An Overview of the NOAA Habitat Blueprint

*Improving fisheries, marine life, and coastal communities through habitat conservation*

Designing Sustainable Coastal Habitats Workshop
April 17, 2013
NOAA’s Objective—
Healthy habitats that sustain resilient and thriving marine resources and communities

We protect and restore habitat for:
- Sustainable and productive fisheries
- Threatened and endangered species
- Protected coastal and marine areas and habitats at risk
- Resilient coastal communities and economies
- Coastal and ocean tourism, recreation, and access
Why is the Blueprint Needed?

- Widespread habitat loss and degradation
  - 111,000 acres of estuarine wetlands lost between 2004-2007
  - 45% increase in coastal watershed county population from 1970 to 2010
- Current small-scale conservation activities have limited impact
- Need to be more efficient with limited resources
Prioritize resources and activities across NOAA to improve habitat conditions

Make decisions in an ecosystem context and consider competing priorities

Foster and leverage partnerships

Improve delivery of habitat science to facilitate decision-making
1) Establish long-term Habitat Focus Areas

2) Implement a Systematic and Strategic Approach to Habitat Science

3) Strengthen Policy and Legislation

First step: Implement short-term Regional Habitat Initiatives (Harris Creek, MD)
1: Establish Habitat Focus Areas

Goals:

- Select area(s) in each region to prioritize long-term habitat science and conservation efforts
- Achieve measurable benefits for multiple objectives and mandates
- Maximize our investments by seeking to build synergies
HABITAT FOCUS AREA REGIONS

NOAA Regional Collaboration Framework

Legend
- Alaska
- Central
- Great Lakes
- North Atlantic
- Pacific Islands
- Southeast & Caribbean
- Gulf of Mexico
- Western

Pilot Region
Southern portion of NOAA Western Collaboration Region

FL, NY, & PA are 2-region states
2: Strategic Approach to Habitat Science

Goals:

- Integrate science with management actions to foster better decisions
- Prioritize science activities to fulfill habitat data needs
- Improve delivery of habitat science
3: Policy & Legislation

Goals:

- Explore ways to strengthen and apply existing authorities (MSA, ESA, CZM)
- Investigate innovative habitat policies and cross-agency partnerships
- Consider developing new policies and/or legislation to provide a strong mandate for conservation
3: Policy & Legislation

- **Key Actions:**
  - Increasing efficiency of Essential Fish Habitat consultations
  - Strengthening coordination between NMFS and CZM programs
FIRST STEP: REGIONAL HABITAT INITIATIVES

Goals:

➢ Find **immediate** opportunities to address marine resource challenges through habitat-based solutions

➢ Apply place-based science to management issues

➢ Oyster restoration in Harris Creek, MD
Goal:
• Restore oyster populations in 20 tributaries by 2025

Oyster Metrics:
• Developed Bay-wide, consensus definition of ‘restored reef’ and ‘restored tributary’

Tributary Selection & Restoration Plans:
• Harris Creek tributary plan complete
Harris Creek
Tributary Plan and Restoration Progress

- Acres: 377
- Substrate: 350,000 cubic yards
- Seed: 2 billion
- Estimated cost: $31 million

2012:
- 22 acres new reef constructed (Army Corps)
- 97 acres seeded (Oyster Recovery Partnership, in partnership with Univ. of MD, with funding from NOAA and DNR)

2013:
- Approx 1/3 of the way toward the 300 acre minimum goal
- End of 2013: likely to be 2/3 of the way there
Quantify ecosystem services on oyster restoration sites before and after project implementation and on similar un-restored reference habitat.

This work has been planned and will likely begin this summer.
WHAT’S NEXT? FOCUS AREA SELECTION

1. Form a Regional Planning Team
2. Identify Candidate Habitat Focus Areas
3. Seek Stakeholder Input
4. Select one or more Habitat Focus Areas
5. Develop an implementation plan and develop new partnerships
WHAT CAN YOU DO?

- Provide input into the habitat focus area selection process
- Help identify shared objectives between NOAA and partners
  - e.g., link land and water conservation and restoration efforts
Back up
FOR MORE INFORMATION

Visit:
www.noaa.gov/habitatblueprint.html
SUMMARY— WHY THE BLUEPRINT?

- Increasing need to be even more effective with our habitat programs:
  - Continued habitat loss and degradation
  - Limited funding

- Blueprint principles = a strategy to be even stronger
  - Prioritize resources and activities
  - Make decisions in an ecosystem context
  - Link science to decision-making
  - Leverage partnerships
Top FAQs About Habitat Focus Areas

- Why establish habitat focus areas?
- How many focus areas will there be? And how big will they be?
- Will all of NOAA’s resources be directed to these areas?