, and economic benefits. Account for changing environmental conditions and new information as it becomes available. Respect the intrinsic value of the ocean, its biodiversity, and act as its steward/caretaker, recognizing humans as part of the ecosystem.

Potential Outcomes:

1. Areas of regional importance for birds, marine mammals, fish, benthos, and sustenance are identified as appropriate, considering the availability of existing information
2. Maps of species, habitats, and areas of regional importance (e.g. areas of high productivity, diversity, spawning, and/or critical habitats) are incorporated in existing decision making processes
3. Current understanding of changing conditions is accounted for in management responses
4. Priority list of regional science and research needs with an action plan to address priorities
5. Greater recognition and understanding of the connection between riverine water quality and healthy ocean and coastal ecosystems

The following actions could be undertaken to achieve the outcomes listed above.

Potential Actions:

1. Map species and habitats; assess trends
2. Working within existing regulations and authorities, use publically-accessible maps and trends to define and characterize important, significant, or valuable areas
3. Identify geographic areas and species that are important for sustenance
4. Identify opportunities within existing regulations and authorities for restoration and protection
5. Model future environmental conditions, such as potential climate change effects on species' habitat, distribution, and/or abundance
6. Prioritize science and research needs to fill key gaps in knowledge

Goal: Compatibility Among Past, Current and Future Ocean Uses

Develop a planning framework to encourage compatibility among past, current and future uses of ocean and coastal waters while minimizing user conflict and impacts to environmental and cultural resources. Recognize local priorities and the connection of ocean uses and the ecosystem to shoreside infrastructure and activities. Facilitate increased understanding and coordination among stakeholders, recognizing the difficulty of resolving certain conflicts.

Potential Outcomes

1. Assessment of the regional coastal and ocean economy
2. Maps of existing human uses, and identification of potential future changes to those maps, used to help minimize conflicts and informing siting of new uses
3. Maps of areas with higher potential for paleocultural resources
4. Working within existing authorities and regulations, information for preserving important cultural and historic sites and traditions
5. Consideration of regional infrastructure needs incorporated into existing authorities and decision-making
6. Identification of priority needs for shoreside infrastructure upgrades
7. Greater recognition and understanding of the connection between inland resource use and associated impacts on ocean resources

8. Greater understanding of the compatibility among ocean uses to inform implications of management decisions

The following actions could be undertaken to achieve the outcomes listed above.

Potential Actions:

1. Identify and where possible map existing uses (fishing, boating and other recreation, shipping and commerce, etc.) and related infrastructure. Identify practical implications of new and changing activities on the regional economy and environmental and cultural resources (including potential paleocultural resources)
2. Identify and map cultural and historic sites
3. Enhance viability of and compatibility among new and existing ocean uses, specifically by considering the following, drawing upon existing sources of information where available and appropriate:
 - a) Assess current and foreseeable trends in maritime commerce, particularly related to potential implications of short-sea shipping, the widening of the Panama Canal, and other economic drivers
 - b) Assess current and foreseeable trends in commercial fishing in New England, relying on information available through fisheries management efforts
 - c) Assess current and foreseeable trends in ocean-based renewable energy development on the regional economy, compatibility with other existing uses, regional electricity transmission, and other related issues
 - d) Assess potential for offshore aquaculture, particularly considering the regional nature of this ocean planning effort, existing federal regulatory framework, and technology trends
 - e) Assess current and foreseeable uses of seafloor material (extraction for beach nourishment or siting of disposal areas), considering recent storms and related federal and state responses, long-term trends, needs for disposal of dredged material, and related issues
 - f) Assess existing shore-side infrastructure that directly affects ocean habitats and species (Combined Sewer Overflows, discharges, etc.) and assess need for improvements