

STAKEHOLDER-DRIVEN REGIONAL RESEARCH PLANNING: AN EXAMPLE OF TWO APPROACHES

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In 2006 an effort began to identify regional research needs throughout the United States based on the Joint Subcommittee on Ocean Science and Technology (JSOST) document, *Charting the Course for Ocean Science in the United States for the Next Decade: An Ocean Research Priorities Plan and Implementation Strategy* (ORPP). The effort was sponsored by the National Sea Grant Office and implemented on a regional level by state Sea Grant programs and guiding boards composed of experts from federal, state, and local agencies, tribal governments, academia, industry and non-governmental organizations. Each region developed a unique strategy to identify research needs that was rooted in stakeholder input and included active participation by the guiding board. Several regions have completed their initial research plans. The processes used to collect stakeholder input, formulate research priorities, and create linkages to regional governance structures will be presented from the West Coast and Gulf of Mexico initiatives.

The West Coast region is comprised of Washington, Oregon, and California. More than 600 individuals participated in 16 workshops, and more than 350 people participated in a Web-based survey. Stakeholders included federal, tribal and state governments, agency scientists and managers, academics, fishing communities, marine industries, recreational users, and non-governmental organizations. Workshops and the survey used an open-ended informal approach which asked to stakeholders to answer framing questions such as, “what do managers need to know sustainably manage the resources you care about?” To insure stakeholder identified needs were effectively captured in the regional research plan, social science methods were used to categorize the more than 5000 comments. The analysis led to eight broad research and information topics, three cross-cutting themes, and the recommendations detailed in the west coast regional research plan.

The Gulf of Mexico region is comprised of Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida. More than 1,200 people completed a survey to identify research priorities within the context of the ORPP. Stakeholders also provided over 500 comments through the survey. In addition, five regional workshops were held to discuss priorities in further detail and involved 300 people from academia, federal and state agencies, non-governmental organizations, and the private sector. More than 250 priorities were identified and five broad research topic areas captured the highest priority needs. When

linked back to the ORPP the majority of high priority Gulf of Mexico research topics linked to two of the five ORPP societal themes “Improving Ecosystem Health” and “Stewardship of Natural and Cultural Resources,” but research priorities did emerge in all ORRP societal themes.

Although different strategies were used to collect and analyze stakeholder input similar results emerged in both the West Coast and Gulf of Mexico. The next and more challenging step is implementation of activities to address the priorities on a regional level in coordination with regional governance structures, the research community, and other mechanisms. The West Coast and Gulf of Mexico governance structures are in different stages of maturity, however both have utilized the research priorities that were derived from the regional research planning efforts to further their work.

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Note to meeting organizers: This abstract is complimentary to the proposed panel session entitled, “Regional approaches to research and governance: stakeholder process, progress, and implementation” and the authors are willing to present this abstract within the panel session if accepted, or as a presentation external of the proposed panel session.