



## Conserving Ocean and Marine Resources: Northeast Region Ocean Park Strategic Plan

Northeast Region (NER) ocean park units include some of our nation's most outstanding marine environments. Oceans, bays, estuaries, and tidal rivers define the coasts of these parks. These ocean parks also preserve the nation's rich maritime heritage.

Responding to the President's U.S. Ocean Action Plan, the National Park Service (NPS) has launched a new initiative to provide an enhanced focus on ocean park marine resources. The NPS Ocean Park Stewardship Action Plan, announced in December 2006, commits to science-based conservation of marine resources, both natural and cultural. The NPS Action Plan calls for an increased understanding of marine ecosystems and human interactions, restoration of impacted resources, and new measures to enhance park

resource management efforts. Strengthening the capacity of the NPS to explore and protect marine resources, foster partnerships, and engage visitors in ocean park stewardship are fundamental to the Action Plan.

The NER Ocean Park Strategic Plan will serve to lead the Region's coastal parks toward implementation and achievement of the broad goals of the U.S. Ocean Action Plan and the NPS Ocean Park Stewardship Action Plan. The NER Strategic Plan will also guide ocean parks as the challenges associated with global climate change are addressed.

Consistent with the national-level Ocean Park Stewardship Action Plan, the NER Strategic Plan identifies specific goals and action items associated with four major topics:

- Establish a seamless network of ocean parks, sanctuaries, refuges and reserves
- Discover, map, and protect ocean parks
- Engage visitors and the public in ocean park stewardship
- Increase technical capacity for ocean exploration and stewardship

It is intended that the Strategic Plan, prepared by the NER Ocean Stewardship Task Force, will be periodically revised and updated as action items are completed and as additional tasks are identified.

**The following is a condensed version of the Strategic Plan.**



# Establish a Seamless Network of Ocean Parks, Sanctuaries, Refuges, and Reserves

Numerous federal, state and local agencies, and conservation-oriented organizations share common mandates for conservation of marine resources. Within the northeast coastal zone, National Park units are often near a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service refuge, a NOAA National Marine Sanctuary, a National Estuarine Research Reserve, or a state/local park. Each agency could more effectively and efficiently achieve their common ocean stewardship responsibilities through enhanced collaboration.

## **GOAL: Facilitate partnership opportunities among federal, state and local agencies and non-government organizations toward enhanced marine resource conservation and education**

- Convene two multi-agency pilot workshops in the Northeast region (Gulf of Maine and NY-NJ Bight) during fall/winter 2007, and Chesapeake Bay and southern New England workshops in 2008-09.
- Prepare a feasibility study to establish a multi-agency National Ocean Center of Excellence at Gateway's Sandy Hook Unit to advance the seamless network concept.
- Create opportunities to co-locate agency personnel through detail assignments, etc with the objective of facilitating collaboration and implementation of the seamless network concept.



**Friendship, Salem Maritime NHS**  
Photo by Leighton O'Connor

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# Discover, Map, and Protect Ocean Parks

The NER has stewardship responsibilities for a significant amount of submerged marine areas, often encompassing over 60% of total park acreage. Understanding natural and cultural resources through inventory, monitoring and research, enhancing the NPS presence within marine waters, and implementing advanced planning are essential to effective ocean park stewardship.

## **GOAL: Inventory and map natural and cultural resources within the submerged boundaries of ocean parks**

- Prepare a plan to inventory and map submerged natural and cultural resources.
- Pursue a Centennial Challenge Signature project to facilitate an integrated program to inventory submerged natural and cultural resources, understand resource condition, and develop protection strategies.
- Conduct archeological overviews and assessments for submerged cultural resources of all NER ocean parks.
- Define linkages of submerged cultural resources, cultural landscapes, and historic structures toward development of a holistic approach to stewardship of maritime cultural resources.

## **GOAL: Understand and quantify threats to natural and cultural submerged resources, including those associated with climate change and land and water-based activities, identify impaired or threatened resources and develop mitigation or restoration strategies**

- Evaluate park natural resource conditions through the NPS Coastal Park Condition Assessment Program.
- Inventory existing marine resource restoration projects, related to both natural and cultural resources, to demonstrate accomplishments and to serve as models for new restoration projects that may be required.
- Collaboratively with USGS, identify and initiate targeted studies to enhance understanding of natural and cultural resource responses to specific threats, as well as responses to global change variables.

## **GOAL: Expand the natural resource vital signs monitoring program to more fully address ocean and estuarine resources**

- Identify priority monitoring needs that are essential for quantifying changes in processes, biota, and/or stressors that are relevant to submerged and nearshore ocean and estuarine environments.
- Spotlight 1-2 vital signs, using existing data, that characterize the current condition of ocean park submerged natural resources. Incorporate these vital signs into public education programs.

## **GOAL: Understand and anticipate the role of ocean park stewardship, within the urban corridor, given changing demography, development patterns, economies, and societal preferences**

- Engage social scientists, demographers, planners and economists to prepare research papers on societal changes that will be relevant to the ocean stewardship goals of the Strategic Plan.

## **GOAL: Expand understanding of ocean park boundaries, jurisdictions and authorities**

- Facilitate preparation of a Solicitor's opinion on boundaries, jurisdictions and authorities for each NER ocean park.
- Convene a workshop for park managers to clarify jurisdictional issues.

## **GOAL: Increase the National Park Service ocean and marine presence**

- In cooperation with the national-level Ocean Park Stewardship Task Force and NOAA, include park boundaries on digital and printed nautical charts. Evaluate the feasibility of using buoys to mark park boundaries.
- Promote and expand joint marine enforcement patrol operations with other agencies.
- Establish an ocean park network of strategically located telephone "tip lines" to facilitate reporting of marine violations and to reinforce the message of ocean stewardship.

## **GOAL: Proactively inform park management and the public of emerging issues that could impact the status and function of marine resources**

- Prepare synthesis papers on emerging issues (e.g., LNG facilities, alternative energy development, sea level rise and other climate change topics), with discussion on expected impacts on park resources, operations and visitor experiences. Include discussion of alternative management strategies.
- Prepare a written guide describing the variety of planning methods available for enhancing conservation of marine resources.
- Engage in state and local watershed planning efforts and encourage implementation of smart-growth and best management practices, conservation easements, and other approaches to lessen impacts from activities that are external to park boundaries.

## **GOAL: Adopt a strategy of advance planning to insure that park-specific ocean stewardship issues and knowledge are available and synthesized for planning teams**

- In advance of the general management planning process identify the key issues that will be of relevance and then prepare papers that synthesize and interpret the available literature and data, describe historic and current management and regulatory activities related to each issue, and identify information gaps.



**Horseshoe Crabs (*Limulus polyphemus*)**  
Photo by Charles Roman

## Increase Technical Capacity for Ocean Exploration and Stewardship

NER ocean parks have a longstanding commitment to ocean resource stewardship through active resource assessment, science, protection, education and planning programs, but this dedication must be enhanced through collaboration with partners, sharing of resources, marine-focused training, and the investment of new resources.

### **GOAL: Maximize the existing capacity of the NER and ocean park units to engage in stewardship activities**

- Inventory existing NPS resources capable of engaging in ocean park stewardship initiatives and prepare a directory of resources that could be shared among ocean park units.
- Create programs dedicated to ocean stewardship within the NER's Research Learning Centers.
- The Research Learning Centers and North Atlantic Coast Cooperative Ecosystem Studies Unit will sponsor technical symposia and training to enhance local knowledge of ocean issues; initiate ocean resource fellowship programs; and facilitate student and faculty research.
- In cooperation with the national Ocean Park Stewardship Task Force, facilitate collaboration with regional ocean-related inventory, mapping, and research programs of USGS, NOAA, and USEPA.
- Cooperate with the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center to host the coastal marine law enforcement training course at a NER park.

### **GOAL: Increase the technical capacity for ocean exploration and stewardship**

- Identify and prioritize specific ocean stewardship programs that require a new investment in personnel, infrastructure, and/or support funds.
- Seek opportunities to obtain high quality surplus boats from federal marine enforcement agencies.
- Pursue a Centennial Challenge Signature project to establish a multi-agency National Ocean Center of Excellence at Gateway's Sandy Hook Unit.

## Engage Visitors and the Public in Ocean Park Stewardship

NER coastal parks, all located in the vicinity of population centers, provide extraordinary venues to communicate ocean stewardship messages. The status of coastal and ocean ecosystems, understanding climate change topics and expected societal consequences, fostering changes in daily habits that would promote ocean resource conservation, and cultivating innovative thinking on approaches for ocean resource protection, are some of the messages that will enhance knowledge and awareness of marine resource issues.

### **GOAL: Create a communication strategy for ocean parks to better inform the public on topics of ocean stewardship**

- Develop a communication strategy that will identify consistent ocean stewardship messages at the region and park level, identify core audience interests, and suggest preferred media approaches.

### **GOAL: Enhance awareness and understanding of ocean stewardship issues through the development of interpretive materials**

- Develop a thematic, curriculum-based resource guide aimed at teachers and non-formal education partners.
- Facilitate development of an ocean park stewardship program at the 2008 conference of the National Science Teachers Association.
- Develop an annotated list of sources of ocean stewardship interpretive information and a list of potential partners involved with ocean literacy.
- Develop regionally generic interpretation materials and templates articulating the key ocean stewardship messages and concepts.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of education and outreach approaches in advancing the ocean stewardship message and capitalize on the evaluation strategy in the Interpretation and Education Renaissance Action Plan.

### **GOAL: Explore approaches to engage visitors, teachers and students in the practice of ocean stewardship through experiential learning and recreation**

- Engage the public in marine environment bio-blitz programs and incorporate citizen involvement in ocean park natural resource monitoring.
- Develop prototype self-guided marine trails that inform recreational users of ocean stewardship issues.
- Develop a distance learning venue for middle and high school students, modeled after Gateway's interactive Estuary Live web broadcast.
- Link ocean stewardship messages with the NER Civic Engagement and 21st Century Relevance task groups to maximize public benefit and cultivate new park stewards.

### **GOAL: Demonstrate a commitment to ocean stewardship through adoption of sustainable operations and practices at ocean parks**

- Launch a "green marina" initiative at NER ocean parks. Work collaboratively with local communities to encourage "green harbors."
- Identify specific park operations that will contribute to sustainability of ocean resources (e.g., alternative-designed septic systems, mooring buoys).
- Develop a "conserve your ocean resources" traveling display that demonstrates sustainable actions that contribute to ocean stewardship.



**Visitor education at Acadia NP**  
Photo by Sheridan Steele



**GOAL: Evaluate the effectiveness of the Northeast Ocean Park Stewardship Strategy in conserving coastal and marine resources**

- Establish specific criteria to measure progress, accomplishments, and success with ocean park stewardship in areas of natural and cultural resource conservation, enforcement protection, planning, education, and interpretation.

**GOAL: Pursue funding opportunities to increase the technical capacity for ocean exploration and stewardship**

- NER ocean parks authorized to collect recreational fees should consider using these 80% funds to support ocean stewardship activities. In addition, the NER Ocean Stewardship Task Force will prioritize proposals for use of 20% recreation fee funds to support ocean stewardship projects in non-fee collection parks.
- In association with the new flexible park base funding program, the NER Task Force will solicit and prioritize a series of park-based proposals to focus on specific ocean-related needs.
- Partnerships are fundamental to the success of the NER Ocean Park Strategic Plan and the NER will pursue several Centennial Challenge Signature projects aimed at advancing our understanding of ocean park resources through fostering of partnerships.



**National Park Service**  
U.S. Department of the Interior

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**Please visit [www.nps.gov/nero/oceans/](http://www.nps.gov/nero/oceans/) for the full Strategic Plan and more information.**

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The National Park Service cares for the special places saved by the American people so that all may experience our heritage.

## Moving the Strategic Plan Forward

The goals and action items that follow deserve special mention because of their broad significance and relevance to all items of the Strategic Plan.

**GOAL: Generate awareness among park managers on the significance of marine resources and protection responsibilities**

- Design and implement a pilot Ocean Park Rapid Assessment Program to inform park managers of the Strategic Plan, conduct an initial characterization of existing knowledge and capacity, identify management issues, and develop park-specific ocean stewardship goals, among other topics. Conduct two pilot rapid assessments in FY08.

## Conserve Park Ocean Resources for Future Generations

Promoting stewardship of ocean park marine resources is not new to the Northeast Region, but a comprehensive ocean park strategy that looks to the future, integrates all programs (natural and cultural resources, operations and protection, interpretation and education, planning and partnerships), calls for focused collaboration within and between parks, facilitates partnerships, and addresses the complex issues of global climate change is new. This Strategic Plan provides the Northeast Region with the vision to become a leading partner in the conservation and restoration of the marine resources and maritime heritage that define our ocean parks.