

Southeast Geographic Strategic Plan 2024–2027



NOAA
FISHERIES



Cover: Right Whale and her new calf, observed off Cumberland Island, Georgia. Credit: Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, taken under NOAA permit #20556-01). Credit: NOAA Fisheries. Above: Upper Barataria Marsh Creation Project. Credit: Patrick M. Quigley

A Message from the Science Center Director and the Regional Administrator

The Southeast Region is unique in the complexity of its charge, covering four ecologically diverse Large Marine Ecosystems with hundreds of species of fish and various habitats—all supporting the second largest commercial fishery in the United States by volume and more recreational fishing than the rest of the nation combined. More than 90 stocks of dolphin, whales, and sea turtles share our waters, along with coral and other protected species. Numerous management bodies have overlapping jurisdictions in the region, including three regional fishery management councils (Gulf of Mexico, Caribbean, and South Atlantic), two interstate marine fisheries commissions (Atlantic and Gulf), the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas, the Western Central Atlantic Fishery Commission, and scores of other state and federal agencies. The political, fiscal, and logistical challenges posed by such a broad charge are evident, and it is clear that prioritizing the most at-risk species and habitats, improved resourcing, and effective collaboration are key to success.

This Geographic Strategic Plan reflects NOAA Fisheries' mission to protect, conserve, and recover our vulnerable living marine resources, while supporting the [New Blue Economy](#) and building economic resilience in our fisheries. We recognize that available resources are not sufficient to meet all of our needs. Accordingly, we focused on aligning our science and management priorities on activities that most benefit our constituencies and meet federal mandates. These include modernizing our data information systems (taking advantage of new technology and leveraging other agency capabilities), supporting marine aquaculture production and the expansion of offshore wind energy while reducing conflict and ensuring adequate mitigation, streamlining stock assessments, improving organizational efficiency, building partnerships, and communicating more effectively inwardly and outwardly.

Our strategic plan recognizes that at the heart of our mission is the people we serve and the people that deliver those services. Our staff are committed to working alongside the councils, states, federal agencies, international organizations, academia, industry, congressional representatives, and stakeholders who share our mission. Together, we can implement an inclusive approach to natural resource management and conservation based on world-class science.



Clay Porph, Ph.D.
Director
Southeast Fisheries Science Center



Andy Strelcheck
Regional Administrator
Southeast Regional Office



Winning photo from the 2021 contest: Captain Barbara Evans with an Atlantic mahi mahi. Credit: B. Evans.

Science, Service, and Stewardship

Vision

The potential of our ocean ecosystems is realized—using innovation and understanding of a changing world—for the benefit of the nation.

Mission

NOAA Fisheries is responsible for the stewardship of the nation’s living marine resources and their habitat. We provide vital services for the nation: sustainable and productive fisheries, safe sources of seafood, the recovery and conservation of protected resources, and healthy ecosystems—all backed by sound science and an ecosystem-based approach to management.

Organization

The [Southeast Regional Office](#) relies on scientists and fishery managers working together to ensure sustainable fishing opportunities and communities, protection of endangered species and marine mammals, and the conservation of the habitat needed to support marine life.

The Southeast Regional Office is headquartered in St. Petersburg, Florida and has employees and facilities in Beaufort, North Carolina; Charleston, South Carolina; Brunswick, Georgia, and West Palm Beach, Florida; Stennis, Mississippi; Baton Rouge, Louisiana; Galveston, Texas; San Juan, Puerto Rico; and Christiansted, USVI.

Several other NOAA programs are also co-located in St. Petersburg, Florida. The programs include more than 50 employees who work on habitat restoration, highly migratory species management, enforcement of fisheries and protected resources regulations, seafood inspection, legal guidance and support, fisheries finance, and more.

The [Southeast Fisheries Science Center](#) provides the scientific advice and data needed to effectively manage the living marine resources of the Southeast Region and Atlantic high seas.

The Southeast Fisheries Science Center is headquartered in Miami, Florida with facilities in Beaufort, North Carolina; Panama City, Florida; Pascagoula, Mississippi; and Galveston, Texas. We also have researchers, port agents, fisheries observers, and other staff stationed in Stennis, Mississippi; Lafayette, Louisiana; and other locations throughout the region.

Overview: Southeast Region

Local Landscape, Opportunities, and Challenges

The Southeast is the most populous and fastest growing region in the country. It includes North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Texas; the inland watershed states of Arkansas, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Missouri, Nebraska, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Tennessee; the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico; and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

The National Environmental Policy Act, Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, Marine Mammal Protection Act, National Marine Sanctuaries Act, and Endangered Species Act (ESA), as well as other applicable environmental laws, policies, and executive orders provide guiding legislation for our work with our many partners, including: 17 coastal and inland states, two territories, three regional fishery management councils, two interstate marine fisheries commissions, the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas and U.S. Advisory Committee, Western Central Atlantic Fishery Commission, Marine Mammal Commission, nine U.S. Army Corps of Engineers districts, three U.S. Coast Guard districts, three U.S. Environmental Protection Agency regions, three Federal Emergency Management Agency regions, and two U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service regions.

Our region contains the largest recreational fisheries in the world and the second largest (by volume) commercial fisheries in the United

States. Together with our regional fishery management councils and intergovernmental organizations, we manage more than 210 fish stocks/complexes, and are assisting the development of one of the first Aquaculture Opportunity Areas in the world. In the South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico alone, our region generated more than \$37.8 billion in sales and supported over 240,000 jobs in 2022. ([2022 Fisheries Economics of the United States](#) report).

We have over 29,000 miles of tidal shoreline, and the largest wetland acreage (31.3 million acres) and coral reef tract in the contiguous United States. We are responsible for conserving more than 90 marine mammal stocks and 40 threatened or endangered species. We conduct double the number of ESA and Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) consultations of any region. This includes large infrastructure and coastal development activities that may impact these important aquatic species and habitats to ensure a balanced approach to development and conservation.

The Southeast Region is critical for energy production and water-borne commerce. Approximately



Barotrauma expands gasses in a fish causing the air bladder and other organs to expand as well, making it difficult for fish to swim after release. Credit: NOAA Fisheries, Florida SeaGrant.

97 percent of all oil and gas produced in the Outer Continental Shelf is in the Gulf Central and Western Planning areas. The South Atlantic and Gulf are also the focal point for offshore wind energy expansion and have 12 of the nation's top 20 ports.

This is against the backdrop of impacts from climate change, sea level rise, increasing major storm events, and disaster assistance needs, being home to three of the top 12 most populated states—and growing. The broad geographic area we work in and the domestic and international partners we coordinate with require a diverse and agile workforce that can address evolving mission needs. This plan is tightly focused on addressing our highest priorities and is informed by our local landscape.

Implementing This Plan

This plan will serve as primary guidance for planning, budgeting, and execution through FY 2027. The plan unites science, policy, and management priorities across the region and serves to communicate our shared goals and how we hope to achieve those goals over the next 4 years. The Key Performance Indicators in this document highlight our overarching mission focus within each goal, and will help us monitor progress. Annual activity plans will be developed to implement the strategies identified in the plan and track their progress.

Some of the Key Challenges:

- Population growth and coastal development leading to increased resource use and interactions with managed fisheries and protected species and their habitats.
- Changing oceanic and coastal conditions affecting distribution, productivity, and sustainability of managed species and their associated habitats.
- Increasing number of disasters and large-scale ecosystem impacts such as hurricanes, red tide, hypoxia, oil spills, and freshwater input.
- Estuarine habitat loss due to subsidence, sea-level rise, and coastal development.
- Coral loss due to disease and increasing ocean temperatures.
- Reducing the take of protected species associated with coastal development, oil, gas, and wind energy production, and maritime activities.
- Increasing consultation requirements in support of large, complex infrastructure, offshore power, and aquaculture activities.
- Home to two of the most endangered whale species in the world, the North Atlantic right whale and Rice's whale.
- Bycatch and bycatch-related injury of marine mammals, endangered and threatened species, and non-target fishery resources and reducing discards of target species.
- Illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing throughout the range of transboundary stocks, which undermines the sustainability of U.S. fisheries and the conservation and restoration of protected species populations.
- Demand for increased commercial and recreational fishery access within a region faced with increased overfishing.
- Shifting from single species to ecosystem-based fisheries management.
- Inadequate data to address equity and environmental justice (EEJ) objectives.
- Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) transition process and incorporation of state data into recreational fisheries science and management.
- Evolving data collection needs, in-season monitoring methodologies, surveys, and population assessments for marine resource management and conservation.
- Integrating and calibrating multiple and fragmented data collection systems, both national and international, for use in stock assessments and resource management.
- Inadequate data, including a high degree of uncertainty about the level of recreational catch, to provide management advice for a large number of managed species and reduce uncertainty in fish stock status.
- Coordination and alignment of staff and resources to meet mission needs across multiple jurisdictions, especially as species' ranges shift.
- Workforce burnout due to increasing workload and reduced resources.

Some of the Risks:

- If staffing and funding continue to be outpaced by our increasing mandates, operational costs, and ocean co-use and impacts, we risk reduced efficiency and ability to protect and recover managed species.
- If we do not effectively manage species to plan for future climate change, human development of the marine environment, and natural disasters, we risk increased impacts to those species.
- If the number of stocks that are overfished or experiencing overfishing increase, the proportion of mortality from discards will also continue to increase,



NOAA Fisheries in the southeast works to innovate solutions to reduce the bycatch of sea turtles. Credit: T. Moore.

further risking more restrictive management measures.

- If NOAA survey vessel availability continues to be limited or unreliable, our ability to maintain adequate data collection will result in fewer or no population assessments and greater management uncertainty.
- If we do not address aging or inadequate facilities and plan for current and future workforce needs, we risk decreased productivity, efficiency, and safety of our workforce
- If we are not able to provide flexibilities and be responsive to employee work-life balance and well-being, we risk not retaining a diverse and knowledgeable workforce.

Some of the Opportunities:

- Leveraging capacity of other NOAA offices and external partners to address overlapping science or management needs such as climate change, compatible stock assessments, and offshore wind energy and aquaculture development.
- Embracing modern data management architecture and migration of all data to the cloud or NESDIS repositories to store, process, and share with users.
- Increased funding to advance artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning initiatives that provide more efficient management advice.
- Transforming our science, management, and climate readiness through activities associated with the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and Inflation Reduction Act.
- Optimizing restoration funds for restoring trust resources in the Gulf injured by oil spills while achieving synergistic benefits for fisheries, habitats, and protected species science and management.
- Modernizing fishery information collection systems to support better and more timely science for fisheries management of federally managed species.

Top Geographic Priorities

NOAA Fisheries has sustained world-class fisheries, productive ecosystems, and resilient seafood communities. Among our highest priorities for the Southeast Region are supporting growth of the New Blue Economy and realizing the potential of America’s oceans and coasts without unduly compromising vulnerable marine species and ecosystems. We strive to:

- Reduce use conflicts and impacts to protected and managed resources associated with offshore wind development, ensuring equitable mitigation through proactive engagement and expanded technological support.
- Inform climate-ready fisheries, habitat, and protected resource conservation and restoration strategies by integrating climate vulnerability and risk information into management advice.
- Improve resource monitoring, conservation, and management by expanding the use of advanced technologies (e.g., drones, acoustic towed arrays, eDNA) in survey design and data collection.
- Improve the availability of near real-time management advice by developing nimble assessment methods and processes that use available resources efficiently, and promote timely provision of management advice that is inclusive of key uncertainties.
- Improve understanding of fisheries target and non-target



An atlantic spotted dolphin with its calf. Credit: NOAA Fisheries.

- species bycatch and discards and interactions with protected species, using electronic monitoring and AI to improve monitoring coverage and reduce costs.
- Develop innovative new strategies for managing commercial and recreational fisheries, reducing discards and depredation, and increasing economic and social benefits.
- Engage underserved communities and expand their input, collaboration, and access to our conservation and management decisions to improve the equitable delivery of products and services.
- Support Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and Inflation Reduction Act initiatives, and other infrastructure and offshore energy demands, by developing a strategy to better resource ourselves to address user conflicts and complex ESA and EFH consultations.
- Protect and recover the most at-risk species through prioritization of recovery actions and restoration and conservation of associated priority habitats.
- Recruit and retain a diverse, well-qualified workforce by reducing hiring and promotion barriers and focusing on worker growth, development, and well-being.

Strategic Goal 1

Adaptively manage fisheries for sustainability and economic competitiveness

The Southeast Region has more saltwater recreational fishermen than all other regions combined, and the nation’s demand for seafood continues to grow. As fishing pressure increases, more managed stocks face overfishing, and discards are becoming an increasing source of mortality. Changing ocean conditions are disrupting fisheries and fishing communities as productivity of fish and other living marine resources become less predictable. Recent additions to the Southeast Region’s blue economy such as aquaculture and offshore wind bring new resource demands. The challenge moving forward will be to provide the science to balance competing needs in a changing climate, and employ an ecosystem approach to management. Ensuring sustainable access to fisheries, diverse market opportunities, and participation of underrepresented communities will build resilience to fishery disasters and market disruptions.

Key Performance Indicators for Goal 1:

- Fish Stock Sustainability Index — decrease number of overfished stocks and number of stocks subject to overfishing
- Marine aquaculture — identify one or more new Aquaculture Opportunity Areas
- Resource surveys — incorporate advanced technology, automation, and diverse deployment platforms into survey design, data management, and dissemination
- Offshore wind — provide spatial intelligence to inform marine spatial planning in advance of siting decisions and to move from static to dynamic marine spatial planning to inform construction and operations throughout the lifespan of offshore wind.
- Equity and environmental justice — increase engagement with underserved communities in fishery and aquaculture policy decisions

Strategies for Goal 1

Manage stocks for optimum yield and increase the sustainability of marine fisheries

- Prioritize management and science actions to end overfishing and rebuild fish stocks through iterative coordination with the Gulf of Mexico, South Atlantic, and Caribbean fishery management councils (Southeast councils), International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas, Gulf and Atlantic interstate marine fisheries commissions, and state and territorial agencies.

- Increase efficiencies of monitoring and assessment strategies that are responsive to key uncertainties, such as climate change, to support the Next Generation Stock Assessment Improvement Plan and as part of the Climate, Ecosystems, and Fisheries Initiative.
- Develop innovative management strategies for sustainable recreational and commercial fishing while minimizing discards, especially within the red snapper fishery by leveraging Inflation Reduction Act funds.
- Actively promote the goals of the National Seafood Strategy and

Recreational Fishing Policy to include regional focal fisheries and evaluating a whole-of-government approach to identifying regulatory and other barriers to seafood sector climate resilience and economic viability.

Advance climate science and ecosystem-based fishery management (EBFM) to build climate and economic resilience in U.S. seafood and fishing sectors

- Strengthen economic returns and resilience to market disruptions in the commercial and recreational for-hire fishing



Finalist in the 2020 photo contest: Sailfin emerging from water. Credit: Hubert Eric Heiden

industries, and coastal fishing communities, by improving the socio-economic science that supports management actions and disaster determinations.

- Promote development of sustainable aquaculture in federal waters of the Gulf (including identifying a marine Aquaculture Opportunity Area) in collaboration with other federal agencies that avoid, minimize, and mitigate use conflicts and impacts to trust resources.
- Increase the production and communication of scientific products to support EBFM (e.g., ecosystem status reports, risk and vulnerability assessments, and identification of fishery and ecosystem drivers and related ecosystem indicators).
- Increase use of climate and EBFM science in adaptive management for fisheries by

improving accessibility and use of Management Strategy Evaluation and Marine Spatial Planning tools.

- Develop science-based mitigation recommendations to address the effects of offshore wind energy development on fisheries, fishing communities, protected species, and EFH.
- Implement Fishery Ecosystem Plans for the Southeast councils.

Mitigate and adapt to climate-driven changes in fisheries habitat

- Conserve and protect high-priority areas of EFH as identified through finer scale habitat mapping and assessments.
- Identify areas that may be important for future fish and shrimp reproduction and juvenile production given the potential for climate-driven shifts in fisheries and their habitats.
- Improve fish passage, restore coastal and coral reef ecosystems, and enhance community resilience—including underserved communities and tribes—through collaboration on landscape scale efforts.

Diversify our data collection technologies and expand and modernize data products and services

- Modernize MRIP-certified marine recreational surveys to meet the Southeast Region's assessment and management needs by working with state partners, through GulfFIN and Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program.
- Increase resource survey and assessment capacity and

efficiency through use of advanced technology, automation, and diverse deployment platforms.

- Expand electronic logbook data collection and real-time data reporting in support of regional and highly migratory species (HMS) fisheries, and renewable energy.
- Expand data products and accessibility to the public, fishing and seafood stakeholders, academia, and federal, state, and local government.
- Improve customer service and accessibility of our permit, for-hire and commercial logbook, and IFQ catch share information and reduce costs by transitioning to a locally maintained system.
- Develop advanced technologies and tools to detect IUU fishing.

Ensure equity and accessibility for tribal, indigenous, and underserved communities

- Identify systemic barriers to equitable access to fishery benefits, opportunities, and services through conversations with underserved communities throughout the Southeast Region.
- Make decision-making processes, products, and opportunities more accessible to the public, fishing and seafood stakeholders, and other partners.
- Collaborate with the Southeast councils to understand and address the impacts of fishery management policies and programs on underserved fishing communities.
- Assist in improving the equity of the Southeast catch share programs and policies.

Strategic Goal 2

Safeguard protected species and propel their recovery

NOAA Fisheries has worked for more than 50 years to conserve and recover protected species and their associated habitats in the Southeast Region. Increased human interactions (e.g., bycatch, incidental take, and noise) and changing environmental conditions (e.g., warming temperatures, acidification, increasing intensity of drought and storm events, and sediment runoff) have contributed to the decline of many protected species and habitats. Advancing our understanding of the impacts of climate change on protected species and their habitat is critical when proposing science-based solutions for conservation and recovery. Working with partners, we develop conservation and recovery policies, guidance, and regulations, and consult on proposed actions to mitigate threats to protected resources. Proactive outreach and promoting compliance with our conservation efforts help protect these vulnerable species.

Key Performance Indicators for Goal 2:

- Protected species recovery actions — increase the number and percentage of recovery actions ongoing or completed
- Protected species recovery trends — increase the number of protected species with stable or increasing population levels

Strategies for Goal 2

Implement actions to conserve, stabilize, and recover protected species

- Conduct surveys from different platforms (e.g., ship-based and aerial surveys, and passive acoustic monitoring) to monitor population trends, density, and distributional shifts of marine mammal and turtle species.
- Characterize protected species' ecology, soundscapes, behavior, health, population structure, demographic changes, and population variability due to human-caused activities and environmental changes.
- Better understand the magnitude of protected species bycatch and reduce the risk of fisheries interactions through management strategies and techniques, with priority given to North Atlantic right whales, Rice's whales, sea turtles, pilot whales, bottlenose dolphins, and smalltooth sawfish.
- Evaluate severity of non-bycatch threats to protected species (e.g., vessel strikes, noise, and sedimentation) by using life history information to develop risk assessments, with priority given to Rice's whales, North Atlantic right whales, sperm whales, sea turtles, and corals.
- Reduce non-bycatch threats to protected species through industry and public engagement, and where necessary, regulation.
- Support identifying and implementing restoration projects funded by the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and Inflation Reduction Act.
- Respond to marine mammals and sea turtles in poor health with emergency interventions.
- Raise awareness and increase dedicated research and management capacity for priority species through improved internal and external communications.
- Respond to the major disease outbreak affecting corals in the Caribbean and Florida by identifying disease-resistant genotypes, testing novel intervention strategies, and developing methods to effectively restore coral populations impacted by disease outbreaks, in collaboration with federal, academic, NGO, and institutional partners.
- Restore marine mammal, sea turtle, and Gulf sturgeon populations impacted by the Deepwater Horizon oil spill by monitoring and leading Natural Resources Damage Assessment projects.

Model and predict the effects of climate change on protected marine species to improve conservation outcomes

- Implement the NOAA Fisheries Climate Science Strategy Regional Action Plans by leveraging Inflation Reduction Act funding for dedicated spatial modeling support.
- Improve management and recovery plans and identification of climate-related science priorities by reviewing climate vulnerability assessments and incorporating climate-informed conservation recommendations.

Expand the use of advanced and innovative technologies

- Supplement traditional protected species observations by employing advanced technologies (e.g., autonomous and uncrewed systems, artificial intelligence, satellite tags, passive acoustics, ‘omics (in situ methods used to analyze DNA, RNA, proteins, or metabolites), and bioinformatic analyses).
- Promote development of advanced technologies such as noise abatement and on-demand/ropeless fishing to prevent large whale entanglements, and technology-based management measures to reduce negative interactions.

Protect and restore habitats necessary for the recovery of endangered marine species

- Understand key habitat requirements and factors limiting recovery of imperiled species, with priority given to Rice’s whales, corals, Atlantic and Gulf

sturgeon, sperm whales, Nassau grouper, and queen conch, if listed.

- Designate critical habitat for ESA-listed species: Rice’s whales, Nassau grouper, and queen conch, if listed.
- Restore seven iconic coral reefs in coordination with the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary and other state and federal partners through Mission: Iconic Reefs.
- Develop forward-looking habitat mitigation and restoration recommendations that consider shifting coastlines from sea level rise, subsidence, and increasing coastal storms.
- Restore access of diadromous fish to spawning and nursery habitat by working with partners and developing prescriptions for fish passages.
- Support efficient consultation on large infrastructure projects by prioritizing projects resulting in the highest conservation value for priority species and habitats.

Protect marine species while supporting ocean-based economic growth

- Provide analyses and decision-making tools to assess the near-term and long-term effects of competing ocean uses, such as offshore wind or other energy development, aquaculture siting,



Researcher holding juvenile queen conch. Shown is the spiral-shaped shell with a glossy pink/orange interior, part of the soft interior body, and large eyes on the end of stalks. Credit: NOAA Fisheries.

offshore area leasing, shipping, and fishing on protected marine species populations and their habitat.

- Pursue increases in capacity and resources, and develop new innovative ways of doing business, to meet increased management and consultation needs associated with ocean-based economic activities in the Southeast Region.
- Avoid or minimize impacts to protected species and their habitat and ensure impacts are compensated by engaging affected industries and other managing federal agencies early in the environmental compliance process.
- Improve our capacity to support Administration priorities and engage other agencies early, by leveraging Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, Inflation Reduction Act, and other funding to address our resource gaps.

Strategic Goal 3

Diversify our workforce, promote equity and environmental justice, and improve our mission performance through organizational excellence

Three key elements of a successful organization are its people, infrastructure, and business processes. NOAA Fisheries recognizes that the success of our mission relies on the expertise and commitment of our diverse and talented employees. We will implement our plan for diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA), including recruiting and training a workforce of the future, representing the communities we serve and having the skills in emerging technologies to meet evolving needs. Our approach in managing infrastructure and technology must consider the potentials of a virtual working environment, and cloud computing. Improving communication within the agency and outreach to our constituents and Congress will improve understanding, support, and effectiveness of our mission. Implementing transparent strategic resource management and leveraging funding sources will focus limited resources on our highest priorities.



Caribbean reef fish. Credit: Adobe Stock.

Key Performance Indicators for Goal 3:

- Human resources — increase workforce diversity at all levels to better reflect the makeup of the communities we serve
- Workplace — optimize workplace flexibilities, including remote work and telework availability, and promote worker wellness opportunities
- Equal Employment Opportunity — increase recruitment opportunities targeting underrepresented populations
- Customer service — increase outreach to stakeholders
- Equity and Environmental Justice – improve engagement, service delivery, and understanding of underserved communities

Strategies for Goal 3:

Ensure total worker wellness

- Continue to build a healthy and safe workplace and a culture that incorporates staff-led solutions addressing Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey and worker wellness concerns.
- Address and prevent harassment and other types of workplace violence by providing Workplace

Violence Prevention and Response support.

- Provide training and resources for wellness best practices and behavioral health support, and develop a culture that recognizes the signs of behavioral health issues and is supportive of employee self-care.

Improve workforce diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility

- Build toward a workforce that reflects the diversity of the communities in the Southeast Region by implementing recruitment and other actions to improve diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility.

- Support the development of, and provide opportunities for, employees representing minority groups to achieve positions of senior leadership.
- Understand and appreciate individual differences of race, color, creed, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, or sexual orientation, and ensure their equal rights, opportunities, and inclusion in the workplace.
- Improve our organizational culture through inclusion and psychological safety training.

Develop workforce skills for the future

- Increase workforce overall skills and competency in emerging technologies, data literacy, and virtual office management by hiring for evolving skill needs and enhance workforce proficiency through training, internships, and details or reassignments.

Embrace a new paradigm for the workplace

- Evolve a work culture that includes flexible and versatile in-office and alternative work spaces providing for the mission needs of our organization.
- Support a high-performing workforce and enable higher levels of productivity and resilience by fully using technological resources.
- Help all employees, including those working remotely, to experience a shared agency identity, common mission, and sense of belonging, with a healthy work-life balance.

Adaptively manage infrastructure

- Improve infrastructure needs decision-making by conducting asset management reviews, life-cycle modeling, cost forecasting, and enterprise risk registries.
- Ensure our facilities are climate-ready and energy efficient by identifying and mitigating climate vulnerabilities.
- Consider future needs and incorporate partnership approaches in our infrastructure solutions.
- Optimize data and computing capacity, eliminate hardware obsolescence, increase physical and IT security, and reduce server hosting requirements and on-site maintenance, and ultimately reduce cost through cloud technologies.

Optimize resources

- Make resource prioritization an important driver of the budgetary and annual allocation processes by executing a transparent and deliberative strategic planning process.
- Provide opportunities to optimize resource allocation among regional programs and facilitate senior leadership in communicating their vision and marshaling resources toward high priorities, as recommended by the National Academy of Public Administration.

Expand internal and stakeholder communications

- Improve the quality and frequency of internal communications on priority issues, high-interest topics through strategic communication across the Southeast Regional Office and Southeast Fisheries Science Center.

- Expand direct stakeholder engagement focused on key issues through virtual and in-person meetings with leadership.
- Continue to improve the NOAA Fisheries and regional office intranet websites to support external and internal communication.
- Target congressional outreach by proactively sharing regionally and nationally focused actions, increasing briefings and responsiveness to inquiries.

Implement an Equity and Environmental Justice Strategy

- Continue to identify and recognize underserved communities in the Southeast Region through partnerships, application of vulnerability indices, and other tools.
- Develop an actionable plan to advance NOAA Fisheries equity and environmental justice strategy in the U.S. Caribbean, Gulf of Mexico, and South Atlantic based on underserved community input.
- Solicit local and indigenous traditional ecological knowledge to help inform agency decision-making.
- Improve equitable participation in decision-making by soliciting inclusive nominations for Southeast council appointments, take reduction teams, and other committees.
- Prioritize advancement of equity and environmental justice in ongoing and future activities, including in equitable climate mitigation, and conservation and management solutions.

Implementing This Plan

Between 2024 and 2027, this plan will serve as primary guidance for planning, budgeting, and execution. Activity plans and milestones will be developed to focus execution on these strategies and to track progress, and key performance indicators will provide evidence of success.



Above: Grouper on a coral reef hiding among soft corals. Credit: NOAA Fisheries. Back Cover: Elkhorn coral (*Acropora palmata*). Credit: NOAA Fisheries.



U.S. Secretary of Commerce
Gina M. Raimondo

Under Secretary of Commerce for
Oceans and Atmosphere and NOAA
Administrator

Dr. Richard W. Spinrad

Assistant Administrator for Fisheries
Janet Coit

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www.fisheries.noaa.gov

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National Marine
Fisheries Service
1315 East-West Highway
Silver Spring, MD 20910

