

The Ocean Planning Committee (OPC) is one of three Northeast Regional Ocean Council (NROC) standing committees. The committee was established to support and coordinate activities related to ocean planning in New England. The OPC originally convened when individual New England states were developing ocean plans in response to proposals for new offshore activities, including offshore LNG terminals and renewable energy installations. In 2009, NROC and several partners, established the Northeast Ocean Data Portal (www.NortheastOceanData.org) to inform planning, permitting, siting, and other regulatory and management activities throughout the region. In 2010, the OPC began supporting activities related to the 2010 National Ocean Policy under the Obama Administration, including supporting the establishment of the Northeast Regional Planning Body (RPB) in 2012 and the development and implementation of the 2016 Northeast Ocean Plan.

In 2018, the OPC was re-established to continue advancing regional priorities for ocean planning and management as a result of a new federal Executive Order that eliminated the RPB and pointed to Regional Ocean Partnerships (ROP), including NROC, as the appropriate forum for establishing and advancing regional priorities. The OPC now includes voluntary participation from NROC's member states and federal agencies, additional state and federal agencies, federally recognized tribes, and the New England Fishery Management Council. In the fall of 2018, the OPC sought stakeholder input to consider regional ocean planning and data priorities that were then sent to the federal interagency Ocean Policy Committee in December to inform the federal implementation of EO 13840. The OPC continues to provide a forum, information, and support for offshore planning activities and issues as they arise.

Goal: Provide a forum, data and information, best practices, and opportunities to coordinate offshore planning, regulatory, and siting activities to improve ocean and coastal ecosystem health, enhance decision making, and ensure compatibility among human activities.

Need for Action: There is an increasing need for data and information, multi-jurisdictional coordination, and effective stakeholder engagement as new activities continue to be proposed in state and federal waters.

The number and type of new activities in New England's ocean continue to increase and move into areas where potential impacts to ecological resources and existing human activities need to be better understood. For example, offshore wind lease areas in federal waters are moving closer to construction, new areas are being contemplated for development, and deeper water technologies are being actively considered by developers and researchers. Other renewable and non-renewable energy developments and research activities are also being considered. The need for cable runs and cable landings are increasing as offshore wind farms are installed and internet and telecommunications networks are expanded.

Offshore sand resources are being characterized for potential use in coastal protection and restoration projects, as well as for addressing emergency restoration or replenishment needs after a disaster. Aquaculture activities continue to increase in state waters and are also being increasingly considered in federal waters. New proposals and activities need to be considered and coordinated within the dynamic landscape of existing activities, such as fishing, maritime transportation and shipping, and recreation. As

such, there is a need to share data and information, and to identify, share, and implement best practices to inform existing decision-making processes. Within this dynamic landscape there are also opportunities for coordination and identification of emerging offshore issues.

Strategies: The OPC has identified four strategies for working toward its goal to support and coordinate ocean planning:

1. Provide a regional forum for a broad range of interests to engage in offshore planning and management issues
2. Engage stakeholders in the development of peer-reviewed geospatial data products characterizing human activities and ecological and cultural resources
3. Enhance existing regulatory and management processes with specific improvements around using best available information, coordination across jurisdictions, pre-application consultations, and engaging the public
4. Determine long-term capacity and funding needs to support these activities and identify options to sustain the Northeast Ocean Data Portal and the capacity to support regional coordination around offshore management issues and ocean planning

Strategies and activities: Each of the strategies below are in the process of being implemented. Strategies are supported by individual activities that committee members and partners will implement.

Strategy OPC-1: Provide a regional forum for a broad range of interests to engage in offshore planning and management issues

Activities:

OPC-1.1 Host two public ocean planning meetings per year

Public ocean planning meetings will be held in the spring and fall of each year. These meetings are one way that the OPC will ensure communication and coordination across agencies and jurisdictions. Meetings also represent an important mechanism for obtaining stakeholder input on OPC activities. OPC meetings will also be used to coordinate with federal activities under EO 13840. Meeting agendas will include, but are not limited to, opportunities for OPC member discussion of/coordination on offshore management issues, stakeholder input, and updates on work group activities.

OPC-1.2 Identify and advance regional ocean planning and management priorities

The OPC will obtain input from stakeholders in the region to understand potential regional ocean planning and management priorities, establish regional priorities, and communicate those priorities to the federal Ocean Policy Committee and related subcommittees established under EO 13840.

OPC-1.3 Establish work groups or subcommittees to support regional ocean management and planning priorities

The OPC will initially establish two work groups: a Regional Data Work Group to guide and assist with the development of regional data products to inform decision-making and ensure the long-term maintenance and sustainability of the Northeast Ocean Data Portal; and a Best Practices Work Group to develop specific recommendations and frameworks for improving stakeholder engagement, agency and interjurisdictional coordination, the use of data and information, and pre-application practices in regulatory and management decisions. Other work groups may be established as needs arise,

particularly if there's interest in better understanding a specific current or emerging ocean management issue. In the past, there have been work groups or subcommittees working on Restoration and Offshore Sand. These groups may continue, and others will be considered.

OPC-1.4 Enable and initiate discussions, forums, and workshops for emerging or important regional ocean management and planning issues

The OPC will identify emerging or important regional ocean management and planning issues and serve as a convener for discussions around those issues. The OPC will also consider the appropriate role for NROC in advancing those issues. For some issues, the NROC OPC may simply provide opportunities for coordination and communication during existing meetings. For other issues, the NROC OPC may decide to host a workshop, establish a subcommittee or work group, and develop a work plan. The following initial list of priority issues reflects OPC and stakeholder input provided in the last several years and will be the starting point for OPC discussions about which issues to address first.

- Aquaculture
- Cumulative impacts
- Climate change
- Offshore wind
- Sand
- Tribal interests
- Monitoring
- Regional science and research priorities

Strategy OPC-2: Engage stakeholders in the development of peer-reviewed geospatial data products characterizing human activities and ecological and cultural resources

Activities:

OPC-2.1 Implement and update the 2019 Northeast Ocean Data Portal Work Plan

The 2019 Northeast Ocean Data Portal Work Plan is available online: <https://neoceanplanning.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Northeast-Ocean-Data-Portal-Work-Plan-3.25.19.pdf>

The OPC will facilitate implementation of the main objectives of this work plan:

1. Maintain and develop products for regional ocean data priorities
2. Maintain and enhance applications and tools for visualizing and utilizing regional data products
3. Maintain website and IT infrastructure
4. Conduct outreach and communications to enhance user understanding of the Portal and to communicate its various uses

The Portal Work Plan will be updated to reflect progress and regional ocean data priorities.

OPC-2.2 Establish Regional Data Work Group to support and inform the development and maintenance of the Northeast Ocean Data Portal

The OPC will establish and convene a Regional Data Work Group composed of core members from OPC organizations to ensure the long-term utility and sustainability of the Northeast Ocean Data Portal by supporting and informing a range of tasks:

- Ensure timely updates and maintenance of existing geospatial data products and inform the development of new data products and analyses for regional data priorities
- Facilitate a greater role for data providers, agencies, and stakeholders in data development, updates, and maintenance
- Connect regional data efforts with federal and state efforts, including efforts by the [Federal Interagency Ocean Policy Committee](#) to publish federal geospatial data that address regional needs
- Inform the identification and acquisition of funding sources for regional geospatial data product development and maintenance

The OPC will establish ad-hoc subgroups to support the development of and updates to specific data themes (e.g., fishing, aquaculture, energy and infrastructure) and the engagement of related stakeholders. Subgroups will be formed and meet on an as-needed basis. The OPC will develop a Terms of Reference that will include more detail on membership and activities for the Regional Data Work Group.

Strategy OPC-3: Enhance existing regulatory and management processes with specific improvements around using best available information, coordination across jurisdictions, pre-application consultations, and engaging the public

Activities:

OPC-3.1 Establish Best Practices Work Group to develop specific recommendations to advance best practices

The OPC will establish and convene a Best Practices Work Group composed of core members from OPC organizations to develop specific recommendations and potential frameworks for improving stakeholder engagement, agency and interjurisdictional coordination, the use of data and information, and pre-application practices in existing regulatory and management processes. Best Practices Work Group responsibilities will include:

- Identify potential best practices by reviewing agency guidance, stakeholder comments, the Northeast Ocean Plan, and other documents, and through engaging government and non-government representatives
- Develop a set of potential best practices, including specific mechanisms and frameworks for implementing those practices
- Communicate, educate and advise on the use of best practices
- Track and report on the use of best practices

The OPC and Work Group will determine the need for and establish ad-hoc subgroups for specific topics or purposes. The OPC will develop a Terms of Reference that will include more detail on the membership and activities of the Practices Work Group.

OPC-3.2 Develop a set of potential best practices

The OPC, informed by the Best Practices Work Group, will first identify potential best practices by reviewing existing agency guidance, researching stakeholder comments on recent planning and management actions, reviewing the Northeast Ocean Plan, and engaging government and non-government representatives through the Best Practices Work Group and other mechanisms.

The OPC will then develop a set of potential best practices, with continued agency and stakeholder input, and identify specific frameworks for potentially implementing those best practices.

OPC-3.3 Communicate and track the use of potential best practices

Once best practices are selected, the OPC will communicate and educate agencies and stakeholders on the use of those practices to ensure they are considered in pertinent regulatory and management processes. In addition, the OPC will provide opportunities for OPC members and the public to transfer knowledge, ideas, and experience across the region. The OPC will also develop methods to understand the use of best practices and obtain feedback on refining those practices and potential frameworks for using them.

Strategy OPC-4: Determine long-term capacity and funding needs to support Ocean Planning Committee activities, the Northeast Ocean data Portal, and regional coordination of offshore management issues and ocean planning

Activities:

OPC-4.1 Identify and secure funding to support the Northeast Ocean Data Portal and core ocean planning functions in the near-term

The OPC will identify and secure funding to support core regional ocean planning functions, including the development of regional data products and maintenance of the Northeast Ocean Data Portal. This will include exploration of governmental and non-governmental funding sources, in-kind capacity, and other types of partnerships and opportunities to leverage existing funding or obtain additional resources.

OPC-4.2 Identify potential funding and capacity for maintaining the Northeast Ocean Data Portal over the long-term

The OPC will develop a set of options for supporting the Northeast Ocean Data Portal over the long-term that considers state and federal capacity and the potential for obtaining funding through grants and partnerships.

Specifically, the OPC will first assess the capacity and funding required to maintain core elements of the Portal. Next, the OPC will determine the impacts of any potential improvements to federal and state agency provision of core data streams to Portal capacity and funding needs. Finally, the OPC will identify funding mechanisms and consider the benefits and potential issues with each, including federal and state grants, private grants, and potential opportunities for support from or partnerships with industry and advocacy groups.

OPC-4.3 Identify potential funding and capacity for supporting ocean planning activities over the long-term

The OPC will develop a set of options for supporting ocean planning functions in the region over the long-term.

Specifically, the OPC will first conduct a review of NROC core ocean planning activities and functions other than maintaining the Portal. Next, the OPC will determine the level of funding and capacity necessary to support these core ocean planning functions. Finally, the OPC will identify funding mechanisms and consider the benefits and potential issues with each, including existing OPC and stakeholder capacity, federal and state grants, and private grants.