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, 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
- Conserved at-risk habitats
- Resilient coastal communities and economies

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 protect and restore habitat, we are developing the NOAA Habitat Blueprint to guide our future actions.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- Prioritize resources and activities across NOAA to improve habitat conditions.
- Implement innovative place-based habitat solutions to address coastal and marine resource challenges.
- Make natural resource management decisions and recommendations in an ecosystem context that considers competing priorities.
- Foster and leverage partnerships.
- Integrate and improve the delivery of habitat science across disciplines to facilitate conservation actions.
- Anticipate and address changes to coastal and ocean habitats due to development, climate, and other pressures.

What is the Habitat Blueprint framework?

NOAA is developing and implementing new habitat-based solutions to support healthy and productive ecosystems. We will expand our partnerships, prioritize our activities, and direct our focus to better understand, protect, and restore habitat for the benefit of our living marine resources and coastal communities.

The Habitat Blueprint consists of a four-pronged approach:

1) Implement regional habitat initiatives as immediate opportunities to explore new collaborative approaches for habitat science and conservation. These initiatives will preserve or improve habitat conditions within a defined geographic area to address specific challenges to living marine and coastal resources.

2) Establish geographic priorities to focus long-term habitat science and conservation efforts. We will direct our expertise, resources for science, and on-the-ground conservation efforts in targeted areas to maximize our investments and the benefits to marine resources and coastal communities.

3) Implement a systematic and strategic approach to habitat science to inform effective decision-making. We will prioritize our science and use a more integrative approach for planning and conducting quality habitat science that is directed to priority species and areas.

4) Strengthen policy and legislation at the national level to enhance our ability to achieve meaningful habitat conservation. We will remove barriers and seize opportunities to improve our policies, regulations, and legal authorities. This will ensure that habitat considerations are an integral part of marine, coastal, and ocean resource management and will strengthen NOAA's habitat conservation focus overall.

Who is involved?

While the NOAA Habitat Blueprint starts with increasing efficiencies within NOAA and across its programs and offices, it is also designed to foster collaboration across federal, state, and local levels. We plan to work together with our partners on common actions in priority areas and improve delivery of habitat science to encourage complementary habitat conservation actions along our nation's coastline and for our marine environments.

What's next?

In early 2012, we will begin to develop detailed action plans for the approaches above as well as share the Habitat Blueprint with our partners.

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