



REGIONAL HABITAT INITIATIVES

Exploring collaborative approaches to habitat science and conservation

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.

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 watersheds such as the Nooksack, Skagit, Puyallup/White, and Snohomish. 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 and salt marshes. These creeks and marshes 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.

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.



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.



Great Lakes—Manistique River

In the late 1800s, the Manistique River in the Great Lakes basin became a dumping ground for byproducts of sawmilling operations. Woody debris and chemical contamination continues to degrade lake and river habitat today. This environmentally degraded site—identified as an Area of Concern by the Great Lakes Water Quality agreement—has been plagued by fish consumption advisories since the mid-1980s. NOAA Fisheries, in partnership with NOAA's National Ocean Service, will restore Manistique River habitat by removing the contaminated debris, thus removing its Area of Concern designation. This collaborative project will provide insight and transfer of information to other Great Lakes habitat impaired by marine debris.

