Priorities and Annual Guidance for 2014
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Developing the agency’s priorities and annual guidance is a collaborative effort of the NOAA Fisheries Leadership Council.

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NOAA Fisheries Priorities and Annual Guidance for 2014

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
National Marine Fisheries Service
Demand continues to increase for the vital services NOAA Fisheries provides to the nation: productive and sustainable 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. Key elements of these services are the economic, societal, and environmental benefits they provide the nation.

As federal budget resources are further constrained while this demand grows, NOAA Fisheries must focus our efforts to support our two core mandates, better capitalize on partnerships, and encourage innovative business models.

This document provides guidance to all NOAA Fisheries employees in executing our mission responsibilities by establishing a framework for development of FY 2014 priority milestones. The priorities described below consider our core mission functions in the context of current fiscal conditions. They are intended to guide the development and execution of the FY 2014 Annual Operating Plan and to promote effective and efficient planning, management, and execution over the next five years.

**For FY 2014 the focus remains on the two core mandates:**

*Ensure the productivity and sustainability of fisheries and fishing communities through science-based decision-making and compliance with regulations.*

* Recover and conserve protected resources through the use of sound natural and social sciences.*

All other NOAA Fisheries programs, projects, and investments (including Science and Technology, Habitat Conservation, Enforcement, etc.) should be designed and conducted in a manner that supports these two core mission functions.

NOAA Fisheries will strive to implement ecosystem-based management to achieve these mission functions. Ecosystem-based management is informed by science to protect and sustain diverse and productive ecosystems and the services they provide. It is an integrated approach that incorporates the entire ecosystem, including humans, into resource management decisions, and is guided by an adaptive management approach.
This guidance also considers mission functions in the context of external trends, current NOAA guidance (including the NOAA Strategic Plan and the FY 2014 Annual Guidance Memorandum/Cover memo), the FY 2013-2019 NOAA Healthy Oceans Implementation Plan, the outcomes of recent Leadership Council discussions and analyses concerning budget and management strategies, and broad administration priorities such as the National Ocean Policy and the National Strategy for the Arctic Region.

**A Challenging Fiscal Context**

The federal fiscal climate remains dominated by uncertain economic and policy conditions. Divergent views on the prospects for national and global economic growth, consumer and business confidence, and national budget deficits will likely continue to fuel policy debates and differing views on potential solutions in the coming year. In FY 2013 a government-wide budget sequestration challenged NOAA Fisheries to examine strategies in the face of declining budgets and the possibility of furloughs. In preparation for FY 2014, NOAA Fisheries compiled an inventory of high-level impacts affecting the agency’s performance and delivery of services, including:

- Funding reductions to state fishery commissions, posing significant limitations to fishery-dependent and fishery-independent data collection.
- Funding reductions to permitting and consultations, data collection, and analysis, leading to increased economic burdens on stakeholders.
- Funding reductions reducing or cancelling surveys, leading to incomplete abundance and trend time series with increased uncertainty in the estimates and to delays in documenting significant changes in population trends.

The current budget climate does not offer promise for an improved fiscal situation in FY 2014. Facing this landscape, NOAA Fisheries continues to adjust to a substantial contraction of our budget since FY 2010 and divergent views on the President’s proposed FY 2014 budget (see graph). Since FY 2010 we have absorbed a 12 percent budget reduction through program reductions and efficiency gains. Adjusted for inflation, our budget is lower than it was a decade ago and we are operating with 280 fewer people, thus further reducing our capacity to provide expected services. Further budget reductions will need to be incorporated in FY 2014 and future years.

![NOAA Fisheries Budget](chart)
In this challenging context, we have remained steadfastly focused on continuing the many years of cumulative progress we have made toward our core mission mandates. We have turned the corner in ending overfishing, leading to a brighter future for fish stocks, fishermen, and fishing communities; made progress in recovering protected species; continued to level the playing field international for U.S. fishermen by combating illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing practices; and created jobs and improved coastal economies by restoring and protecting important marine and coastal habitats and by increasing opportunities for marine aquaculture.

**NOAA Fisheries FY 2013 Results**

NOAA Fisheries had a very successful FY 2013. Significant progress was made in eliminating overfishing and rebuilding overfished stocks. Overfishing was eliminated on 13 of the 34 stocks that were subject to overfishing at the beginning of the year. Five additional stocks became subject to overfishing, underlining the continuing challenge of preventing overfishing, but the net decrease of eight stocks is a remarkable achievement. Five stocks are no longer overfished (while two others became overfished), and four stocks (including three of the five that are no longer overfished) were fully rebuilt. Meanwhile, U.S. commercial and recreational saltwater fishery landings in 2012, and the value of those landings, were the second-highest on record, with 9.6 billion pounds of fish and shellfish valued at $5.1 billion. These represent small decreases in pounds (2.3 percent) and value (3.2 percent) over 2011, which had the highest landings volume over the last decade and highest value ever recorded. However, poundage and value continue to remain higher than the average of the preceding decade (9.2 billion pounds valued at $4.1 billion). Recreational saltwater anglers took more than 70 million marine fishing trips in the United States and caught almost 380 million fish.
Guidance for FY 2014 Execution and Out-Year Planning

Our overarching focus in FY 2014 remains the core NOAA Fisheries mandates for living marine resource stewardship: to continue progress in our national quest for sustainable commercial, recreational, and subsistence fisheries and fishing communities; and to recover and conserve protected resources. All other programs, projects, and activities will be designed and conducted to support this mission. In particular, NOAA Fisheries’ science is the solid foundation that sustains these core mission mandates and must be strengthened and improved. Habitat conservation, protection, and restoration are essential for ocean ecosystem stewardship and sustainable strategy for fisheries and protected species. Our approach to these mandates and supporting functions will be guided by the following overarching principles:

- **Sustain the nation’s living marine resources, habitats, and ecosystems:** As the principal federal agency tasked with sustaining fish and protected species, NOAA Fisheries must continue to meet our stewardship mission despite declining budgets and in the face of changing environmental conditions.

- **Focus limited resources to maximize national and regional benefit:** With limited funds we must work on only what the federal government and particularly NOAA Fisheries can uniquely affect and accomplish. We will encourage programs, activities, and products that serve multiple uses and customers, and focus on those having economic, societal, and environmental benefits. We will continue to consolidate to reduce facility costs wherever possible and promote the effective and efficient utilization of the agency’s resources.

- **Cultivate our partnerships:** We will set shared goals and targets that provide leadership on significant national or regional objectives and engage the expertise, capacity, and resources of our partners—including other federal agencies, regional fishery management councils, interstate and international commissions, states, tribes, academia, industry, and environmental organizations. Partnerships are vital to our mission functions and should be maintained and fostered, particularly in areas such as cooperative research, species recovery, aquaculture, habitat restoration, and enforcement. At the same time, to carry out our mission we need to investigate all other funding options, such as reimbursable agreements, cost recovery, and resource rents, subject to governing appropriations and other legislation.

- **Make strategic choices:** Budget growth cannot be relied upon to fund future program costs. We need to make the most cost-effective use of the limited funds we are appropriated. Improved collaboration and communication among NOAA Fisheries programs will lead to greater efficiency and synergy across the agency as a whole as improved understanding of each program’s needs allows greater focus on the most important activities.
- **Sustain a professional workforce:** Even in a budget-limited and downsized environment, NOAA Fisheries will continue to place a high value on our people. Retaining and supporting a talented and motivated workforce are critical to achieving our goals. We will work to provide our workforce with the tools, support, and career opportunities to excel and thereby reflect their commitment to NOAA and its mission.

- **Improve the cost-effectiveness of information technology, facilities, and observing systems:** To support our mission priorities we must find opportunities to provide highly specialized infrastructure, including information technology, facilities, and observing systems at the least cost and/or with productive approaches that provide the highest return on investment.

- **Improve internal and external communications:** We have made a concerted effort to improve our communications to focus on the science behind our work, the quality and sustainability of domestic seafood, the positive impact of robust U.S. fisheries on the economy, and the benefits of species recovery. We will also continue to advance and improve communications with partners and stakeholders through traditional pathways and by employing new, low-cost approaches, such as social media platforms and web-related tools. And, as we did in FY 2013 we will strive toward a “no surprises” approach to communication with our stakeholders and, where practicable, build consensus on expectations and the identification of critical factors to measure success.
Maximize Productivity and Sustainability of Fisheries and Fishing Communities

Effective fisheries management is essential to sustain and protect domestic seafood production, enhance recreational and subsistence opportunities, and protect ecosystem health and sustainability—all factors for enormous economic, social, and environmental benefits.

We continue to make significant strides in partnership with the regional fishery management councils to build sustainable fisheries, including implementing effective annual catch limits and accountability measures, and rebuilding plans for depleted stocks to achieve long-term productivity and sustainability of fisheries.

Our partnerships with the states and private interests have contributed to improved fisheries stock status in both state and federal waters. At the same time, we have increased opportunities for the development of a growing domestic marine aquaculture industry, which will continue to provide job opportunities for coastal communities and increase the U.S. supply of sustainable seafood.

Building on this progress will require:

- Enhancing the implementation of ecosystem-based management principles by enhancing our scientific ability to assess and predict fish stock status, the consequences to the fishing industry and communities, and ecosystem health. This will be advanced with an integrated approach of biological, physical, and social science as we develop next generation stock assessments.
- Understanding the environmental, social, and economic drivers to inform regulatory choices and enhance access to healthy stocks. This includes explicit recognition of the impact of climate change, ocean acidification, and other stressors on our trust resources and the communities sustained by these resources.
- Obtaining the science needed to address emerging issues at the national and regional levels (e.g., offshore renewable energy, the Arctic, toxins, restoration effectiveness).
- Working with commercial and recreational interests, non-governmental organizations, and states to develop more robust, effective, and implementable guidance to develop conservation and management measures to prevent overfishing while achieving optimum yields from each fishery (e.g., National Standard 1).
- Increasing the supply, quality, and diversification of domestic seafood through science-based development of U.S. marine aquaculture.
Increasing partnerships with industry and consumer groups to ensure properly labeled seafood through inspection, enforcement, and international cooperation.

Increasing the focus on regulatory simplification, efficiency, enforceability, and compliance, particularly as we prepare for the reauthorization of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA). This includes helping fishermen, the aquaculture industry, and coastal communities benefit from rebuilt stocks and sustainable fisheries (e.g., easier and more efficient access to allowable harvests and aquaculture permits and improving their capacity to succeed in a changing regulatory environment).

Modernizing the agency’s trade monitoring programs to support implementation of the Safe Ports Act and the use of trade measures by regional fisheries management organizations to achieve conservation objectives.

**FY 2014 Priorities**

In FY 2014 we will make progress in ensuring our regulatory programs are clear and cost-effective. Working with the regional fishery management councils, states, tribes, the fishing industry, and other stakeholders, we will advance efforts to design more streamlined and less difficult-to-enforce regulations that still meet our policy goals. In particular, we must continue to set appropriate annual catch limits and ensure rebuilding plans are meeting their goals. We will work to develop procedures that will promote implementation of electronic monitoring of fishery catch nationwide.

NOAA Fisheries will begin to develop recommendations in preparation for MSA reauthorization and will propose improvements to the National Standard 1 guidelines. We will continue implementing the Recreational Fishing Action Agenda to support national and regional efforts to improve and expand fishing opportunities. In partnership with anglers, we will develop and implement updated regional recreational action agendas and convene a national saltwater recreational fisheries summit to outline a new national recreational action agenda. In FY 2014 and beyond, we will continue domestic and international efforts to end overfishing, minimize bycatch (particularly of protected resources), provide enhanced enforcement and compliance assistance, and focus on rebuilding and maintaining fish stocks at sustainable levels to maximize fishing opportunities and jobs.

Our long-term focus on sustainable fisheries also will require continued science-based efforts to foster the development of marine aquaculture to supply safe seafood, complement domestic wild fisheries, rebuild threatened and endangered species, and restore habitats. Developing management tools and information for planning and decision-making, regulatory requirements, and understanding aquaculture’s role in the provision of ecosystem services are key investments that will yield sustainable seafood and jobs, food security, and healthy habitats and oceans. We will continue to implement the National Shellfish Initiative and continue efforts to implement the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Plan for Aquaculture.
Advance the Science to Manage Fisheries Sustainably

The increasing value of rebuilt domestic fisheries and improved economic performance of catch share management systems place even greater importance on increased investment in research, assessments, and observers for both fisheries and protected resources.

As guidance for FY 2014, NOAA Fisheries will implement further improvements and efficiencies in fisheries science through accelerated implementation of electronic monitoring methods (e.g., digital imaging and electronic log books) to complement fishery observer and catch monitoring programs, as well as through advanced sampling techniques to support further development of Next Generation Stock Assessments (NGSA) measures. Our near-term priority to conduct higher-quality assessments is linked to the long-term goal of applying ecosystem-based management across more geographic and other resource areas. Our strategy requires a transition to the continuous production of NGSAs.

To complement our biological and physical science and better understand and forecast what is socially and economically sustainable, additional socioeconomic research and forecast models are a priority. Understanding human use patterns in marine ecosystems is crucial because people are the principal stressors on and beneficiaries of sustainable marine ecosystems. Ultimately, both stock assessment and social and economic science products are needed to inform managers.

Our approach to this science mission relies increasingly on partnerships for comprehensive, high-quality integrated science data and products/services. These efforts include agreements with other NOAA line offices (e.g., for climate research, habitat conservation), reimbursable agreements (e.g., with industry and other federal agencies for research in the Arctic), grants and cooperative agreements with academic partners and states, and direct cooperative research with commercial and recreational fishermen.

NOAA Fisheries cannot deliver on our mission priorities without highly specialized infrastructure, including information technology, facilities, and observing systems. To this end, in FY 2014 we will work within NOAA and with external partners on three priorities:

1. Increasing public access to scientific data and manuscripts developed with federal funds.
2. Improving capacity utilization and cost-effectiveness of mission-critical observation platforms—especially the NOAA fleet.
3. Improving the cost-effectiveness and capacity of our systems for providing adequate observations.

This latter challenge includes a focus on determining the appropriate circumstances when electronic monitoring technologies can be adopted as the most cost-effective means for collecting data for science, management, and enforcement. These three priorities are necessary to help satisfy the rising demand for essential data, including the conduct of new studies that provide an integrated analysis of the ecological, physical, oceanographic, and chemical dynamics affecting the status of living marine resources.
Focusing Habitat Efforts for Sustaining Fisheries

Habitat protection and restoration are essential elements of a sustainable strategy for commercial and recreational fisheries. In every region of the country the success of our resource policy and management decisions is inextricably linked to the quality and quantity of available habitat and the functionality of the ecosystem supporting the living marine resources under our stewardship. Habitat lost or degraded, whatever the cause, has direct economic consequences on commercial, recreational, and tribal fishermen and can threaten the sustainability not only of fishery resources but also entire communities that rely on them for food, commerce, and employment. Yet habitat challenges in coastal and ocean areas around the country are significant and pervasive, requiring a new, better informed, more strategic, and more integrated response.

NOAA is implementing a Habitat Blueprint as the framework to strategically align habitat conservation efforts with NOAA’s mission stewardship responsibilities and goals, including those to sustain fisheries and protected resources. In addition to strengthening collaboration for habitat conservation across NOAA, the Blueprint is leveraging external partnerships and resources as well as driving coordinated action and improving habitat conditions that support marine resources and communities.

Our objective is to focus on broad-scale challenges affecting our fisheries and protected resource missions. In addition, NOAA is increasing collaboration with external partners for larger scale habitat conservation through landscape conservation initiatives, such as the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative. The Habitat Blueprint and the landscape-scale conservation initiatives will implement a NOAA-wide systematic and strategic approach to habitat science to inform effective prioritization and decision-making. They will provide integrated science, strategic investment, and effective leadership to engage our partners in coordinated habitat conservation actions in priority areas, and strengthen policy and legislation to enhance our ability to achieve meaningful habitat conservation.

These approaches are supported by Regional Habitat Initiatives that demonstrate the Blueprint guiding principles and provide lessons learned. In this context, for FY 2014 NOAA Fisheries will focus activities on habitat conservation priorities and objectives that will contribute to improved stock status, protect biodiversity, and restore ecosystem structure to support sustainable fisheries.

Improving habitat science and planning efforts with our partners is essential in linking habitat conservation improvements to fishery productivity. We will work with the states and our federal partners to continue implementation of the Pacific Coastal Salmon Recovery Fund, to carry out our trust responsibilities for Natural Resource Damage Assessment, to implement the provisions of the RESTORE Act in a manner that mitigates damages and restores functioning habitats in the Gulf of Mexico, and to expand our collaborations with state and other federal agencies in the National Fish Habitat Partnership. We also anticipate the opportunity to engage and provide coastal and ocean leadership through implementation of the National Ocean Policy and an increasing federal agency focus on integrated landscape-scale conservation.
Recover and Conserve Protected Species

FY 2014 Priorities

NOAA Fisheries is responsible for the assessment, protection, recovery, and conservation of protected species that are critical to the sustainability and health of marine ecosystems and the coastal communities that depend on them. Many of these species function as key components of their ecosystems, while others are the subject of economically important recreational and commercial activities (e.g., domestic and foreign fisheries catch and bycatch, international trade, tourism, wildlife viewing) as well as national security activities (e.g., naval operations). Other species have particular social and cultural importance to our nation.

The Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) and the Endangered Species Act (ESA) have specific conservation and recovery objectives, which are fulfilled through specific actions, such as:

- Conducting regular and credible science on protected species under our jurisdiction to inform management decisions.
- Listing species under the ESA when such protection is warranted.
- Consulting on and permitting actions that may impact species.
- Ensuring compliance with the regulations.
- Undertaking direct science-based actions—including with other federal agencies, states, and tribes—to recover populations and stocks.

We authorize a variety of activities that affect protected species and ensure they occur in a manner that fosters conservation and recovery and are derived from current and reliable science. These authorizations are often critical for businesses and industries to be able to invest and expand, thus improving the national economy.

Our priorities for FY 2014 to recover and conserve protected species and for future planning purposes are to:

- Improve and expand protected resources science.
- Better link this science to management actions.
- Increase the scope and effectiveness of collaborative conservation efforts with external partners, especially states, tribal governments, and other federal agencies.
- Continue to understand, conserve, protect, and recover habitats vital for protected species.
- Continue to provide enhanced enforcement and compliance assistance to protected species.
- Reduce marine mammal incidental mortality and serious injury associated with exports of fisheries products from foreign nations.
We will focus our attention and limited funds on activities that provide the most conservation value. Significant regional challenges will exist in FY 2014 with respect to the West Coast, Gulf of Mexico, and the Arctic. In the Gulf, the development of numerous large coastal restoration projects under the RESTORE Act, Natural Resource Damage Assessment, and the Clean Water Act settlement agreements will require considerable work by NOAA staff to ensure environmental compliance.

The Presidential focus on Arctic energy and the food security needs of Alaska Natives will require continued analyses by NOAA staff to ensure development occurs appropriately with respect to the National Environmental Policy Act, ESA, and MMPA. A series of complex and high-profile ESA consultations and habitat conservation planning processes that relate to large-scale water management and habitat conservation on the West Coast are underway. The efforts of the West Coast Regional Office and science centers are necessary to successfully complete these processes and negotiations.

The formal listing of a species triggers a suite of statutory responsibilities under specific timelines. Because the number of species we have been asked to evaluate for protection under the ESA has increased dramatically, we will continue to collect cost data and evaluate policy options for streamlining listing activities so that we may maintain a balance between listing species and other activities mandated by the ESA. NOAA Fisheries will conduct organizational workflow, policy, and procedural analyses to develop options for prioritizing and streamlining regulatory responsibilities.

Where overlap occurs, our protected resources mission must work in concert with the management of sustainable fisheries to achieve the joint ecological and societal benefits of living marine resource stewardship. Through this integrated approach, in FY 2014 NOAA Fisheries will increase transparency and collaboration between the Regional Fishery Management Councils and the Regional Offices on ESA consultations on fishery management plans, and continue to participate in stakeholder-engaged efforts such as Marine Mammal Take Reduction Teams. We will also work internally to ensure that national or multi-region conservation and enforcement programs are well coordinated across the country to maximize effective use of limited resources. In addition, we will identify best practices for working with our partners so that we may better execute our shared objectives.
Advance the Science to Support the Recovery and Conservation of Protected Species

NOAA Fisheries will continue to develop new and improved methods for assessing the abundance and distribution of species protected under the MMPA and ESA, and for evaluating the impacts of various anthropogenic threats. Particular areas of focus include:

- Bycatch reduction research.
- Evaluation of the impacts of the changing ocean and habitat conditions on protected species in high latitudes (e.g., the Antarctic and Arctic, loss of sea ice, warming temperatures, increasing acidification.)
- Evaluation of rising levels of anthropogenic sound in the world’s oceans.
- Development of new science-based tools to support ESA decision-making.
- Development of ecosystem models for anadromous fish management.
- Development of methods and appropriate metrics for relating habitat restoration to the fish population level effect.
- Development of a sound science program for investigating ecosystem health in the Gulf of Mexico under the RESTORE Science program.

Additional science and tools need to be developed to evaluate threats to species (e.g., shallow and deep water corals, fish, etc.) currently listed or being considered for listing under the ESA. Climate change effects are a particular concern to NOAA Fisheries because they can affect the productivity and distribution of protected resources. In 2014, we will identify options for incorporating climate information into vulnerability analyses, stock assessments, and ESA consultations.

Effective management policies will require improved science on the population status of protected species and the habitats on which they depend. We must obtain critical biological and ecological data and conduct research and analyses to better understand the environmental and habitat factors affecting protected species.

Focusing Habitat Efforts for Recovery and Conservation of Protected Species

Habitat conservation, protection, and restoration are essential elements of a sustainable strategy for recovery and conservation of protected resources. As is the case with sustaining fisheries, the success of our resource policy and management decisions is inextricably linked to the quality and quantity of available habitat and the functionality of the ecosystem. Habitat challenges in coastal and ocean areas are significant and pervasive, requiring a new, better informed, more strategic, and more integrated response. The NOAA-wide Habitat Blueprint is strengthening collaboration for habitat conservation across NOAA and with external partners, and driving coordinated action and improving habitat conditions that support protected resources. In FY 2014 NOAA Fisheries will focus activities on habitat conservation priorities and objectives that will contribute to the recovery and conservation of protected resources. Improving habitat scientific information and planning efforts with our partners is essential in linking habitat conservation improvements to protected resource recovery and conservation.
Future Strategic Opportunities

NOAA Fisheries must remain vigilant regarding the existing and emerging issues that will challenge our mission, as well as the opportunities that will allow us to improve how we meet our core mandates and strive to balance economic, societal, and environmental benefits. These opportunities may come in the form of new mandates and resources to meet our nation’s growing environmental challenges or business needs; through greater coordination, collaboration, and synergy with federal and external partners; or from focusing existing programs and resources on efficient local and regional pilot projects and case studies that demonstrate value and provide lessons transferable to other locations.

The impending reauthorization of the MSA will require us to develop strategies and adapt management approaches to this legislation. We will work closely with the fishing industry and recreational anglers, and with state and tribal managers and representatives to develop strategies that allow us to respond to our authorities as well as the needs of stakeholders. The ecosystem-based management approach to implementing the MSA and other authorities will increase the capacity of stakeholders to make wise investments while streamlining and improving the certainty of federal, state, and local planning and decisions. In turn, this will support economic growth, promote jobs, and sustain coastal communities without compromising ecosystem protection and sustainability.

Arctic observations and science will be a major emerging influence on operations within NOAA Fisheries. Significant increases in human activity due to diminishing sea ice will create challenges as well as opportunities to protect this fragile ecosystem and its traditional inhabitants. The issuance in fall 2013 of the National Arctic Strategy’s implementation plan and the accompanying Presidential Executive Order, as well as NOAA’s Arctic Vision and NOAA’s Arctic Action Plan, will lead to a series of new scientific tasks for NOAA Fisheries. The rapidly changing Arctic also is a place-based opportunity to conduct scaled pilot projects that develop, test, and refine ecosystem-based principles and best practices, new technologies, scientific information, models, and assessments, and decision-support tools that can be deployed to other regions to address specific resource management objectives.
Changes in the Earth’s climate will continue, or even accelerate, over the next century. Climate change and ocean acidification significantly impact our nation’s marine resources and the communities they sustain. To mitigate these impacts, NOAA Fisheries must better understand how ecosystems and ecological dynamics will be affected by changing climate conditions and re-evaluate current conservation strategies. Furthermore, because climate change is spurring increased interest in renewable energy, particularly offshore wind and hydrokinetics, it is important for NOAA Fisheries to stay ahead of new developments and work with other federal agencies on efforts to inform siting considerations, consultations, and future research efforts in these and other marine use sectors. We will use the President’s Climate Action Plan (2013) and the National Fish, Wildlife and Plants Climate Adaptation Strategy (2012) to help guide our actions.

As noted above, engaging the capacity and resources of federal ocean agencies is a cost-effective way to address shared goals and mandates. The 2013 National Ocean Policy Implementation Plan identifies a number of actions that NOAA and its federal partners will achieve to bolster our economies, improve ecosystem health and resilience, sustain the domestic seafood supply, and provide better science and information to improve decision-making. For example, implementing the National Shellfish Initiative will foster better coordination and efficiency in the review and approval of aquaculture permitting.

NOAA Fisheries’ science remains the ingredient that sustains our core mission. Emerging science challenges—such as understanding the effects on habitat and living resources of climate change and human activities in marine and coastal ecosystems (e.g., coastal development; oil, gas, and renewable energy exploration; development in the high Arctic; and the establishment of marine protected areas in the Southern Ocean/Antarctic)—will require an integrated science approach. Our science mission relies increasingly on collaboration with our NOAA, federal, state, tribal, academic, and private science partners for comprehensive, high-quality integrated science data and products/services to expand our understanding of the effects of these stressors on trust resources.

NOAA Fisheries must manage trade-offs between resource surveys for traditional single-species stock assessments and surveys for the multi-species process studies represented by Integrated Ecosystem Assessments (IEAs). IEAs that merge and synthesize data and analyses from an array of disciplines and sources are effective tools to advance ecosystem-based management. Ultimately, IEAs and other science-based tools will provide resource managers decision support for assessing the social and economic impacts from changes in fishery management and from changes in environmental stressors. To this end, we must continue to expand our understanding of the biological and economic value of ecosystem goods and services provided by U.S. marine ecosystems.
## Anticipated Results in FY 2014

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<tr>
<th>Maximize Productivity and Sustainability of Fisheries</th>
<th>Recover and Preserve Protected Species</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Fishery Regulatory Actions</strong></td>
<td><strong>Protected Species Regulatory Actions</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Decrease the number of stocks subject to overfishing and increase the number of rebuilt stocks.</td>
<td>• Strengthen partnerships with states, other federal agencies, and non-governmental organizations to enhance and leverage our species recovery efforts.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Continue to engage our recreational stakeholders via the 2014 Recreational Summit, following up on the recommendations stemming from the Recreational Action Agenda and regional action agendas.</td>
<td>• Finalize rules and guidelines to improve implementation of MMPA and ESA mandates.</td>
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<td>• Solicit feedback and comments on National Standard 1 guidance, and identify specific actions and proposed revisions.</td>
<td>• Identify policy options for streamlining the permitting process.</td>
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<td>• Identify recommendations for NOAA leadership in preparation for MSA reauthorization.</td>
<td>• Identify methods for incorporating changing climate information into our management of protected species.</td>
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<td>• Increase the recognition of the sustainability of U.S. fisheries using our own FishWatch program and collaboration with external partners.</td>
<td>• Reduce fishery interactions with protected species.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Integrate an ecosystem-based approach to management into the tools and information needed to improve certainty within resource and ocean management and business decisions.</td>
<td>• Develop and implement recovery plans for ESA-listed species.</td>
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<td>• Implement initial efforts to establish electronic monitoring and reporting in at least one fishery.</td>
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### Maximize Productivity and Sustainability of Fisheries

**Science and Assessment**
- Finalize a fish stock assessment prioritization process to assist in assessment planning and improve communication between science centers and regional councils.
- Develop an updated Stock Assessment Improvement Plan to guide the agency’s transition to a next-generation stock assessment framework.
- Conduct benchmark or updated assessments for fish stocks, including highly migratory species managed internationally.
- Improve the quality of fish stock assessments nationwide by exploring ecosystem linkages and incorporating data from advanced sampling platforms where available.
- Make substantial progress toward completing a regional electronic technology implementation plan and conduct a national electronic monitoring workshop.
- Complete implementation of the revised MRIP protocols in East Coast and Gulf of Mexico recreational fisheries.
- Improve the Fish Stock Sustainability Index.
- Conduct a managed fish stock climate vulnerability assessment in at least one region.
- Publish a technical report on implementing maximum economic yield.
- Implement a plan to increase public access to research results to meet the goals and requirements of the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy.

### Recover and Preserve Protected Species

**Science and Assessment**
- Complete the first year of research on the protected species assessment methods toolbox.
- Conduct region-specific marine mammal surveys on both the East and West coasts.
- Conduct Biological/Status Reviews for one or more ESA listing decisions.
- Improve precision of protected stocks estimates in regions where possible.
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<td><strong>Habitat</strong></td>
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<td>• Complete selection of Blueprint Habitat Focus Areas in all regions and begin executing implementation plans in them.</td>
<td>• Improve habitat conditions and address limiting factors to the recovery of species managed under ESA by providing funding and technical support for restoration projects in priority areas.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Improve habitat contributing to sustainable fisheries managed under MSA by providing funding and technical support for habitat restoration.</td>
<td>• Further align agency objectives and priority setting and maximizing our efforts to support the recovery of ESA listed species by conducting a strategic review of restoration and other habitat conservation related activities across headquarters and the regions.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Coordinate with co-trustees on restoration planning and project implementation, including environmental compliance responsibilities, for the Deepwater Horizon Natural Resources Damage Assessment.</td>
<td>• Produce more timely critical habitat designations for ESA listed species.</td>
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<td>• Align agency objectives and priority setting to maximize our efforts to improve the sustainability of MSA managed species by conducting a strategic review of restoration and other habitat conservation related activities across headquarters and the regions.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Implement priority actions in the Chesapeake Bay Protection and Restoration Strategy to advance oyster recovery, ecosystem-based fisheries management, and monitoring of ecosystem conditions.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Develop habitat conservation and management objectives to support regional fishery management council implementation of ecosystem approaches to fisheries management.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### Maximize Productivity and Sustainability of Fisheries

**Enforcement**
- Continue the transition to catch share management and appropriate enforcement strategies including the shifting of existing resources to compliance assistance and monitoring activities designed to foster voluntary compliance and deter violations.

### Recover and Preserve Protected Species

**Enforcement**
- Continue the transition to appropriate enforcement strategies including the shifting of existing resources to compliance assistance and monitoring activities designed to foster voluntary compliance and deter violations.

### Aquaculture

- Publish a proposed rule to implement the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Plan for Aquaculture.
- Implement and expand the National Shellfish Initiative.
- Develop and implement permitting regulatory efficiencies for aquaculture.
- Complete ESA/EFH consultations on permitting shellfish activities in Oregon and Washington.
<table>
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<th>Maximize Productivity and Sustainability of Fisheries</th>
<th>Recover and Preserve Protected Species</th>
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**International**

- Improve the effectiveness of seafood trade monitoring programs by issuing regulations to consolidate seafood dealer permits and to require electronic reporting of import/export shipments through the International Trade Data System.
- Implement actions to support international fisheries management plans and agreements (e.g., Pacific Salmon Treaty, Halibut Convention).

**International**

- Reduce the potential for adverse impacts to U.S. endangered Atlantic salmon throughout their migratory range through collaboration with the North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organization.
- Address the risk to North Atlantic right whales from commercial fishing and shipping by working with Canada to develop conservation equivalent measures.
- Reduce incidental mortality of marine mammals in foreign fisheries by issuing regulations to implement the provisions of the MMPA that would apply comparable marine mammal protection standards to fisheries exporting to the U.S. market.
- Collaborate with international partners to protect and conserve species through science-based input and capacity building.
- Assess transboundary species populations and improve scientific basis for management in U.S. waters.
U.S. Secretary of Commerce
Penny Pritzker
Secretary of Commerce

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
Kathryn D. Sullivan, Ph.D.
Acting UnderSecretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere

National Marine Fisheries Service
Samuel D. Rauch, III
Acting Assistant Administrator for Fisheries

December 2013

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