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

NOAA's Habitat Conservation Mission

- ***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

Blueprint Guiding Principles

- **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

Blueprint Key Approaches

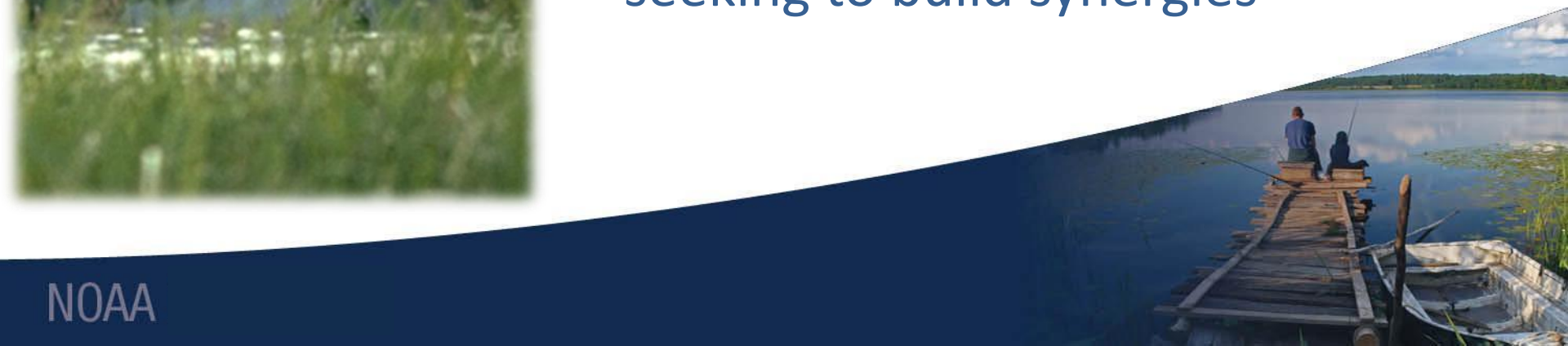
1) Establish long-term **Habitat Focus Areas**
2) Implement a Systematic and Strategic Approach to **Habitat Science**
3) Strengthen **Policy and Legislation**

First step: Implement short-term **Regional Habitat Initiatives (Harris Creek, MD)**

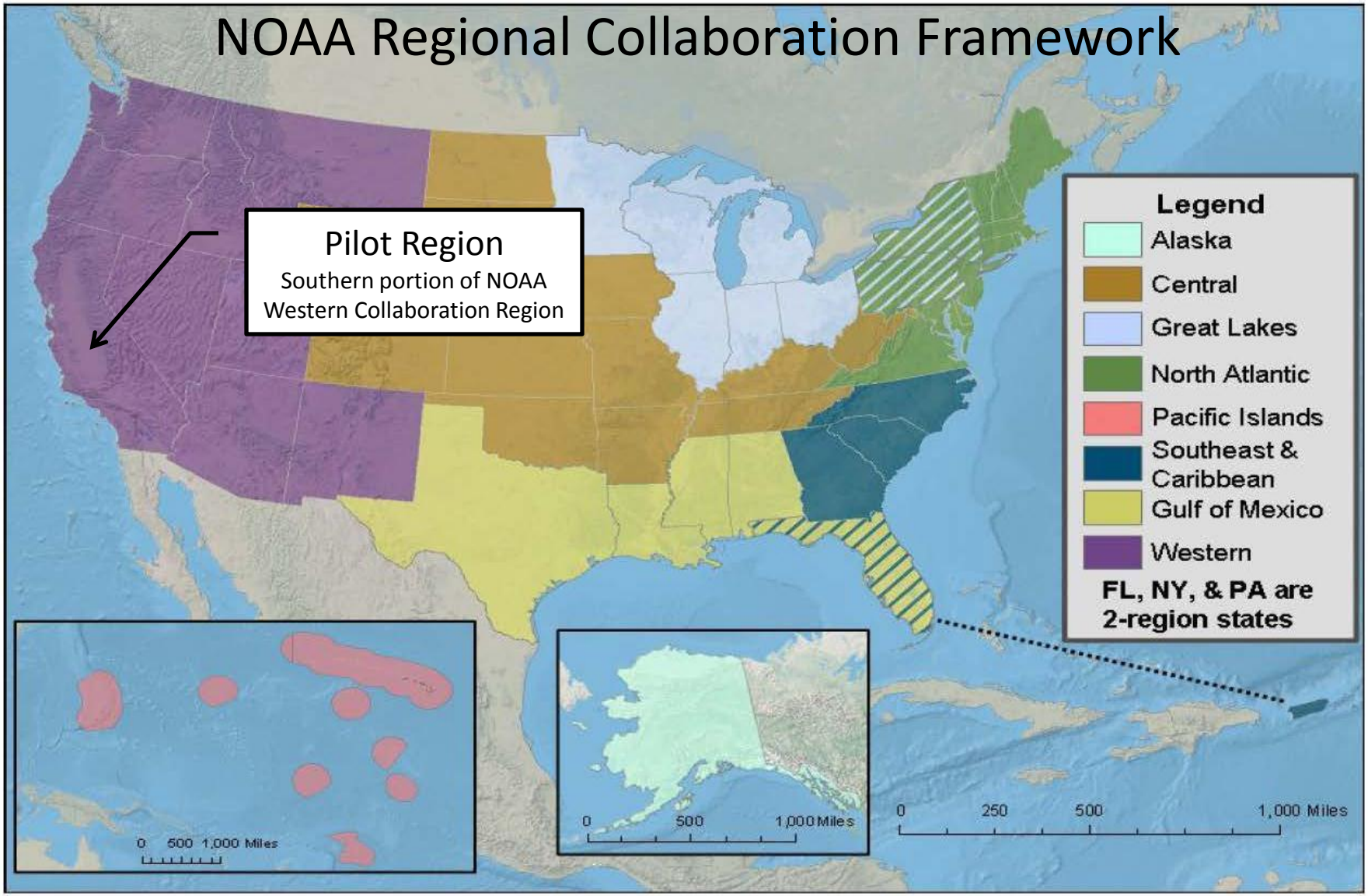
1: Establish Habitat Focus Areas

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

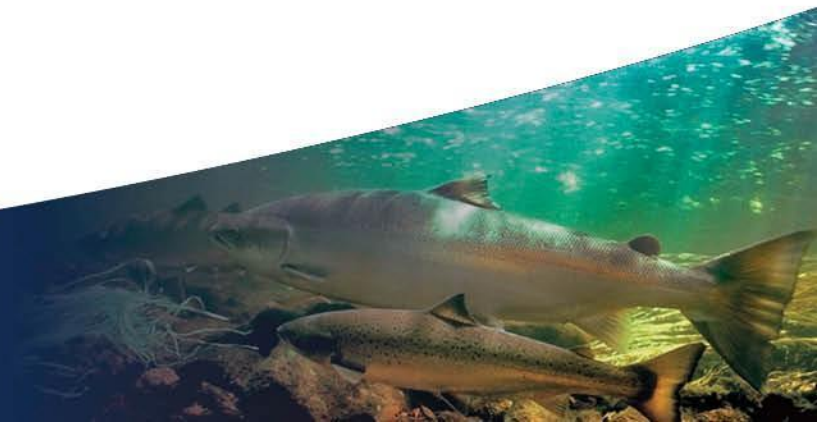


Candidate Focus Areas – SW Pilot Region

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 <u>immediate</u> opportunities to address marine resource challenges** through habitat-based solutions
- **Apply place-based science to management issues**
  - **Oyster restoration in Harris Creek, MD**

Harris Creek Regional Initiative

Goal:

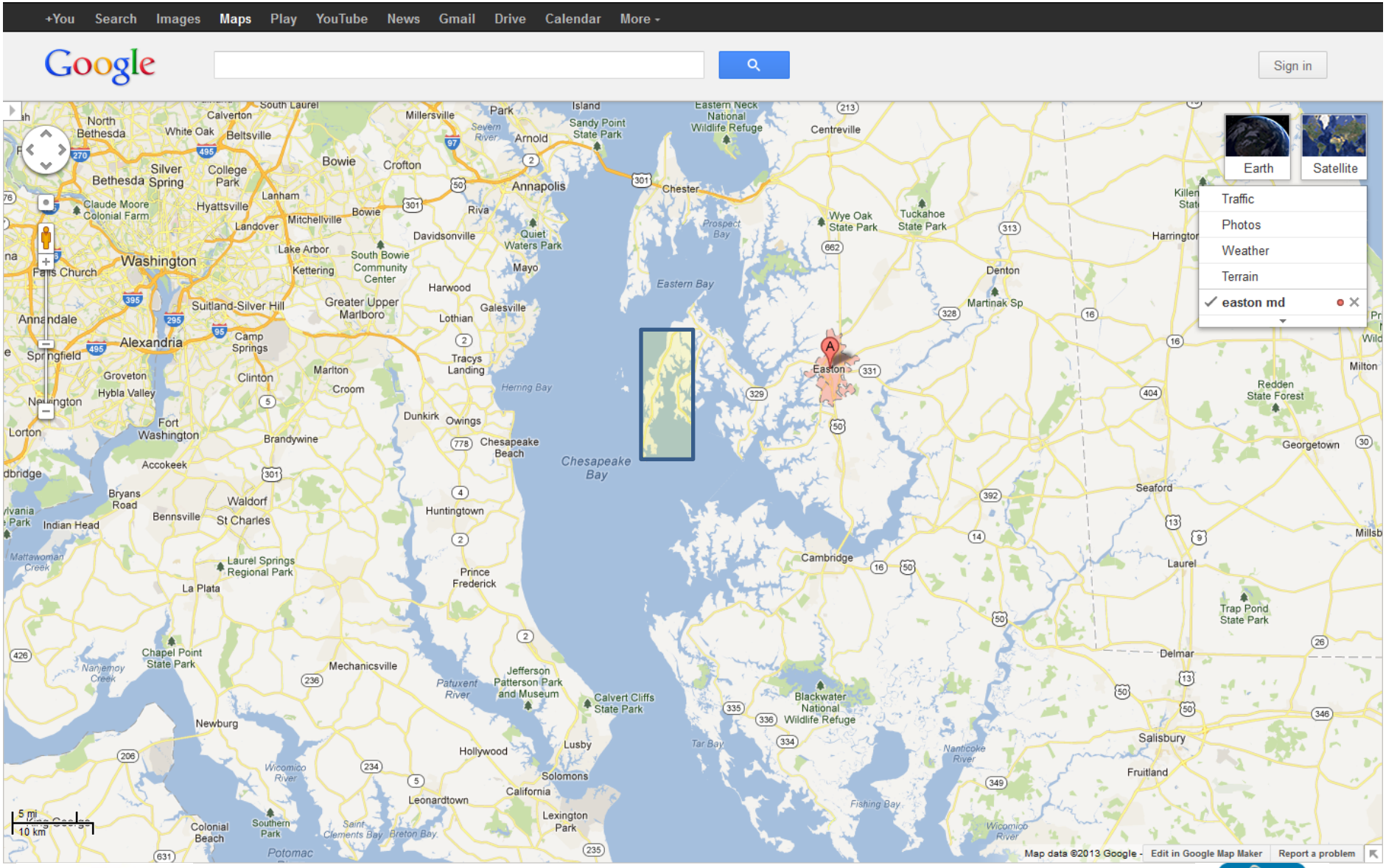
- Restore oyster populations in 20 tributaries by 2025

Oyster Metrics:

- Developed Bay-wide, consensus definition of ‘restored reef’ and ‘restored tributary’

Tributary Selection & Restoration Plans:

- Harris Creek tributary plan complete



NOAA National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration U.S. Department of Commerce

MARYLAND DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science

Oyster Recovery Partnership ORP

Harris Creek Tributary Plan and Restoration Progress

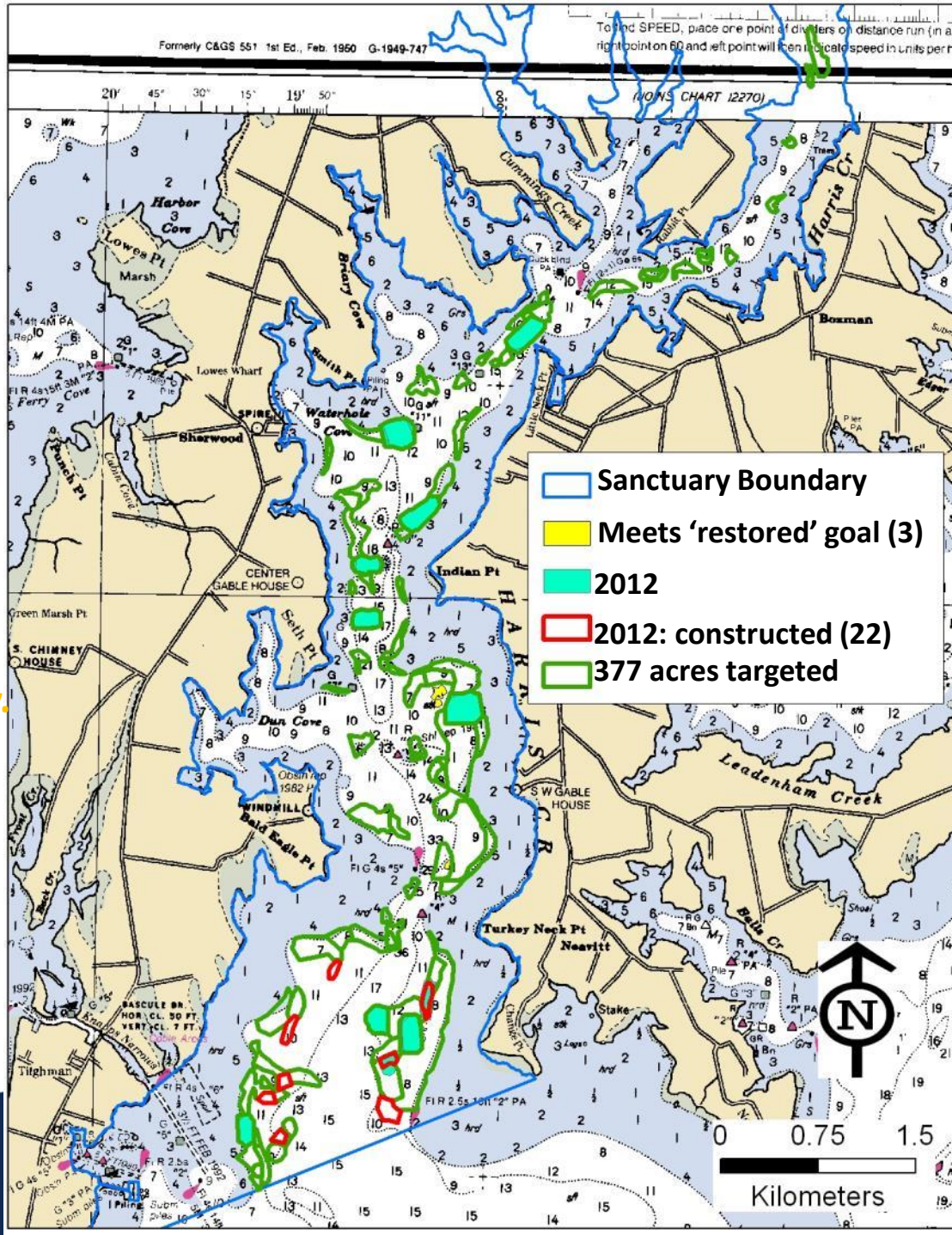
- **Acres:** 377
- **Substrate:** 350,000 cubic yards
- **Seed:** 2 billion
- **Estimated cost:** $31 million

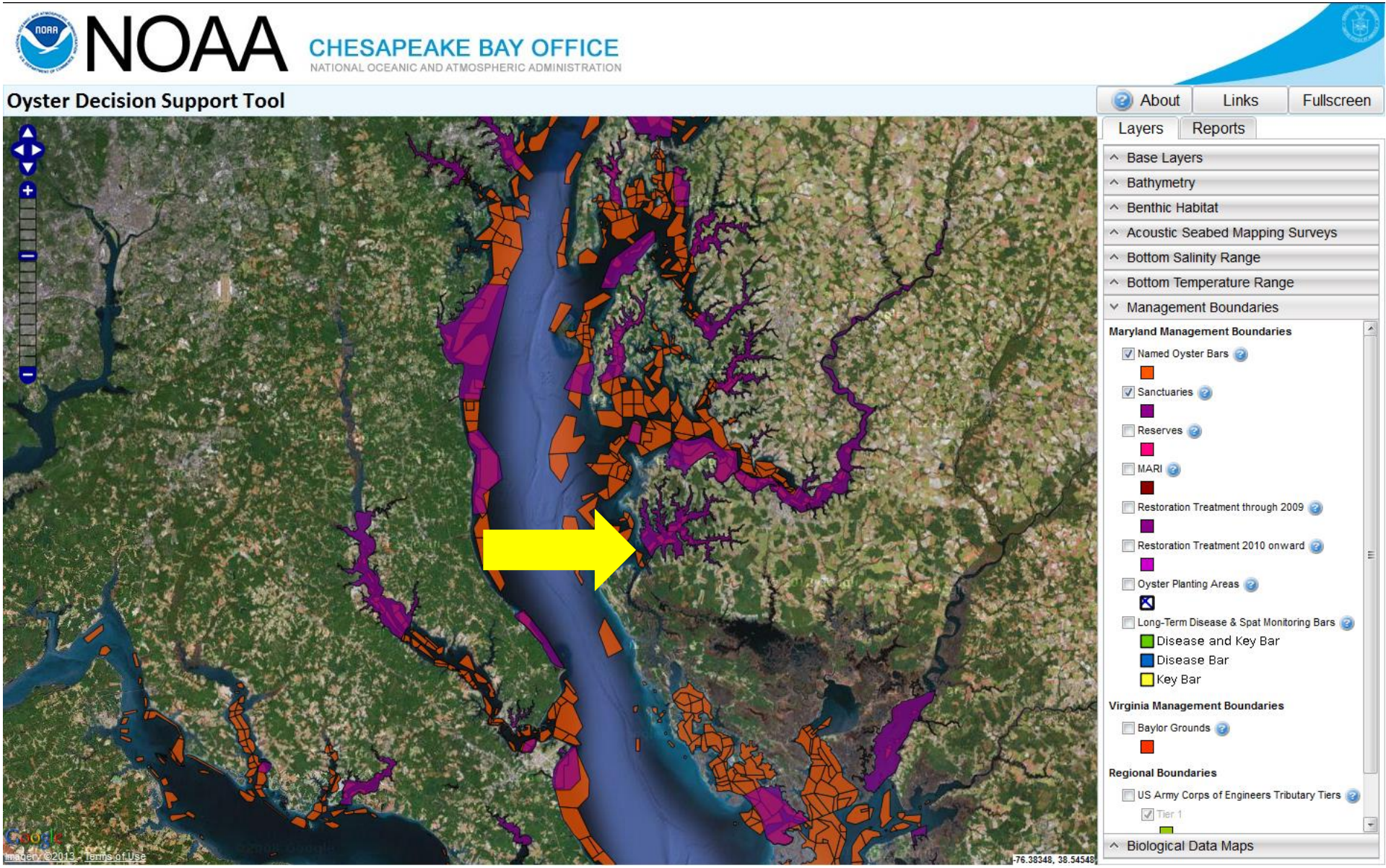
2012:

- 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

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Oyster Decision Support Tool
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Management Boundaries
Maryland Management Boundaries
Named Oyster Bars
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Restoration Treatment through 2009
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Oyster Planting Areas
Long-Term Disease & Spat Monitoring Bars
Disease and Key Bar
Disease Bar
Key Bar
Virginia Management Boundaries
Baylor Grounds
Regional Boundaries
US Army Corps of Engineers Tributary Tiers
Tier 1
Biological Data Maps
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Little Choptank- Ecosystem Services Study

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

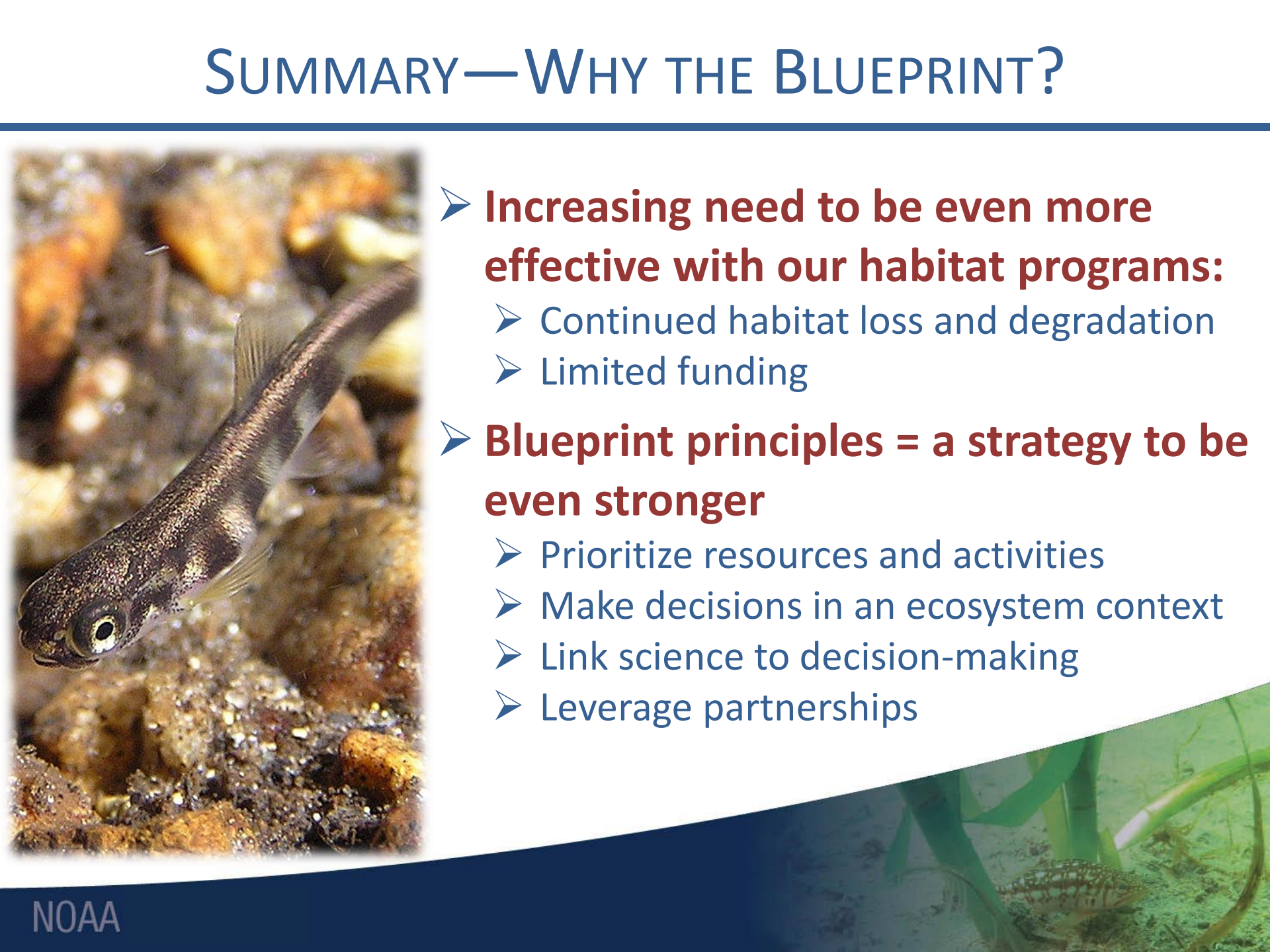
Visit:

www.noaa.gov/habitatblueprint.html

NOAA

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?**