

## **HOLDING THE HIGH GROUD: COASTAL HABITAT IN A CHANGING CLIMATE**

Healthy marine, coastal, and riverine habitats support abundant commercial and recreational fisheries, protect inland areas from erosion and storms, filter sediment and polluted runoff from watersheds, and contribute to our quality of life. But our nation's habitats are under threat. Pressures on habitats from development and pollution are taking their toll, and climate change impacts on habitats are being documented. Coastal and marine habitats are being threatened, with significant losses expected in the coming decades. Habitat conservation efforts must adapt to these changes and can play an important role in overall climate adaptation and mitigation strategies.

Habitat conservation should play an important role in climate adaptation and mitigation strategies. While mitigating the rate of climate change will largely depend on redirecting national policies, the ability for marine habitats to resist or be resilient to the impacts of climate change will require innovative conservation strategies and management actions. Coastal and natural resource managers need to know what they can do now to protect marine habitats against climate change impacts, while they continue to address non-climate threats. For marine habitats to continue to provide vital ecosystem services to our coastal communities and to marine species that depend on them, it will be essential to strengthen existing and create new management strategies to increase marine habitat resilience.

Today, more than ever, the economic health of our nation, the safety of our coastal communities, and the welfare of our valuable natural resources depend on successful, well-planned habitat conservation efforts. It is important to provide managers with a set of tools and strategies to protect, restore, and maintain and improve marine habitats and the natural benefits and services they provide. In particular, new management actions need to be identified to increase marine habitat resilience to climate change, while existing tools including watershed and coastal planning; water quality, protection, restoration, marine zoning, and others must be strengthened and applied more effectively.

The challenge before all natural resource agencies and organizations concerned with habitat conservation is how to make the impacts of climate change on the ability to manage resources and the value of habitat in a changing climate relevant to both managers and the public. This panel session will highlight habitat conservation approaches and strategies in the face of climate change.