

Businesses, Scientists and Conservationists Working Together for A Thriving Ocean Future

Stakeholders across New England recently began working together to support Regional Ocean Planning. The result of this effort is the creation of the New England Ocean Action Network (NEOAN) www.newenglandoceanaction.org. NEOAN recognizes that a comprehensive, science based and participatory ocean planning process is necessary to accommodate a growing range of ocean uses, and to grow our economy while protecting and restoring the health of our ocean ecosystems. Such a planning process could promote sustainable economic development, improve stewardship of our ocean and coasts, and help government be more effective at solving management problems. NEOAN comprises individuals and organizations from the region's environmental community, educational and research institutions, shipping and ports, fishing industry, clean energy field, and other ocean users.

FACT SHEET



When it comes to important decisions affecting our oceans, we need to base each decision on science and find a way to give everyone a voice. Regional Ocean Planning is a process that brings together all our ocean stakeholders – from fishermen to whale watchers, from beachgoers to renewable energy developers – to help us figure out how to share the ocean sustainably and maintain the benefits these resources provide for us all.

The Challenges

Ocean resources are currently managed by more than 20 federal agencies and administered through a web of more than 140 different and often conflicting laws and regulations. This results in such problems as:

- Poor communication and coordination about ocean use decisions
- Slow, reactive management management decisions that drag on unnecessarily and delay or prevent good projects from moving forward.
- Exclusion from the process not all ocean users feel like they have a say in decisions
- Difficulty sharing data it's hard to make sound decisions without having all the facts in one place

The Solutions

Based on decades of studies and existing efforts, the Obama Administration established the National Ocean Policy, which is an important framework that requires all federal agencies to work with state agencies, tribes and ocean user groups to improve the management of our oceans and coasts. The National Ocean Policy promotes the use of better scientific, economic, and cultural information and data in order to inform decisions and involve all ocean and coastal users.

Regional Ocean Planning, technically known as coastal and marine spatial planning, is one of nine objectives of the National Ocean Policy. Regional Ocean Planning is a science based process of improving decisions about ocean resources before conflict arises – by involving everyone who has a stake in those resources, including

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conservation groups, recreational users, and commercial and industrial entities. A regional planning body will guide the process by identifying key issues, fully involving stakeholders, and ensuring interagency coordination and collaboration.

Regional Ocean Planning will bring together conservationists and fishermen, clean energy companies, community advocates, scientists, the shipping industry, and recreational users in an ocean planning process that will help protect our ocean and coasts, ensure decisions are made with the best scientific and economic data, and promote sustainable development of our ocean economy.

Regional Ocean Planning Works

Regional Ocean Planning has already been successful in New England in solving difficult challenges. For example, shipping lanes into and out of Boston Harbor were re-routed to decrease accidental, harmful collisions of ships and whales in a process where scientists, conservationists, local officials, and the shipping industry came together to solve the problem. In another example, a proposed fiber-optic cable across Buzzards Bay and Vineyard Sound was sited in a much shorter timeframe by using the information and previous work of the Massachusetts Ocean Plan. This also helped to avoid sensitive eelgrass beds and rocky bottom that provide important habitat for New England sea life.

Some of the great benefits of an improved ocean planning process are in the responsible siting of future offshore wind energy turbines. Regional Ocean Planning in New England will include energy companies, fishermen, scientists and government agencies to ensure that new developments such as a renewable energy industry does not harm ocean wildlife or conflict with current uses such as commercial fishing or recreational boating.

The Regional Ocean Planning Process

Regional Ocean Planning can help us find solutions:

- Serious stakeholder engagement which continues throughout the process
- Defining a management area which helps stakeholders identify priority uses in a certain area
- Goals and objectives are defined by federal and state agencies, tribes and all stakeholders for the area where the plan will be implemented

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About NEOAN

The New England Ocean Action Network (NEOAN) brings together individuals and organizations from the region's environmental community, educational and research institutions, fishing industry, clean energy field, and other ocean users, industries, and stakeholders who are committed to building a thriving future for New England's communities, economy and marine ecosystems. Together, we support efforts to develop a comprehensive, region-wide ocean planning process based in sound science and robust public and stakeholder participation.

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