

Improving Regional Ocean Data Access, Use, and Application

Introduction

Executive Order 13840: *Ocean Policy to Advance the Economic, Security, and Environmental Interests of the United States*, emphasizes improved access to and use of federal data. Two federal agencies, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM), are leading the effort.

Phase I assessed regional federal geospatial data needs for ocean and coastal management. **Phase 2** documents how regional ocean data sharing and application capabilities can be improved.

Phase I was presented in December 2018 to the White House Ocean Policy Committee's Ocean Resource Management Subcommittee. Through engagement with regional ocean partnerships and stakeholders, the Phase I project was able to identify data required to address the top issues, such as offshore aquaculture siting, fisheries management, community resilience and climate adaptation, offshore renewable energy siting and leasing, and sand and sediment management.

The top 10 identified data themes are listed below:

1. Jurisdictions and regulated areas (various agencies)
2. Abundance and distribution of marine species (NOAA, BOEM, Department of Defense, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service)
3. Synthesized oceanographic parameters (NOAA)
4. Commercial fishing effort – Vessel Monitoring System (NOAA)
5. Vessel traffic – Automatic Identification System (AIS) (U.S. Coast Guard, Maritime Administration)
6. Human and cultural use areas (National Park Service, Bureau of Indian Affairs, NOAA)
7. Commercial fishing effort – Vessel Trip Report (NOAA)
8. Bathymetry (NOAA, U.S. Geological Survey)
9. Sand and borrow sites (BOEM, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers)
10. Species and habitat locations, including benthic habitat (NOAA, BOEM, U.S. Geological Survey, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service)

The Ocean Resource Management Subcommittee recently organized the interagency Data Working Group to address how agencies can improve their delivery of these data. The Data Working Group will ground-truth the associated data requirements with end users (regional partners) to better understand data applications.

Phase II is underway and has two primary objectives for 2019:

1. Work with regional partners to refine data requirements and characterize existing regional data-sharing efforts.
2. Work with the Data Working Group to design several “regional roundtables” in 2019 to further refine data requirements. Some data themes for the roundtables will include 1) AIS data provided by the U.S. Coast Guard, and 2) jurisdictions and regulated areas provided by a number of agencies (e.g., NOAA, BOEM, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency). The roundtables will help federal agencies focus their efforts as required by the executive order.

(Continued on reverse)



Congressional Support

Congress recognized the need to enhance regional ocean data sharing and application, and appropriated \$1.5 million in 2019 to support “regional data portals” through NOAA’s Integrated Ocean Observing System (IOOS). This supports the executive order’s direction to enhance capacity for sharing and integrating federal and non-federal data to better inform regional coastal, ocean, and Great Lakes management priorities.

NOAA and BOEM will collaborate with regional ocean partnerships and the IOOS regional associations to implement the data-sharing initiative.

NOAA will distribute these funds to existing regional ocean partnerships in the Northeast, Mid-Atlantic, Gulf of Mexico, and West Coast regions. In other regions where these partnerships do not exist (Great Lakes, Southeast, Caribbean, Alaska, and Pacific Islands), funding will go to the IOOS regional associations. Regardless of recipient, the funds will advance common objectives and build partnerships among the data and coastal management communities. These funds will be jointly administered by two NOAA program offices—IOOS and the Office for Coastal Management.

This effort to improve regional data sharing aligns with other recent initiatives focused on increasing access to open data, data that are used to inform economic development and decision-making. The work complements the Open Data Executive Order, Federal Data Strategy, Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act, Geospatial Data Act, and the Executive Order on Artificial Intelligence.

Expected Outcomes

Fiscal year 2019 funds will increase the use of federal and non-federal data to inform pressing coastal and ocean management decisions. The funding will build on previous efforts to increase regional data-sharing capacity and collaboration. Specifically, regional partners may use the funds for the following reasons:

- Convene and collaborate across regional ocean partnerships, state coastal management programs, and regional associations associated with the IOOS program (building on Phase 1 of the scoping study)
- Characterize regional data sharing and existing data platform structure, and outline data management capacity needs
- Define actionable ways to meet data and platform needs, including partner roles
- Implement these actions, as regions become ready to move forward

