

# Mapping Commercial Fisheries

## A Project of the Northeast Regional Planning Body



**A**s commercial fishing in New England changes, the need for better data and information, including traditional firsthand knowledge, has never been more urgent. Understanding where and when commercial fishing happens, and how that picture is changing, can lead to smarter decisions and help reduce conflicts among new and traditional ocean uses.

The Northeast Regional Planning Body (RPB) was established under the National Ocean Policy to develop an ocean plan for New England waters. As a key part of that process, the RPB is collecting and developing data on New England fisheries.

### Project Goals

Existing ocean uses are being characterized to better understand human activities and natural resources, and how new activities may affect these uses. Commercial fishing is a priority in this effort, given its importance in the economy and culture of New England. Several projects to map patterns of commercial fishing have been undertaken in recent years in different parts of the region. This project builds on those efforts, with the goal of producing maps, available to the public, that show commercial fishing activity region-wide.



Accurate maps of commercial fishing activity, created in partnership with the fishing community, are essential to ocean planning in New England.

### Data Sources

The maps rely on data developed for federal fisheries management purposes—for example, vessel trip report (VTR) and vessel monitoring system (VMS) databases. These data are plotted on NOAA charts to show how much activity is taking place (red = more activity; blue = less activity). The maps show activity across New England over several years (generally 2007 to 2010) and are organized by fishery. These data sources have limitations; for example, they do not include some fisheries, such as lobster or bluefin tuna; they do not differentiate areas fished and other vessel activity (transiting); and they do not capture the historic extent of fishing activity.

### Fishing Community Participation

Fishing industry participation is key to this project's success. For this reason, the project is designed as a partnership with the fishing industry, scientists, and managers. Between August 2012 and July 2013, the project team held more than 50 gatherings throughout New England to obtain advice and input for developing maps of commercial fishing activity, and to discuss ocean planning in general. Forums for these meetings have included fishing sector/community meetings, New England Fishery Management Council meetings, one-on-one conversations, and events such as the Maine Fisheries Forum and the New Bedford Waterfront Festival.



## Project Team

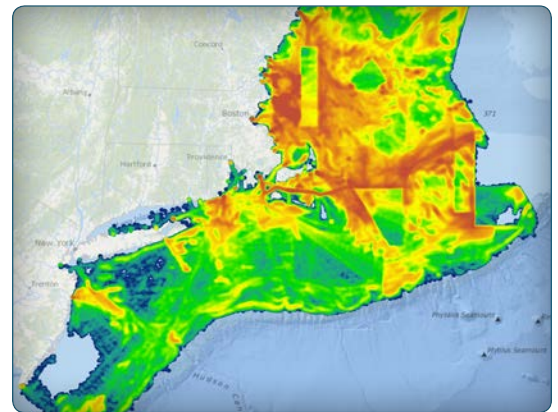
For assistance with the first phase of this project, in 2012, ocean planning staff worked with a team consisting of George Lapointe Consulting, the Island Institute, and the Rhode Island Sea Grant. This team worked with the commercial fishing and party/charter industries, fisheries scientists, and managers to develop and refine the maps and to understand their limitations and potential uses.

## Accomplishments Through 2013

- Developed a series of maps showing areas of commercial fishery use of the ocean, relying on existing data such as vessel monitoring system and other available data sources (see these maps at [www.northeastoceandata.org](http://www.northeastoceandata.org)).
- Met with hundreds of fishermen, managers, and scientists throughout New England to discuss the draft maps and the overall ocean planning effort.
- Produced a report, "Commercial Fisheries Spatial Characterization," (available online at [neoceanplanning.org/projects/commercial-fishing](http://neoceanplanning.org/projects/commercial-fishing)) summarizing Phase I of the project (through the summer of 2013) and providing recommendations for Phase II (through 2014). Recommendations for Phase II include updating maps with more recent data and developing products related to fisheries not well represented by existing data. Like Phase I, Phase II will emphasize engaging the fishing industry, managers, and scientists.
- Developed a work plan to address high-priority data gaps.

## Next Steps

- Continue to review map products with the fishing community and others, incorporating the latest available data.
- Publish and update maps with appropriate descriptions and caveats on the Northeast Ocean Data Portal ([www.northeastoceandata.org](http://www.northeastoceandata.org)).
- Develop and implement methods to develop maps for additional fisheries such as lobster and bluefin tuna.



Map on the Northeast Ocean Data website ([www.northeastoceandata.org](http://www.northeastoceandata.org)). All maps are developed through a scientific process that incorporates input from industry, scientists, and managers.

## For more information

To learn more about this and other ocean planning activities in New England, go to [neoceanplanning.org](http://neoceanplanning.org), scan the QR code to the right, or contact ocean planning staff: John Weber ([jweber@northeastoceancouncil.org](mailto:jweber@northeastoceancouncil.org)); Nick Napoli ([nnapoli@northeastoceancouncil.org](mailto:nnapoli@northeastoceancouncil.org)).

