



**NOAA**  
**FISHERIES**

# STRATEGIC PLAN

2022-2025





## CONTENTS

**ASSISTANT ADMINISTRATOR’S MESSAGE ..... 2**

**NOAA FISHERIES — SCIENCE, SERVICE, AND STEWARDSHIP..... 4**

**Vision and Mission ..... 4**

**Primary Statutory Mandates ..... 4**

**Top Priorities ..... 5**

**STRATEGIC GOAL 1: ..... 6**

**STRATEGIC GOAL 2: ..... 9**

**STRATEGIC GOAL 3: ..... 11**

**IMPLEMENTING THIS PLAN..... 13**



# Assistant Administrator’s Message

## Dear Friends and Colleagues,

I am pleased to introduce our NOAA Fisheries Strategic Plan for 2022–2025. The goals of this plan are focused on key statutes and the priorities of this Administration:

- Building a climate-ready nation, including resilient fisheries and coastal communities.
- Ensuring the sustainability and competitiveness of U.S. fishing and seafood industries.
- Recovering and protecting marine species.
- Continuing to build a mission-oriented, diverse workforce and to promote equity and environmental justice.

We are charged with promoting economic vitality, managing healthy ecosystems, and maintaining environmental stewardship. At NOAA Fisheries, we are focused on confronting climate change, expanding our science capabilities, supporting conservation initiatives—including America the Beautiful—protecting and conserving our marine resources, and advancing equity and environmental justice. Our efforts to increase the competitiveness of the U.S. seafood industry to help make it more resilient to future market and environmental shocks will support domestic production and jobs, and help ensure food security.

The growing effects of climate change impact every corner of our science-based conservation and management mission—from managing sustainable fisheries and growing aquaculture, to conserving protected resources and restoring habitats. People’s lives and livelihoods are at stake. As we confront the immense challenges associated with climate change, we will provide scientific information, tools, and capacity for resource managers and stakeholders to assess and reduce impacts, increase resilience, and help adapt to changing ocean conditions.

Offshore wind energy development plays an important role in U.S. efforts to combat the climate crisis and build a clean energy economy. The White House has set a goal of significantly increasing the nation’s offshore wind energy capacity to 30 gigawatts by 2030. In support of the Interior Department’s Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, the lead federal agency responsible for offshore energy development, NOAA Fisheries will continue to play an important regulatory role, and will focus on minimizing the impacts to ocean resources, critical habitats, and fishing opportunities throughout the planning, siting, and development stages.

Ecosystem-based fishery management and climate science have greater roles as we strive to expand our science capabilities to better understand evolving ecosystems and associated food webs and incorporate these into our management decisions. The changes we are witnessing in the marine environment and its ecosystems will require new methods of observation, data collection, and analysis using novel approaches in molecular methods, uncrewed systems, and artificial intelligence.



Rising sea level and increasing storm intensity are accelerating the loss of habitat. The stressors highlight the importance of protecting and restoring critical coastal ecosystems. We will continue to apply innovative approaches, such as Habitat Focus Areas, to pool our capabilities, engage partners, leverage resources, and make on-the-ground progress toward our habitat conservation objectives. Over the next few years, NOAA has the unprecedented opportunity to support new partnerships through increased funding from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Bill and the Inflation Reduction Act.

The protection and conservation of marine protected resources—such as our nine Species in the Spotlight—will continue to be a core mission area. The resilience of our marine ecosystems and coastal communities depends on healthy marine species, including protected species such as whales, sea turtles, corals, and salmon. They are all vital to the balance of our ecosystems and also key indicators of the overall health of the ocean. Importantly, NOAA Fisheries is responsible for implementing strong laws like the Endangered Species Act and the Marine Mammal Protection Act.

I am deeply committed to ensuring that we begin to incorporate equity and environmental justice considerations into our management and consultation decisions. This will require a deeper understanding of the social and economic implications of our decisions and increased outreach and dialogue. We will prioritize equity and environmental justice by promoting programs, policies, and activities to address the disproportionately high and adverse human health, environmental, climate-related, and other cumulative impacts on disadvantaged communities.

We have a lot to do. Our mission is critical and consequential to the health and vitality of our communities. I look forward to continuing our work with you and our many partners on these important issues.

**Janet Coit**

*Assistant Administrator, NOAA Fisheries*

*Acting Assistant Secretary for Oceans and Atmosphere, NOAA*



# NOAA Fisheries — 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.

## Primary Statutory Mandates

U.S. commercial and recreational fisheries are among the world’s largest and most sustainable. Using the **Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act**, NOAA Fisheries works in partnership with the U.S. regional fishery management councils to: assess the status of 479 fish stocks or stock complexes in 46 fishery management plans, predict future abundance and distribution of fish stocks, set catch limits to balance economic opportunity with the prevention of overfishing, ensure compliance with fisheries regulations, conserve essential fish habitat, and reduce bycatch with increasing attention to improving resilience to climate change. The Act also directs us to work internationally to address illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing. Our evidence-based decisions and policies are guided by world class science, supported by publicly accessible data.

We partner to achieve our mission, working closely with the eight U.S. regional fishery management councils, the three interstate marine fisheries commissions, and other state

and regional entities to develop and implement effective management and enforcement programs. We work closely with federal agencies; other nations, states and territories, tribes and indigenous communities; commercial, recreational, and subsistence fishing stakeholders; and national and regional aquaculture associations, as well as foundations, non-governmental and international fisheries organizations, academia, and local communities. We also work with international and regional fisheries management organizations (RFMOs) to achieve effective, responsible marine stewardship and ensure sustainable fisheries management.

Under the **Marine Mammal Protection Act** and the **Endangered Species Act**, NOAA Fisheries is responsible for the stewardship of 165 marine and anadromous species listed as threatened or endangered, such as sea turtles, corals, marine mammals, salmon, sturgeon, and other fish species, as well as most marine mammals, including all whales, dolphins, porpoises, seals, and sea lions.

Under the **Aquaculture Act of 1980**, we seek to develop effective, streamlined aquaculture permitting systems, and invest in science to support environmentally and economically sustainable U.S. marine aquaculture.

## Top Priorities

NOAA Fisheries has sustained world-class fisheries, productive ecosystems, and resilient seafood communities. Among our highest priorities are to support growth of the Blue Economy and realize the potential of America’s oceans and coasts. We strive to:

- Provide best-in-class science and leadership through NOAA’s Climate, Ecosystems, and Fisheries Initiative (CEFI) to understand the changing climate and ocean ecosystems, and work with councils, states, tribes, communities, and stakeholders to address their impacts on marine fisheries and the nation’s economy.
- Support a robust and resilient seafood sector and associated communities, and increase seafood production through NOAA’s National Seafood Strategy to Build U.S. Seafood Sector Resilience and Competitiveness.
- Support responsible development of U.S. offshore wind energy through science and consultation on potential impacts to ocean resources, critical habitats, and fishing.
- Ensure the survival and recovery of endangered U.S. marine species, such as the North Atlantic right whale and listed populations of Pacific salmon.
- Combat illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing to ensure fair and reciprocal trade in fish products, and protect U.S. seafood competitiveness goals.
- Capitalize on funding in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) and Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), which provide historic funding opportunities to support underserved communities, tribes, states, and partners to implement transformational projects that restore coastal ecosystems and enhance community resilience.
- Prioritize equity and environmental justice (EEJ) by working with others to restore habitats, increase access, and address the disproportionately high and adverse human health, environmental, climate-related, and other cumulative impacts on disadvantaged communities.

# Strategic Goal 1

## ***Adaptively manage fisheries for sustainability and economic competitiveness***

Rapidly changing ocean conditions are disrupting fisheries, fishing communities, and seafood economics as the geographic ranges of fish stocks expand, contract, or shift poleward or offshore, and the productivity of fish and other living marine resources becomes less predictable. The challenge moving forward will be to provide the science needed to further integrate climate change considerations into an ecosystem approach to fisheries management and to model and forecast the effects of changing ocean conditions and habitats on fish stocks, fisheries, and seafood productivity in a timely manner. Deploying economic tools and forecasts to promote responsible and sustainable industry growth, diversify market opportunities, strengthen supply chains, and ensure participation of underrepresented communities will build resilience to fishery disasters and market shocks in our fishing and seafood industries. Combating the threat of IUU fishing and ensuring fair and reciprocal trade in fish products will protect U.S. competitiveness and sustainability goals, and prevent harm to protected resources globally. Domestic marine aquaculture production can help to supplement U.S. wild-caught fisheries while promoting business and employment opportunities. Additionally, the siting, construction, and operation of offshore wind facilities will require scientific and social analyses to sustainably grow the blue economy.

### **Key Performance Indicators:**

- Fish Stock Sustainability Index — decrease # of overfished (depleted) stocks
- Fisheries Economics of the United States — increase the economic value of the U.S. fishing and seafood sectors
- Marine Aquaculture — increase production in the U.S.
- Days at Sea — increase the use of uncrewed systems and ship-based platforms
- Seafood Import Monitoring — increase seafood import recordkeeping compliance
- Offshore Wind — mitigate impacts and achieve renewable energy goals

## Strategies

### 1.1 **Manage stocks for optimum yield and build climate and economic resilience in U.S. seafood and fishing sectors**

Continue to rebuild and manage fish stocks, and support increased seafood production in partnership with the U.S. regional fishery management councils and with close coordination with the interstate fisheries commissions. Continue to implement the Next Generation Stock Assessment Improvement Plan. Develop a NOAA Seafood Strategy to help build resilient and climate-ready fishing and seafood sectors, and associated communities. Strengthen economic returns and resilience to market disruptions in the commercial seafood and recreational for-hire/charter industries and coastal fishing communities. Where authorized, provide loan guarantees for fisheries and aquaculture operations. Expand opportunities for seafood marketing, and support the modernization of seafood processing facilities to increase the competitiveness of U.S. seafood. Collaborate with industry and other federal agencies to support shoreside processing, storage, and other infrastructure capacity to meet new demands for retail sales of seafood and local or direct-to-consumer market delivery. Focus science and collaborative efforts across the federal government to establish marine Aquaculture Opportunity Areas where success is more likely, with minimal conflict with other uses. Expand opportunities for sustainable recreational fishing and support subsistence fishing.



## 1.2 Advance climate science and ecosystem-based fishery management (EBFM) to increase the sustainability of marine fisheries

Apply science and observations to understand and address the environmental effects of climate change on the nation’s coastal and ocean living marine resources and their habitat. Update the Climate Science Strategy Regional Action Plans, and apply the CEFI and EBFM Roadmap to study, measure, model, and forecast the effects of changing ocean conditions and other anthropogenic impacts on living marine resources, fisheries, and fishing communities. Advance adaptive fishery management approaches that account for the effects of climate change. Integrate our understanding of the complexity of marine ecosystems into evidence-based decisions to inform multi-species/multi-objective resources management strategies for fisheries and aquaculture operations. Include equitable climate mitigation and adaptation in our management solutions. Conduct research and monitoring, and provide consultation on the potential effects and mitigation of offshore wind energy development on marine habitats, fisheries, protected resources, and their ecosystems. Coordinate with the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) to develop fisheries resource survey mitigation strategies for offshore wind farm areas.

## 1.3 Mitigate and adapt to climate-driven changes in fisheries habitat

Conserve and restore high-priority areas of Essential Fish Habitat (Habitat Areas of Particular Concern) that provide major ecological functions, are sensitive to decline, are stressed from development, or provide rare habitat. Identify habitat areas important for fish reproduction and nursery with consideration that many commercial and recreational fisheries are experiencing a shift in geographic range. Identify and implement restoration projects funded by the BIL and IRA to improve fish passage, restore coastal ecosystems, and enhance community resilience—especially for underserved communities and tribes. Integrate climate justice to ensure equitable habitat

mitigation and adaptation solutions in our responses to climate change and help vulnerable communities better prepare for habitat-related fishery disasters.

## 1.4 Diversify our data collection technologies and expand/modernize data products and services

Increase stock survey and assessment capacity through maximum use of available vessels and by augmenting vessels with remote technologies such as uncrewed or autonomous vehicles and fixed underwater observing systems. Develop incentives for industry-based (commercial and recreational) data collection and real-time data reporting in support of fisheries, recreation, and renewable energy as part of the New Blue Economy. Develop the Next Generation Data Acquisition Plan and drive consistency for how NOAA Fisheries collects and makes data available to serve research needs. Expand the use of ‘Omics (in-situ methods used to analyze DNA, RNA, proteins, or metabolites) for species detection, seasonality, and relative abundance, including the presence of invasive species. Explore artificial intelligence/machine learning (AI/ML) and data visualization technologies



for use in at-sea observing, analysis, and stock assessment. Increase capacity for data collection and management. Expand data products and accessibility to the public, fishing and seafood stakeholders, federal state and local government, and academia.

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

Implement the NOAA Fisheries Strategy for Advancing Equity and Environmental Justice to ensure meaningful involvement and equitable consideration of input by all peoples and communities regardless of race, color, national origin, language barriers, or income, with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, fishing regulations, policies, and the underlying science. Solicit traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) to understand environmental justice concerns, inform agency decision-making, and build partnerships with indigenous people. Consider that environmental justice is often a local issue affecting underserved communities with the potential for inequitable regulatory burden, or distributions of environmental costs and benefits, but decisions affecting these communities are often made at the regional or national level. Improve equitable participation in decision-making by soliciting inclusive nominations for regional fishery management council appointments and other committee nominations. Review programs and policies to determine whether tribal, indigenous, or

underserved communities face systemic barriers to accessing benefits and services. Support underserved communities and tribal needs through BIL projects.

### 1.6 Counter IUU fishing activity

Combat IUU fishing and related harmful fishing practices—including forced labor—around the world and ensure imported seafood meets standards comparable to those set for domestic producers. Collaborate with federal government agencies and stakeholders consistent with the Memorandum on Combating Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated Fishing and Associated Labor Abuses (National Security Memorandum/NSM-11), Maritime SAFE Act, and other relevant authorities and initiatives. Promote sustainable fisheries management around the globe to prevent IUU fishing, and impose consequences for IUU fishing. Expand NOAA Fisheries’ Seafood Import Monitoring Program (SIMP) to include additional species and species groups, as appropriate. Inspect and enforce traceability documentation of International Fisheries Trade Permit holders. Develop advanced technologies and tools to detect IUU fishing where it occurs. Prevent IUU fish and fish products from reaching U.S. markets. Collaborate with other federal agencies and the private sector to prevent seafood products that are produced with forced labor from entering U.S. markets.

## Strategic Goal 2

### ***Safeguard protected species and propel their recovery***

NOAA Fisheries has been a first line of defense for more than 50 years in recovering threatened and endangered marine and anadromous species and in preventing harm or harassment of marine mammals and sea turtles. Increased human interactions (e.g., bycatch, incidental take, and anthropogenic noise) and changing environmental conditions (e.g., warming temperatures, acidification, pollution, sediment runoff, and habitat degradation) have contributed to the decline of many of these marine species. Advancing our scientific understanding of the escalating impacts of climate change on marine species and their habitat is critical in our efforts to propose science-based solutions to conserve and recover them. We conduct pioneering research to assess, evaluate, and monitor

protected species populations, their health, health trends, and the human impacts they face. Working with partners, we develop conservation policies, guidance, and regulations to conserve and recover protected marine species, and consult on proposed actions to mitigate threats to their survival. Our proactive outreach and efforts to enforce and promote compliance with our conservation efforts help to protect these vulnerable marine species.

### **Key Performance Indicators:**

- Protected Species Recovery Actions — increase the number and percentage of recovery actions ongoing or completed, including regulations
- Protected Species Recovery Trends — increase the number of protected species with stable or increasing population levels



## Strategies

### 2.1 Implement actions to recover endangered and threatened species

Focus on the species at greatest risk of extinction. This includes domestic and international cooperation to stabilize the most at-risk species, and work toward addressing their most critical needs for recovery. Identify and implement restoration projects funded by the BIL that will result in meaningful ecological change through on-the-ground habitat restoration, and enhance our consultation/authorization processes to focus on conservation and recovery of at-risk species. Target enforcement efforts to ensure adherence to regulations designed to prevent harm or harassment. Conduct emergency interventions for protection or recovery of animals in poor health to directly benefit highly endangered species. Advance the Species in the Spotlight initiative to continue to bring greater attention and marshal resources toward near-term actions to stabilize the condition of some of our most at-risk species.

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

Apply science and observations to understand and address the environmental effects of climate change on protected marine species resources and their habitat. Update the NOAA Fisheries Climate Science Strategy Regional Action Plans, and apply the CEFI to study, measure, model, and predict the intensity, geographic extent, and effects of a changing climate and other anthropogenic impacts on protected marine species and their ecosystems. Investigate stranded, entangled, or out-of-habitat marine mammals to document changes in range, health, disease status, or other findings to inform development or validation of climate change models. Communicate those impacts on the health, conservation, and recovery of protected marine species. Provide the science to assess climate vulnerability and develop climate-ready approaches to enhance resilience and adaptation strategies for protected species and their habitats, and incorporate conservation recommendations into management and recovery plans.

### 2.3 Expand the use of advanced and innovative technologies

Increase the capacity to assess the status of vulnerable species by expanding the use of advanced technologies (e.g., autonomous and uncrewed systems, artificial intelligence in species detection, satellite tags, passive acoustics, 'Omics, and bioinformatic analyses including the use of eDNA, genetic and genomic techniques). Use advanced technologies for species protection and conservation including the development of on-demand/ropeless fishing to prevent entanglements, noise abatement methods, and dynamic management measures to protect species when they are present.

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

Protect healthy habitat and restore lost or damaged habitat designated critical to recover endangered species. Improve resilience in consideration of shifting coastlines from the impact of sea level rise and increasing coastal storms. Apply a climate resilient approach, leveraging complementary funding opportunities and BIL funds to improve access to spawning habitat in streams and rivers and to restore coastal habitat.

### 2.5 Protect marine species while supporting ocean-based economic growth

Provide evidence-based scientific advice on the impacts to protected marine species and their habitat from near-term and long-term effects of competing ocean uses, such as offshore wind or other energy development, aquaculture siting, offshore area leasing, shipping, acoustic survey and other ocean noise, commercial fishing, and other ocean-based activities. Conduct science, provide advice, and require mitigation to support management decisions and rulemaking to ensure continued protection of marine species and their habitat.

# 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, talented employees and partners. We will implement our plan for diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA), including recruiting and training a workforce of the future, which represents a cross-section of society and has the skills and competencies 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 across the agency and outreach to our constituents and Members of Congress will improve coordination on the progress of our mission. Implementing transparent strategic resource management and leveraging diverse funding sources will focus limited resources on our highest priorities.

### Key Performance Indicators:

- Human Resources — increase minority and gender representation at all levels
- Workplace — optimize workplace flexibilities, including remote work and telework availability
- Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) — increase recruitment events and outreach activities targeting underrepresented populations
- Efficiency — improve processes through the use of Lean principles
- Customer Service — increase outreach and responsiveness to stakeholders
- Equity and Environmental Justice - implement strategy

## Strategies

### 3.1 Promote total worker wellness

Foster a healthy and safe working environment, including on vessels and in remote locations. Prevent harassment and other types of workplace violence and provide resources for effective behavioral health support. Provide training and resources for wellness best practices and develop a culture supportive of employee self-care. Improve behavioral health literacy in the workforce and train managers and peers to recognize the signs of behavioral health issues in their colleagues (e.g., stress, anxiety, and depression).

### 3.2 Improve workforce diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility

Implement strategies to promote diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility. Continually build toward a workforce that reflects the diversity of America by recruiting and implementing actions to improve diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility. Develop and promote employees representing minority groups into 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. Use training to improve our organizational culture in a way that promotes inclusion and psychological safety.





### 3.3 Develop workforce skills for the future

Build the workforce of the future. Increase NOAA Fisheries’ overall skills and competency in emerging technologies, data literacy, and virtual office management by strategically hiring to address evolving skill needs and enhance workforce proficiency through training, internships, and details or reassignments. Integrate hiring and reassignment strategies into the Strategic Resource Management process.

### 3.4 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.

### 3.5 Adaptively manage infrastructure

Conduct asset management reviews and use data dashboards, lifecycle modeling, cost forecasting, and enterprise risk registries to provide the data needed to improve infrastructure analyses and decision-making. Identify and mitigate climate vulnerabilities of our facilities and ensure they are climate-ready and energy efficient. Analyze office footprint needs and adjust where appropriate. Incorporate partnership approaches in our infrastructure solutions. Utilize cloud technology to reduce overall cost, optimize data and computing capacity, eliminate hardware obsolescence, increase physical and IT security, and reduce server hosting requirements and on-site maintenance.

### 3.6 Optimize resources

Analyze spending and improve processes to continually optimize resources toward the highest priorities, as required by OMB Circular A-11 Part 6. Execute an open, transparent, and deliberative Strategic Resource Management process. Make strategic planning an important driver of the budgetary and annual allocation processes. Provide opportunities to optimize resource allocation among headquarters offices, regional offices, and science centers and facilitate senior executives in communicating their vision and marshaling resources toward high priorities, as recommended by the National Academy of Public Administration.

### 3.7 Expand internal and stakeholder communications

Coordinate strategic communications across the agency to improve the quality and frequency of internal communications on priority agency issues, high-interest topics, and news across Fisheries offices. Expand direct stakeholder engagement focused on key issues through virtual and in-person meetings with agency leadership. Expand and improve the NOAA Fisheries website and our federal web satisfaction scores with target audiences. Expand congressional outreach by proactively sharing regionally and nationally focused actions, increasing briefings, and being responsive to inquiries.

### 3.8 Implement an Equity and Environmental Justice Strategy

Serve stakeholders equitably by engaging underserved communities in the science, conservation, and management of the nation’s ocean resources and their habitat. Build on equity and environmental justice efforts to provide guidance for incorporating and prioritizing EEJ in ongoing and future activities. Identify and recognize underserved communities, as well as address access barriers they face and more equitably and effectively serve all communities.



# Implementing this Plan

Between 2022 and 2025, this plan will serve as primary guidance for planning, budgeting, and execution in NOAA Fisheries. Annual priorities will be developed to focus execution on these strategies. Budget formulation efforts will focus agency resource requests on the strategies outlined in this plan. An Annual Operating Plan will establish milestones used to track progress, and key performance indicators will provide evidence of success.





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