

Northeast Ocean Plan: Plan Performance Monitoring and Evaluation

Draft for Stakeholder Forum

May 2, 2017

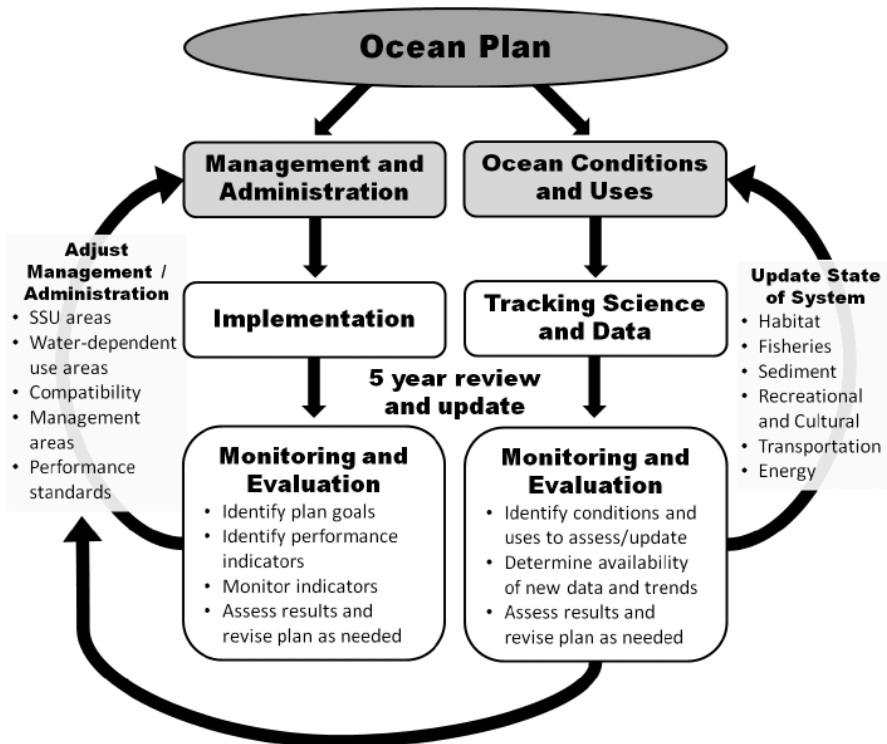
Introduction

On pages 160-163, the 2016 Northeast Ocean Plan (Plan) establishes two tracks for monitoring and evaluation - Plan performance monitoring and ecosystem health monitoring and evaluation.

Plan performance monitoring and evaluation focuses on measuring the RPB’s progress towards implementing the Plan’s actions and achieving the Plan’s goals and objectives. This likely focuses more on evaluating process-based outcomes and changes in behavior than economic or ecological change.

Ecosystem health monitoring and evaluation focuses on measuring changes in the ecosystem to identify the issues that may require management attention. The Ocean Health Index is an example of one approach to monitoring ecosystem health. While there are potential linkages to Plan performance monitoring, the rest of this document will not focus on ecosystem health monitoring approaches.

As context, the [2015 Massachusetts Ocean Plan](#) established a similar two-track monitoring and evaluation structure; see graphic from the MA Ocean Plan below:



In addition, on page 161, the Northeast Ocean Plan presents the following principles for establishing and monitoring Plan performance indicators (paraphrased below for simplicity):

- Relate indicators to Plan outcomes, including goals, objectives, and actions (or implementation activities).
- Establish a baseline.
- Hone indicators to balance specificity with the availability of information, including the use of qualitative information when quantitative measures are unavailable, and establishing fewer more effective indicators rather than many indicators.
- Obtain public input.
- Ensure indicators inform whether Plan amendments or Plan updates are necessary.

Proposed Approach to Developing a Performance Monitoring and Evaluation Framework for the Northeast Ocean Plan

The Northeast Ocean Plan provides an overview of the need for establishing Plan performance indicators and the general principles to guide the process for developing them. The Plan states that the RPB will establish a process to develop and monitor performance indicators with public input, and consider how those indicators may inform amendments and updates to the Plan. Therefore, the following approach to establishing indicators is proposed:

1. Establish a general approach that identifies the primary activities (resulting from the actions described in the Plan) and a draft set of process-based outcomes of the Plan. Note the linkage between primary activities and process-based outcomes to Plan goals, objectives, and actions. Consider how other ocean plans monitor and evaluate plan implementation and plan performance.
2. Obtain public input on the general approach to monitoring Plan performance during the May stakeholder forum and present proposed next steps during the May RPB meeting. Those potential next steps could include:
3. Revise the general approach after public and RPB input provided during the meetings in May.
4. Organize the RPB around the primary Plan implementation activities to finalize Plan outcome language, identify a series of indicators that can be used to evaluate progress implementing relevant Plan actions and achieving relevant Plan goals and objectives, establish a baseline for each indicator (whether qualitative or quantitative), and develop mechanisms for appropriate RPB entities to report on each.
5. Develop a process and timeline for evaluating and communicating results for each indicator, including consideration of a “dashboard-type” reporting tool through the NE Ocean Planning or NE Ocean Data Portal websites.
6. Determine whether and how results for each indicator inform potential amendments and updates to the Plan, including whether Plan goals, objectives, and actions should be revised.

Plan Actions and Outcomes

Recognizing the importance of Plan implementation activities to measuring progress, actions from the 2016 Northeast Ocean Plan are summarized and grouped into four categories in the following discussion. This is an initial attempt at identifying the primary categories for which the RPB could articulate Plan outcomes, identify indicators, establish a baseline, and monitor and communicate progress. The RPB may also want to use these general categories to identify which RPB agencies and staff members need to be involved, recognizing that these are different topics with different agency and staff responsibilities.

Note that draft outcomes have been included for each of the four categories below. These draft outcomes are derived from the Plan, but many are not quoted directly from the Plan. Therefore, it is expected that the RPB will reconsider these draft outcomes as a first step in developing appropriate performance measures.

1. Maintain and Update Data

Actions

Chapter 3 of the NE Ocean Plan describes the maps and data that the RPB developed for each of the ten priority ocean resources and activities for regional ocean planning. The maps and data are further summarized in a table starting on page 158 of Chapter 4, which also includes the relevant agencies that are responsible for updating each dataset. Each ocean resource or activity section of Chapter 3 also includes a series of actions, and the first category of actions in each section is to maintain and update data that are identified in the Plan and available via the Northeast Ocean Data Portal (Portal). The following actions generally cover the intent of each of the individual actions under that section heading for each of the ten ocean resources or activities:

- Maintain and update maps and data identified in the Plan and available via the Portal.
- Identify opportunities to develop new data products and conduct new analyses.

Draft Outcomes

Throughout the Plan there are discussions and references to intended outcomes from this category of actions. The following statements attempt to summarize those outcomes for discussion purposes.

- Priority data products on the Portal are updated by the RPB and reviewed and validated by relevant stakeholders.
- RPB agencies and entities take increasing responsibility for updating relevant data products on the Portal.
- The RPB identifies new data needs, starting with those listed in the Plan, and determines the appropriate timeframe and process for developing products and integrating them into the Portal.

2. Inform Regulatory and Management Decisions

Actions

Chapter 3 of the Plan summarizes the regulatory and management context in the region, including federal environmental and regulatory laws and management activities that are most relevant for Plan implementation. Each of the ten ocean resource and activity sections in Chapter 3 includes additional details about the regulatory and management context that is specific to the resource or activity. Each section also includes a series of actions under the heading “inform regulatory and management decisions” about how relevant agencies will use Plan data and information to inform decision-making. The following actions generally cover the intent of each of the individual actions under that section heading for each of the ten ocean resources or activities:

- Use the Plan and Portal to inform regulatory and management decisions.
- Use the Plan and Portal to identify potential conflicts and compatibilities.
- Use the Plan and Portal to identify and engage potentially affected stakeholders.
- Use the Plan and Portal to help determine the additional research or data collection necessary to make a regulatory or management decision.

Draft Outcomes

Throughout the Plan there are discussions and references to intended outcomes from this category of actions. The following attempts to summarize those outcomes for discussion purposes.

- Potential conflicts, compatibilities, affected stakeholders, and additional research considerations are identified early in relevant regulatory and management processes using the information in the Plan and the data on the Portal as two important regionally approved sources.
- Agency coordination, public engagement around agency actions and management activities, and stakeholder proposals and participation in the regulatory process are enhanced through the collective use of the Portal as a repository of regional data products that have been vetted as reasonable characterizations of the spatial extent of human activities and ocean resources.

3. Enhance Agency Coordination

Actions

Several of the ocean resource and activity sections in Chapter 3 include actions under the heading “enhance agency coordination.” These actions are primarily intended to ensure continued regional coordination around offshore human activities that are becoming or likely to become greater considerations over time, such as energy, aquaculture, and the use of offshore sand resources. The first section of Chapter 4 includes a series of best practices intended to generally enhance intergovernmental coordination and coordination with stakeholders across

specific topics. The following actions generally cover the intent of both the topic-specific agency coordination in Chapter 3 and the more general coordination suggested in Chapter 4.

- Continue coordination in the region and with national efforts to better understand stakeholder perspectives and different mapping, science, regulatory, and budgetary aspects of energy and infrastructure, offshore aquaculture, offshore sand resources, and restoration.
- Implement a range of best practices to enhance coordination among federal agencies, between tribes and federal agencies, between states and federal agencies, and between RPB organizations and ocean stakeholders.

Draft Outcomes

Throughout the Plan there are discussions and references to intended outcomes from this group of actions. The following attempts to summarize those outcomes for discussion purposes.

- Specific to energy and infrastructure development: RPB entities and stakeholders have an improved understanding of the regulatory process, there is enhanced coordination between states, federal agencies, and tribes, and there is increased regional collaboration in the identification of energy-specific science and research needs.
- Specific to aquaculture: RPB entities and stakeholders have an improved understanding of the potential physical and biological requirements, conflicts, synergies, and impacts associated with specific types of aquaculture in federal waters.
- Specific to offshore sand resources: There is increasing regional collaboration in the identification of sand needs, potential sand resources, and potential issues associated with the use of offshore sand resources.
- Specific to restoration: There is increased awareness of regional restoration opportunities.
- The following outcomes are specifically identified on page 143 of the Plan as the “results of best practices” for intergovernmental and stakeholder coordination:
 - Broad, shared understanding among agencies of how relevant information from the Northeast Ocean Data Portal, the Plan, stakeholders, and other sources may be used early in the review of a proposed project or activity.
 - Clear and efficient direction for the applicant.
 - An initial shared understanding of the proposed project (among and between agencies), and an initial broad, shared understanding of potential issues, impacts to marine life and habitats, and compatibility concerns with existing human activities.
 - Informed stakeholder engagement.
 - Coordinated federal, state, and tribal review, as appropriate.

4. Advance Regional Science and Research Priorities

Actions

Chapter 5 of the Plan identifies six broad categories of science and research priorities that would advance the ability of RPB entities and ocean stakeholders to make better decisions and to continue to advance a broader ecosystem perspective and approach to management. It also describes the intent of the RPB to serve in a convening and coordinating role recognizing that there are many regional institutions that also have a role in advancing these priorities. The following actions generally cover the RPB's intent of this chapter.

- Coordinate the advancement of the six science and research priorities with federal, tribal, state, regional, academic, and other partners.
- Refine and identify specific science and research priorities and partnerships and develop an integrated regional ocean science agenda.

Draft Outcomes

The following attempts to summarize the intended outcomes of the activities suggested in Chapter 5:

- The RPB, regional science institutions, and stakeholders collectively identify and advance specific science and research priorities that will enable an increased understanding of ecosystems, human activities, and how decisions can potentially affect each.
- Regional science and research priorities are communicated to, coordinated with, and supported by national efforts.

Relevant Goals and Objectives

The following table is an initial attempt at linking actions from the 2016 Northeast Ocean Plan to the original planning goals and objectives from the [Framework for Ocean Planning in the Northeast United States](#) by identifying the planning objectives that are primarily relevant to each of the four previously described plan action categories.

GOAL	OBJECTIVE	Plan Action Categories			
		1. Maintain and Update Data	2. Inform Reg. and Mgmt. Decisions	3. Enhance Agency Coord.	4. Advance Science and Research Priorities
Healthy Ocean and Coastal Ecosystems	1. Characterize the Region’s Ecosystem, Economy, and Cultural Resources	X			X
	2. Identify and Support the Existing Non-regulatory Opportunities to Work Toward Conserving, Restoring and Maintaining Healthy Ecosystems			X	
	3. Produce a Regional Ocean Science Plan that Prioritizes Ocean Science and Data Needs for the Region for the Next Five Years	X		X	X
Effective Decision-making	1. Enhance Inter-Agency Coordination		X	X	X
	2. Implement Specific Actions to Enhance Informed Public Input in Decision-making		X	X	
	3. Incorporate Maps and Other Products into Existing Agency Decision-making Processes		X	X	X
	4. Improve Respect for the Customs and Traditions of Indigenous Peoples in Decision-making Processes			X	X
	5. Improve coordination with local communities in decision-making processes			X	
Compatibility Among Past, Current and Future Ocean Uses	1. Increase Understanding of Past, Current and Future Interactions Among Ocean Uses and the Ocean and Coastal Ecosystem	X	X	X	X
	2. Ensure Regional Issues are Incorporated in Ongoing Efforts to Assess New and Existing Human Activities			X	X