



**NOAA**  
**FISHERIES**

Office of Aquaculture



## INCLUSIVE PROCESS

*Considering NOAA trust resources and stakeholder uses of a defined area will help encourage the sustainable growth of aquaculture by siting aquaculture farms in ways that minimize impacts to those natural resources and reduce user conflicts while maximizing public input in the AOA identification process.*

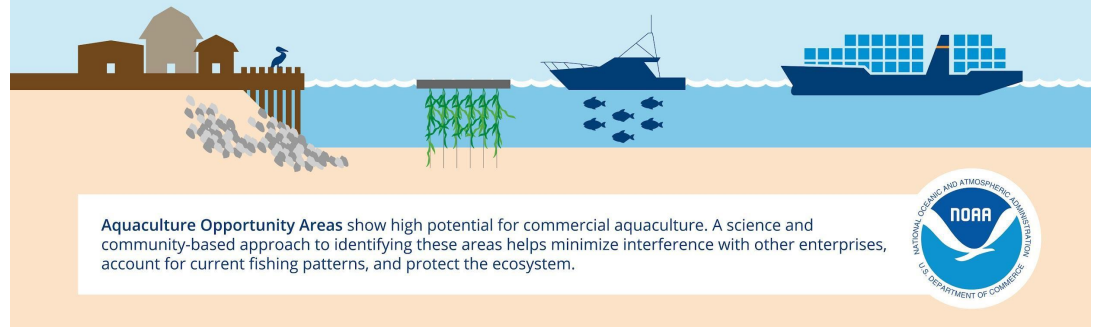
*There will be multiple opportunities for public and stakeholder participation in the process. These include joining public listening sessions and providing comments during the NEPA process and Request for Information periods.*

## What is an Aquaculture Opportunity Area?

AOAs will expand economic opportunities in coastal and rural areas, and increase our nation's seafood security.

AOAs use the best available science to find appropriate spaces for sustainable aquaculture.

AOAs minimize interactions with other users, such as shipping, fishing, and the military.



Aquaculture Opportunity Areas show high potential for commercial aquaculture. A science and community-based approach to identifying these areas helps minimize interference with other enterprises, account for current fishing patterns, and protect the ecosystem.

## Expanding Domestic Aquaculture

Fostering the domestic aquaculture industry is vital to enhancing climate resilient food systems and community health for the nation. An important piece of aquaculture expansion is the science- and community-based planning process to identify Aquaculture Opportunity Areas (AOAs).

NOAA is using a combination of scientific analysis and public engagement to identify AOAs. This is a multi-year planning process intended to maximize the compatibility of AOAs with other ocean uses, while maintaining our commitments to ocean stewardship and our marine resource conservation responsibilities.

An AOA is a defined geographic area that NOAA has evaluated, through both spatial analysis and the programmatic National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process and that may be environmentally, socially, and economically appropriate to support multiple commercial aquaculture operations. The size and shape of each AOA will vary depending on the specifics of the location and will be determined as part of the AOA identification process.

Throughout this process, NOAA will work with federal and state partners, tribes, and interested stakeholders. There are multiple opportunities for stakeholders and tribal communities to provide input to help shape our decisions throughout the process.

### STEPS IN THE AOA IDENTIFICATION PROCESS

1. NOAA's National Centers for Coastal Ocean Sciences (NCCOS) completes spatial analyses and publishes a peer-reviewed Aquaculture Opportunity Atlas for each region in which we plan to identify AOAs.
2. NOAA Fisheries uses the results of the Atlases to inform preliminary alternatives for consideration in our NEPA analyses, with input from federal and state agencies.
3. NOAA Fisheries considers various alternatives to identify one or more AOAs (including a "no action" alternative) and completes a programmatic environmental review under NEPA. This includes multiple opportunities for public input.
4. NOAA Fisheries documents the decision in a NEPA decision document.

Identification of AOAs happens at the end of this process – after the NEPA review is complete.

*NOAA has directives to preserve ocean sustainability and facilitate domestic aquaculture in the United States through the National Aquaculture Act of 1980, the NOAA and DOC Marine Aquaculture Policies, and Executive Order 13921, "Promoting American Seafood Competitiveness and Economic Growth (May 7, 2020)."*

*NOAA has a variety of proven science-based tools and strategies that can support these directives. These help communities thoughtfully consider how and where to sustainably develop marine aquaculture that will complement wild-capture fisheries, working waterfronts, and our nation's seafood processing and distribution infrastructure.*



**SCAN TO LEARN MORE**

### **PUBLIC INPUT IN AOAs**

NOAA started working towards identifying AOAs in the summer of 2020 with a rigorous public outreach effort. This effort includes engagement with stakeholder groups, development of video and print products, and various comment periods and public listening sessions. These ongoing efforts provide a channel for stakeholders to share their insights, which are vital as NOAA works to foster domestic aquaculture opportunities. This two-way dialogue introduces the concept of AOAs and ensures that stakeholders have a voice in the process.

Aided by the public input gathered through stakeholder engagement and the public comment periods, NCCOS develops regional Aquaculture Opportunity Atlases using more than 200 data layers accounting for key environmental, economic, social, and cultural considerations, including fishing interests and marine protected areas.

The Atlases contain the spatial modeling analyses that inform the AOA identification process. The results identify areas that have the highest potential to support multiple marine aquaculture operations and least amount of conflict with other ocean uses--not the best places for all aquaculture.

Areas in the Atlases have characteristics expected to support multiple types of aquaculture and this effort represents the most advanced spatial analyses ever performed for any U.S. ocean region.

### **AQUACULTURE PERMITTING IN AOAs**

The AOA process is designed to increase permitting efficiency by providing robust environmental analysis, ensuring environmental sustainability, increasing investor confidence, and ultimately fostering responsible industry growth. Identifying AOAs is an opportunity for proactive stewardship to use best available global science and stakeholder input to provide potential farmers and permitting agencies with in-depth data to increase permitting efficiency.

Importantly, federal and state permitting and authorization requirements are the same within AOAs as anywhere else. Once AOAs are identified and aquaculture operations are proposed within them, proposals will be subject to federal and state permitting and authorization processes, which may include project-specific requirements such as monitoring, reporting, and coastal zone consistency.

Other analyses and efforts would be made to further minimize potential impacts while maximizing sustainable aquaculture production. Monitoring required as part of existing regulatory requirements for aquaculture operations (e.g., Clean Water Act permits) will also provide data that can be used to inform sustainable management.

**Learn more:** [fisheries.noaa.gov/aquaculture](https://fisheries.noaa.gov/aquaculture)