

Goal: Effective Decision Making

Objective 1. Enhance inter-agency coordination

*Focus on aspects of governmental decision-making (NEPA and other existing siting/regulatory programs) related to marine energy production (wind, marine hydrokinetic) and infrastructure (transmission cables, pipelines), offshore aquaculture, sand extraction for beach nourishment, and consider other potential future uses (e.g., carbon sequestration). **For this objective, it is important to remember that the RPB must work within existing regulatory authorities and that different authorities exist for such activities.** This objective will focus on timing/scheduling, inter-agency information-sharing, and communication at a federal level and between state and federal agencies.*

Action 1-1: Review federal statutory requirements for regulating siting of energy-related development (including electricity generation and transmission, infrastructure such as pipelines, etc), offshore aquaculture, sand extraction for beach nourishment, and other potential future uses of ocean space. Review analogous programs at the state level. In addition to development-specific requirements (e.g., wind energy responsibilities that BOEM has related to the 2005 Energy Policy Act), include more broad considerations such as the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). In addition to this “on-paper” review, discuss practical implementation with agencies and the regulated community.

Action 1-2: Pursue opportunities for coordinating with the BOEM leasing program for offshore wind development. Focus on site assessment and construction-operations plan requirements, utility of regional ocean planning data and information, tribal coordination, and other topics.

Action 1-3: Identify specific opportunities to enhance inter-agency coordination for marine energy production, infrastructure, offshore aquaculture, and sand extraction for beach nourishment. Include NEPA and development-specific regulatory programs in this action. Recognizing that there may be obstacles to this action, also identify obstacles to achieving these opportunities and specific, concrete steps toward addressing these obstacles. Convene non-governmental entities (regulated community and other interested parties) to discuss, and revise prior to finalizing details.

Outcomes:

- Strengthened inter-agency coordination and federal/state regulatory efficiencies and agency commitments to implement.
- Publicly available information describing existing review processes and how the regulated community and members of the public can participate.

Objective 2. Implement specific actions to enhance informed public input in decision-making

Action 2-1: Develop and disseminate publicly-accessible materials describing regulatory programs related to the types of activities listed under Objective 1, including opportunities for public comment, steps where data and information can be provided, and overall timeline for decisions. Existing resources will provide much of the material for this task.

Action 2-2: Engage interested parties to identify other potential means of meeting this objective. This could include topics such as: enhanced use of on-line/social media; use of existing public meetings (such as

those of the RPB) to provide updates on ocean development projects; demonstrating how public input is/would be incorporated in decision-making, and other ways to meet this objective.

Outcomes:

- Enhanced publicly-available information and opportunities for public participation regarding ocean development proposals and review processes.
- Greater understanding of, and ease of participation in, regulatory processes by the public.

Objective 3. Incorporate maps and other products into existing agency decision-making processes

Scientifically-sound, stakeholder-reviewed products should be publicly available through the Northeast Ocean Data Portal. For this objective, it is important to remember that the RPB must work within existing regulatory authorities. Uncertainty and variability in data and other issues must be identified and described for each data product. Caveats associated with data products may limit their utility; some data may be most helpful in generally identifying issues needing further study and/or stakeholders to engage. Certain products may be applicable for preliminary site assessment or consideration of alternatives.

Action 3-1. Within existing regulatory processes, identify potential uses for/applicability of regional ocean planning products. Convene interested parties (government and non-government) to discuss this topic and revise products accordingly.

Action 3-2. Update the Northeast Ocean Data Portal reflecting the results of Action 3-1. Enhance Data Portal functionality through better presentation, characterization, and visualization of products.

Action 3-3. Work with appropriate agencies/data owners to increase responsibility for maintaining/updating data products and the Data Portal, beginning with illustrations of the utility of products developed for regional ocean planning purposes and recognizing future budget issues.

Outcomes:

- Regional ocean planning products and information enable preliminary site assessments, provide a better understanding of existing conditions, and otherwise contribute to regulatory efficiencies.
- Stakeholders continue to be directly engaged in developing products for the Data Portal.
- The Data Portal and its products are maintained and updated in the long-term.

Objective 4. Improve respect for the customs and traditions of indigenous peoples in decision-making processes

Action 4-1. Identify areas and species important for sustenance activities.

Action 4-2. Develop means of incorporating information developed in Action 4-1 into decision-making
...other....these are placeholders for further development....

Outcomes:

Objective 5. Periodically assess process toward achieving this goal and Objectives 1-4

Action 5-1: Develop and implement tracking mechanisms to identify if objectives toward this goal are being met. Include periodic/routine input from the regulated community and the public. This Action is intended to identify longer-term (beyond two years) needs and to implement necessary steps to meet those needs.

Outcomes: Identification of progress toward achieving this goal and implementation of revised measures as necessary.

Goal: Healthy Ocean and Coastal Ecosystems

Objective 1. Characterize the region's ecosystem and economy

Characterize the region's species, habitats, cultural resources, and existing human activities and economy as a component of understanding the "health" of New England's ocean and coastal ecosystems. Environmental conditions in parts of the region appear to be changing and, where possible, such phenomena should be described and ways to portray the dynamic nature of the system explored. Some issues require additional scientific focus, data development, or longer-term consideration.

Action 1-1. Work with the scientific community and other interested parties to integrate natural resource data and model-derived products to characterize marine life and habitats. This includes producing maps for bird, sea turtle, shellfish, marine mammal, fish, and bottom (benthic) habitats. Consider the potential for developing products related to other issues such as historic and future trends, ocean acidification, biodiversity, productivity, species biology (including migration), and the physical/oceanographic environment. Assess the potential for climate change impacts to alter existing conditions. In these considerations, consider scientific understanding and data availability. Convene scientists and other stakeholders to discuss preliminary assessments and potential next steps.

Action 1-2. Identify areas and resources that are of Tribal importance.

Action 1-3. Assess and summarize efforts in the region that have attempted to identify areas of ecological "importance" or measure the "health" of the marine system. The first step in this action will be to define these terms to provide further specificity and direction.

Action 1-4. Work with the shipping, commercial fishing, boating, recreational fishing, energy, aquaculture, and recreation communities to develop information describing those human activities. Engage those stakeholders in specific project design, data development where appropriate, implementation, and review of draft products prior to finalizing.

Action 1-5. Develop an assessment of the regional maritime economy, beginning with compilation of existing analyses/data to determine ability to produce comprehensive economic assessment.

Action 1-6. Incorporating information from Actions 1-1 through 1-5, develop and periodically update a regional baseline assessment of the coastal and ocean ecosystem and data compilation related to the coastal and marine economy.

Action 1-7. Review ongoing and past studies looking at the vulnerability of marine life/habitats to human activities. As part of this summary, assess the current state of the science regarding cumulative impact assessment.

Action 1-8. For Actions 1 through 7, identify priority gaps for the ocean science plan described below. As part of this action and general engagement efforts, identify if there are priority gaps that could meet other purposes beyond those of regional ocean planning.

Action 1-9. Pursue incorporating results of Actions 1 through 7 above into Objective 3 under Goal 1.

Outcomes:

- Characterization of human activities, cultural resources, and natural resources and the ocean and coastal economy.
- Engagement of scientific community and people from the shipping, commercial fishing, boating, recreational fishing, energy, environmental and recreation communities, as well as other stakeholders.
- Incorporation of resulting products into existing decision-making as appropriate and only if specific caveats associated with each product are clearly articulated.

Objective 2. Identify and support existing non-regulatory opportunities to work toward conserving, restoring, and maintaining healthy ecosystems

Existing non-regulatory programs at the federal and state level are widespread and address many coastal and ocean health issues. Examples include habitat restoration activities, certain water quality improvement programs, enhancements to existing infrastructure, assessment of invasive species, etc.

Action 2-1. Identify existing as well as potential programs that are or would be directly related to conservation, restoration, and maintaining healthy ocean and coastal ecosystems at a federal and state level. Identify opportunities for better coordinating and supporting those programs to address priority regional ocean planning needs.

Outcome: Identification of related programs and specific steps taken to support these programs.

Objective 3. Produce a regional ocean science plan that prioritizes ocean science and data needs for the region for the next five years

There will be gaps in data and information that will directly affect attempts to fully achieve goals set out by the RPB. The regional ocean science plan will help fill those gaps, but importantly will also recognize that these science needs will be directly framed by the regional ocean planning effort recognizing the continuing role and capacity of existing efforts to address certain topics.

Action 3-1. Engage agencies, the scientific community, and other stakeholders to prioritize scientific/data needs. Coordinate with existing efforts that are underway or related, and recognize continuing need for basic data development to fill gaps (and budget challenges that may enhance gaps in the future). For priority topics, describe desired outcomes and identify potential ways of addressing those issues (including consideration of leveraging/partnering with existing efforts).

Outcome: Regional ocean science plan to address the region's ocean priority science and data needs.

Objective 4. Periodically assess process toward achieving this goal and Objectives 1-3

Action 4-1: Develop and implement mechanisms to identify if objectives under this goal are being met. This should include periodic/routine input from stakeholders and interested parties. This Action is intended to identify longer-term (beyond two years) needs and implement necessary steps to meet those needs.

Outcomes: Identification of progress toward achieving this goal and implementation of revised measures as necessary

Goal: Compatibility Among Past, Current and Future Ocean Uses

Objective 1. Increase understanding of past, current, and future ocean uses

Addressing project-specific compatibility issues generally is the domain of specific project-review processes and thus is appropriately addressed during permitting. Regional ocean planning can add value by enhancing understanding of trends in human activities, to the extent foreseeable, and by ensuring that specific projects underway consider regional considerations resulting from engagement of stakeholders in the Northeast.

Action 1-1. Examine technological, management, economic, environmental, or other factors to enhance understanding of reasonably foreseeable changes in human uses. Engage industry representatives and experts in maritime commerce, recreation, commercial fishing, marine energy development, and offshore aquaculture to help determine potential future scenarios or trends, if possible. Gauge potential for relatively new uses such as offshore aquaculture and extraction of sand and gravel for beach nourishment.

Action 1-2. Use the results of Action 1-1 to assess the future viability of human activity maps. Identify the need, timing, and other considerations for periodic updates to such maps.

Outcome:

- Identification of potential future changes to human activity maps

Objective 2. Ensure regional issues are incorporated in ongoing efforts assessing new/existing human activities

Several ongoing projects are looking at potential interactions between various human activities through assessing existing information and data. Many of these projects relate to ongoing offshore wind energy development and aspects of these projects may benefit from a regional perspective, recognizing that it will be important to understand their scope, timing, and intended purpose to help identify opportunities to contribute to such work.

Action 2-1. Summarize status of projects such as the Atlantic Coast Port Access Route Study, BOEM-led Northeast Sand Management Working Group, regional efforts to assess commercial and recreational fishing and offshore wind energy development, the identification of potential paleocultural resources offshore Rhode Island, and others.

Action 2-2. Using the assessment in Action 2-1, identify considerations for these existing efforts and work with sponsoring entities/agencies to do so. Identify need to facilitate discussions between diverse users and agencies and undertake such discussions where appropriate.

Action 2-3. Convene regional stakeholders and experts to discuss issues related to electricity transmission from grid-scale wind energy projects. The purpose of this action will be to enhance understanding of issues related to siting and/or connections to existing transmission network.

Outcomes:

- Regional perspectives incorporated in ongoing projects such as those identified above.
- Information describing potential future uses of ocean space, the viability of existing human activity maps and need for updates.
- Public discussion of regional issues associated with offshore wind siting such as transmission.

Objective 3. Periodically assess process toward achieving this goal and Objectives 1-2

Action 3-1: Develop and implement decision-making tracking mechanisms to identify if objectives under this goal are being met. Include periodic/routine input from stakeholders and interested parties. This Action is intended to result in longer-term (beyond two years) needs being identified and necessary steps implemented to meet those needs.

Outcomes: Identification of progress toward achieving this goal and implementation of revised measures as necessary.