

## Recreational SCUBA Diving Characterization FAQs

### *What is ocean planning?*

The ocean and the livelihoods it supports are vital to New England. People in our region greatly value our ocean heritage and are seeking to use resources from the ocean in new and increasingly complex ways. At the same time, environmental changes are affecting the health of ocean life and habitats. Balancing these needs is a challenging process that requires careful thought and decision-making. By collecting existing information to describe human activities and natural resources in the ocean, **ocean planning** is a way to address these challenges. Government agencies and stakeholders are working together to anticipate needs, set priorities, and make decisions from a regional perspective. **The result?** More effective decisions informed by public input to ensure protection and sustainable use of ocean resources. For more information on ocean planning, see [neoceanplanning.org](http://neoceanplanning.org)

### *What is the purpose of the recreational characterization study?*

As part of the ocean planning effort, this study will characterize coastal and marine recreational uses in the Northeast (NY to ME), gathering data about where, when, and how people recreate along New England's coast and in the ocean to help ensure recreational uses be considered in the broader context of ocean planning. More specifically, the study will collect information on the following activities: whale watching, SCUBA diving, sailing regattas and saltwater sportfishing tournaments/derbies as well as day beach use, surfing, kayaking, swimming, and wildlife viewing. The project will not collect data on fishing or recreational boating from individual users as those activities are being addressed through other studies. For more information on how other recreational uses have been/are being addressed, see <http://neoceanplanning.org/projects/recreation/>

### *Who is conducting the study?*

This study is being conducted by the [Northeast Regional Planning Body \(RPB\)](#) and has contracted with a project team consisting of [SeaPlan](#), the [Surfrider Foundation](#), and [Point97](#). The project team has been working with representatives from the recreational SCUBA diving industry to develop a survey methodology that will best characterize areas that are important to the industry.

### *Who has been involved so far?*

The project team has sought input from industry experts from regional industry experts, including representatives from Portsmouth SCUBA, Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary, Northern Atlantic Dive Expeditions, and Quest Marine Services to scope this survey. We are also receiving guidance from a project steering committee consisting of representatives from state and federal agencies, including the Maine Coastal Program, the New Hampshire Coastal Program, the Massachusetts Office of Coastal Zone Management, the Rhode Island Coastal Resources Management Council, the Connecticut Department of

Environmental Protection Office of Long Island Sound Programs, the New York State Department of State, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and the United States Coast Guard. These industry and agency experts have identified the online survey format as the best way to gather high quality data from a wide variety of individuals most familiar with this activity.

### ***What information are we looking for?***

The project team is looking to the industry to help us identify areas that are routinely used by recreational SCUBA divers in the region. We recognize that a frequently-used area can be defined by a specific location, such as a wreck, or a more general area where divers are likely to observe interesting wildlife or habitats. These are likely to be areas where diving groups or charters visit frequently, but may also include unique locations that are only visited rarely, but are still considered important.

Survey participants will be asked to draw an outline of the area using a mapping tool. We recognize that that boundaries may be subjective, and anticipate that survey participants may use areas depicted on maps (e.g. habitat features such as canyons, wrecks, or other features) to guide their drawing. We also understand that some locations are sensitive and are addressing this concern by developing a data processing methodology that will generalize locations so as not to disclose exact spatial information.

### ***How will this information be used?***

The data collected during this survey will not be used for regulatory purposes. Rather, data from the study will be used by the RPB to develop a draft Northeast Ocean Plan and will be integrated into the [Northeast Ocean Data Portal](#), a decision support and information system for managers, planners, scientists, and project proponents. The information will be combined with data being collected from other industries to help ensure recreational uses are considered in future ocean planning. The data will also be available to industry members for use in business planning or to demonstrate the importance of your industry. We will continue to work with industry experts to determine how best to represent the data from a regional standpoint.