

## **EVERYONE IN THE WATER: COLLABORATIVE ENGAGEMENT TO ADVANCE NEW YORK'S ECOSYSTEM-BASED MANAGEMENT INITIATIVE**

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In 2006, New York statutorily committed itself to Ecosystem-based Management (EBM) of its Ocean and Great Lakes, including not only coastal ribbons but also inland watersheds and off-shore waters. EBM takes a more holistic and adaptive approach that will result in increased program effectiveness, administrative efficiencies, and wiser decisions for the long-term sustainability of coasts, oceans, and Great Lakes; and the communities that depend on them. That's because EBM recognizes that human communities are integral parts of any ecosystem, including the human-built environment, infrastructure; social and cultural dimensions, and economies. Through this lens, sustaining biophysical ecosystem health is more than presuming to manage nature. It is really about humans managing themselves; their decisions, activities, and appetites. This calls for collaboration and enduring partnerships. It calls for everyone to build their capacity for engaging in EBM. And it requires stakeholder engagement at a level and of kinds not traditionally common to governmental agencies.

The law that committed NY to Ecosystem-based Management also established an historic Council by the same name, comprised of nine diverse state agencies that manage human activities that impact coastal ecosystems. The Council oversees implementation of EBM to "conserve, maintain, and restore coastal ecosystems so that they are healthy, productive, and resilient, and are able to deliver the resources people want and need." The Council's Report on achievements and next actions for 2009-2014, *Our Waters, Our Communities, Our Future: Taking Bold Action Now to Achieve Long-term Sustainability of New York's Ocean and Great Lakes* was submitted to the Governor and Legislature in March 2009. With the Council, over 25 organizations co-sponsored the 14 public Community Conversations to vet the Report, and this provided a template for future partnerships. The Council's is creating strategies for providing an array of diverse opportunities for partnerships, mutual learning, integrated knowledge, decision-making, and dialogue. It is piloting strategies such as the Stakeholder Advisory Team, multiplying impacts, building local leadership, and creating "Learning Networks" and "Communities of Practice." The New York initiative provides an opportunity to examine and discuss innovative public engagement for implementing this and other initiatives for ecosystem sustainability.

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