



NOAA HABITAT BLUEPRINT

Regional Habitat Initiatives

As part of the NOAA Habitat Blueprint, we will implement regional habitat initiatives to explore new collaborative approaches to 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.



Alaska—Cook Inlet

Cook Inlet adjoins Alaska’s largest and fastest growing population center and supports shipping and resource development that are critical to Alaska’s economy. Its marine habitats are relatively intact, yet face mounting threats. NOAA Fisheries will develop a new conservation strategy to promote long-term habitat conservation for fish and marine mammals in Cook Inlet. The effort will tie together habitat-related science and management activities, working with partners to identify conservation priorities and maintain healthy habitat conditions for marine life. NOAA will expand biological surveys in Cook Inlet, identify habitat areas and functions of greatest concern, provide better coordinated consultative services to regulatory agencies and developers, and increase NOAA’s work with other groups to promote sustainable uses of Cook Inlet’s marine resources.

Northwest—Puget Sound

The State of Washington has lost more than 70 percent of its estuarine wetlands and 50 percent of its riparian habitat, with losses continuing to mount. To address these losses and the impacts on threatened Chinook salmon in the Puget Sound, NOAA will work with federal, state, tribal, and local partners to develop new strategies to conserve salmon habitat. We will integrate scientific modeling and monitoring with regulatory and restoration programs. Actions include reconnecting floodplains and restoring ecosystem functions through dike removal and levee setbacks, leading to restoration of more than 500 hundred acres in the Nooksack, Skagit, Puyallup/White, and Snohomish watersheds. While efforts will focus on habitat restoration in the near-term, NOAA will provide a critical scientific framework for long-term recovery.



Pacific Islands—Guam

The U.S. territory of Guam depends on healthy coral reef ecosystems for food and a tourist-based economy. As part of an innovative multi-agency partnership, NOAA will use Adaptive Program Management (APM) to protect Guam’s coral reefs. APM will strive to prevent loss of coral reef habitat due to the Guam military build-up during the next four years. Unlike the traditional method of monitoring for regulatory compliance, APM requires collaborative research, monitoring, and data integration upfront to develop criteria that indicate potential threats to coral ecosystems. These criteria will prompt management actions to avoid impacts to habitat and other resources. This trigger-to-action collaborative approach will serve as a model for protecting coral reefs globally.

Southwest—Southern California Bight

The Southern California Bight is rich with important fisheries and other marine life, including endangered white abalone, deep-sea corals, and sponges. To address impacts caused by fishing and non-fishing activities, NOAA Fisheries will assess and monitor deep-water ecosystems in the Southern California Bight. NOAA will use a variety of advanced survey tools and approaches to improve our assessments of living marine resources and their habitats in water depths 20 to 900 meters off southern California. These assessments and enhanced delivery of information to managers will improve our conservation recommendations for Pacific groundfish. We will also evaluate the effectiveness of protected areas as a tool for resource conservation along the West Coast, particularly for rockfish and deep-sea corals.



Southeast—Charleston Harbor Watershed

In the Charleston Harbor watershed, coastal development impacts fishery production, water quality, and flood protection in tidal creeks. These creeks are essential fish habitat for snapper, grouper, and penaeid shrimp. To mitigate the impacts of planned large-scale public works projects and dredge and fill permits in this watershed, NOAA will pilot an interdisciplinary approach for prioritizing tidal creek restoration efforts. This approach will include criteria based on engineering feasibility, public perceptions, and the value of these habitats for fish and shellfish as well as for human health.

Northeast—Northwest Atlantic Deep-sea Corals

Deep-sea corals form remarkable complex and fragile ecosystems throughout the world's oceans, providing habitat for a diversity of other organisms, including many commercially important fish and invertebrate species. Occurring primarily on hard substrate on the continental shelf and slope, submarine canyons, and seamounts, these ecosystems are vulnerable to various fishing activities and other man-made impacts associated with offshore development. NOAA Fisheries will partner with the New England and Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Councils to develop and implement a deep-sea coral conservation strategy for U.S. waters in the Northwest Atlantic. This partnership approach will use existing authorities and integrate habitat protection, fisheries management, and research into a comprehensive conservation strategy.



Chesapeake Bay—Harris Creek Oyster Restoration

Overfishing, disease, and pollution have left the Chesapeake Bay with less than one percent of the oysters it once had. Restoring oysters and the habitat they provide for a multitude of other fish and animals is essential to improving the health of the Bay. In response to the Chesapeake Bay Executive Order, NOAA and its partners are working to restore 20 Bay tributaries by 2025 with healthy oysters and viable habitat starting with Harris Creek. We will use habitat mapping and assessment tools to locate and quantify “restorable bottom” for oyster restoration to select tributaries with a strong likelihood of oyster restoration success. This approach will also apply the first-ever set of oyster restoration success metrics to evaluate progress.