

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration	NOAA Administrative Order 216-117	
NOAA ADMINISTRATIVE ORDER SERIES	DATE OF ISSUANCE June 30, 2015	EFFECTIVE DATE June 30, 2015
SUBJECT NOAA National Habitat Policy		
<p><u>PREAMBLE</u></p> <p>Healthy habitat delivers valuable goods and services and stimulates our economy and is therefore vital to resilient coastal and ocean ecosystems and communities. In turn, healthy habitat is important for achieving NOAA's outcomes, outlined below. As such, NOAA has a responsibility, driven by the agency's stewardship mandates, to ensure the Nation has a strong foundation and network of healthy habitats that sustain resilient and thriving marine and coastal resources, communities, and economies by protecting and restoring those habitats. However, with continued widespread loss and deterioration of coastal and marine habitats, we are in danger of losing this natural infrastructure and the ability to foster and sustain healthy and resilient coastal communities and ecosystems, a key aspect of the NOAA and the Department of Commerce mission. Recent trends reflect the challenge: increased coastal wetland loss; increased risks to communities in the face of coastal storms and sea-level rise; continued toxic spills; degraded water quality; and continued loss of natural shorelines and vital habitats for threatened and endangered species as well as managed fisheries.</p> <p>This policy outlines a set of key policy statements and responsibilities in the following sections, which should be incorporated into the work of NOAA's programs. It also calls on NOAA's line offices to use established procedures to implement this policy.</p> <p>By coordinating programs, people, and budgets into a stronger effort grounded in shared interests, NOAA will leverage internal assets while also guiding opportunities to engage with external partners on areas of mutual concern.</p>		

SECTION 1. PURPOSE.

.01 This Order establishes a National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) policy to utilize the agency's full array of mission interests, mandates, and resources to protect, maintain, and restore habitats that support resilient and thriving marine and coastal resources, communities, and economies. The purposes of this policy are to:

- a. Sharpen NOAA's focus on habitat within its existing work across organizational units by affirming the NOAA Habitat Blueprint framework, with its intent to achieve habitat outcomes more efficiently and effectively.
- b. Promote increased place-based conservation, habitat protection and restoration in a landscape-scale context that includes connective coastal and marine habitats and considers the ecosystem services and economic value of those habitats in making NOAA's resource management decisions.
- c. NOAA has a responsibility, driven by the agency's stewardship mandates, to ensure the Nation has a strong foundation and network of healthy habitats that are important for achieving NOAA's outcomes to:
 - i. Increase resilient coastal communities, in which life and property are protected from the impact of hazards and a changing climate, and land-based sources of pollution are reduced;
 - ii. Recover and sustain protected species, and prevent the need for new listings;
 - iii. Rebuild and sustain commercial and recreational fisheries;
 - iv. Protect coastal and marine areas, including watersheds, habitats at risk, and Special Places;
 - v. Enhance coastal and ocean tourism, access, and recreation; and
 - vi. Build a weather-ready nation.

SECTION 2. SCOPE.

.01 This Order applies NOAA's science, stewardship, and service delivery programs that support NOAA's habitat related missions and mandates. This Order supports the Department of Commerce's goal to provide effective management and monitoring of our nation's resources and assets to support both environmental and economic health, which in turn supports NOAA's strategic goals to achieve healthy oceans, resilient coastal communities and economies, climate adaptation and mitigation, and a weather-ready nation.

.02 Many statutory mandates and authorities direct NOAA's habitat conservation, management, and scientific work. See Section 6 for a list of these statutes and executive orders, which each have habitat-related provisions that require improved NOAA coordination in their execution. Many of these mandates reinforce and strengthen NOAA's mission and programs.

SECTION 3. DEFINITIONS.

.01 Habitat: Habitat is defined as coastal rivers and watersheds, estuaries, the Great Lakes, and marine waters; bottom zones through the water column; and an area's physical, geological, chemical, and biological components.

.02 Habitat Protection: Habitat protection refers to a suite of tools used to reduce or avoid impacts to coastal habitats, such as designation of protected areas or special management areas, land conservation (acquisition of land or conservation easements, (e.g. purchase of development rights), as well as permit reviews and consultations which can result in project modifications or mitigation to offset impacts.

.03 Habitat Restoration: Habitat (or ecological) restoration, as defined by the Society for Ecological Restoration, is an intentional activity that initiates or accelerates the recovery of an ecosystem with respect to its health, integrity and sustainability.

.04 Habitat Blueprint: The NOAA Habitat Blueprint is a forward looking framework for NOAA to think and act strategically across programs and with partner organizations to address the growing challenge of coastal and marine habitat loss and degradation. It provides a three-pronged approach and set of guiding principles to: 1) establish NOAA habitat focus areas; 2) implement a systematic and strategic approach to habitat science; and 3) strengthen policy and legislation.

.05 Landscape-scale: Landscape-scale¹ is defined here as a large area, including watersheds and marine environments, encompassing an interacting mosaic of ecosystems and human systems that is characterized by a set of common management concerns. The landscape is not defined by the size of the area, but rather by the interacting elements that are meaningful to the management objectives.

.06 Natural Infrastructure: Natural infrastructure refers to healthy ecosystems, including forests, wetlands, floodplains, dune systems, and reefs, which provide multiple benefits to communities, including storm protection through wave attenuation or flood storage capacity and enhanced water services and security.

.07 Nature-based Infrastructure: Nature-based infrastructure refers to engineered systems where natural features are combined with more hard or structural engineering approaches to create a hybrid system. One example is living shorelines, which is an approach that uses plants, sand, and limited use of rock to provide shoreline protection and maintain valuable habitat.

.08 Resilience: Resilience² is defined here as the ability to adapt to changing conditions and withstand and rapidly recover from disruption due to emergencies.

.09 Special Places: Special Places are those marine areas that are designated, reserved or in some way set aside for particular use(s), including conservation, and are managed by NOAA or long term NOAA partners (states and territories). Examples include, but are not limited to, National Marine Sanctuaries, National Estuarine Research Reserves, and protected areas managed by State partners.

.10 Ecosystem Services Valuation: Ecosystem Services Valuation is defined as understanding the qualitative, quantitative, and monetary values of the goods and services healthy ecosystems provide to humans.

¹ Council on Climate Preparedness and Resilience Climate and Natural Resources Working Group. 2014. Priority Agenda for Enhancing the Climate Resilience of America's Natural Resources.

² Presidential Policy Directive/PPD-8: National Preparedness. March 30, 2011.

SECTION 4. POLICY.

.01 NOAA will seek to protect, maintain, and restore ocean, coastal, and Great Lakes ecosystems based on our habitat related missions and mandates by:

- a. Advancing our understanding through ecosystem research and monitoring of the many values of healthy habitats and the impact of human activities, and using the knowledge to make natural resource management decisions;
- b. Supporting coastal communities through improved integration, delivery, and capacity building for the use of habitat science and products, and through place-based conservation of special places;
- c. Applying natural and nature-based infrastructure, using the best available science, to improve the resiliency of ecosystems, communities, and economies; and the Nation's ability to plan for and respond to habitat issues following acute natural or manmade disasters (such as storm events, algal blooms, pollution, or fisheries collapse), and to adapt to long-term climate changes;
- d. Using landscape-scale approaches to address a range of stressors including sea level rise, land-based sources of pollution, water shortages affecting river flows, and habitat loss, each of which can be further affected by climate change;
- e. Developing NOAA workforce skills and promoting innovation to address current and future habitat challenges; and
- f. Working to foster and leverage partnerships to help advance habitat solutions, increase public understanding of habitat value, add to the scientific understanding of habitats and ecosystem services valuation, and help communicate habitat conservation challenges and best practices.

SECTION 5. RESPONSIBILITIES AND EVALUATION.

.01 NOAA programs, and the agency as a whole, have responsibilities to our habitat mandates and more fully considering habitat implications in making programmatic decisions.

.02 NOAA has a responsibility to engage federal and non-federal partners to maximize external expertise and leverage resources. These partners make valuable contributions toward achieving the agency's mission and fulfilling its habitat-related mandates, including:

- a. Contributing to NOAA's shared body of scientific knowledge;
- b. Helping communicate the ever-changing challenges of conservation;
- c. Helping spread solutions for local communities to deploy; and
- d. Helping connect communities and stakeholder groups so they can work together on conservation at a landscape-scale.

.03 NOAA will explore new and innovative partnerships with other federal and state agencies and organizations that may have very different missions and priorities in order to make NOAA's habitat conservation work stronger and more effective.

.04 The NOAA Habitat Conservation Team, or a future cross-NOAA senior executive leadership body, is responsible for identifying and coordinating implementation procedures that support the goals and objectives of this Order.

.05 Through the NOAA Habitat Conservation Team, or a future cross-NOAA senior executive leadership body, NOAA will track and evaluate the effectiveness of this Order by using existing reporting mechanisms such as Line Office annual operating plans, the NOAA Habitat Conservation Team action plans, program office priority plans, and select program evaluations. Beginning one year after the signature of this Order and annually thereafter, the NOAA Habitat Conservation Team will prepare a report for the NOAA Assistant Secretary for Conservation and Management describing activities conducted consistent with this Order as well as planned activities for the coming year.

SECTION 6. REFERENCES.

.01 The following are statutory mandates and authorities that direct NOAA's habitat conservation, scientific, and management work.

- a. Coastal Wetlands Planning, Protection and Restoration Act (16 U.S.C. 3951-3956)
- b. Coastal Zone Management Act (16 U.S.C. §1451 et seq.)
- c. Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (Superfund) (42 U.S.C. §9601 et seq.)
- d. Coral Reef Conservation Act (16 U.S.C. §6401 et seq.)
- e. Department of Commerce Climate Change Adaptation Strategy
- f. Endangered Species Act (16 U.S.C. §1531 et seq.)
- g. Energy Policy Act (42 U.S.C. §13201 et seq.)
- h. Estuary Restoration Act (33 U.S.C. §2901)
- i. Executive Order 13158 – Marine Protected Areas
- j. Executive Order 13653 – Preparing the United States for the Impacts of Climate Change
 - i. The President's Climate Action Plan
 - ii. Council on Climate Preparedness and Resilience's Priority Agenda for Enhancing the Climate Resilience of America's Natural Resources
- k. Federal Power Act (16 U.S.C. §791-828c)
- l. Federal Water Pollution Control Act (Clean Water Act) (33 U.S.C. §1251-1376)

- m. Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act (16 U.S.C. §661-667e)
- n. Harmful Algal Blooms and Hypoxia Research and Control Act (16 U.S.C. §1451 note)
- o. Hydrographic Services Improvement Act (33 U.S.C. §892-892d)
- p. Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (16 U.S.C. §1801 et seq.)
- q. Marine Debris Act (33 U.S.C. §1951-1958)
- r. Marine Mammal Protection Act (16 U.S.C. §1362 et seq.)
- s. National Environmental Policy Act (42 U.S.C. §4321 et seq.)
- t. National Fish, Wildlife and Plants Climate Adaptation Strategy
- u. National Marine Sanctuaries Act (16 U.S.C. §1431 et seq.)
- v. Commerce and Trade: Department of Commerce – Chesapeake Bay Office (15 U.S.C. § 1511d)
- w. Non-indigenous Aquatic Nuisance Prevention and Control Act (16 U.S.C. §4701)
- x. Ocean and Coastal Mapping Integration Act (33 U.S.C. §3501-3503)
- y. Ocean Exploration Authorization (33 U.S.C. §3402)
- z. Ocean Thermal Energy Conversion Act (42 U.S.C. §9101-9009)
- aa. Oil Pollution Act (33 U.S.C. §2701-2761)
- bb. Rivers and Harbors Act of 1899 (33 §U.S.C. 403)

SECTION 7. EFFECT ON OTHER ISSUANCES.

.01 The Under Secretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere signs because the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) does not have a Delegation of Authority for this NAO.

An electronic copy of this Order will be posted on the NOAA Office of the Chief Administrative Officer website under the NOAA Administrative Issuances Section.
<http://www.corporateservices.noaa.gov/~ocao/index.html>



Under Secretary of Commerce
for Oceans and Atmosphere

Offices of Primary Interest:

National Environmental Satellite, Data, and Information Service (NESDIS)

National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS)

National Ocean Service (NOS)

National Weather Service (NWS)

NOAA Office of Oceanic and Atmospheric Research (OAR)