



**NOAA
FISHERIES**

NOAA Fisheries Priorities and Annual Guidance 2019

This document identifies the NOAA Fisheries priorities for 2019—the specific areas within our strategic goals that require a corporate focus this year.

The identified priorities consider our major mission functions, fiscal support, external drivers, identified risks, and corporate opportunities. These priorities are intended to guide the execution of the FY 2019 Annual Operating Plan (AOP), steer the individual efforts of each science Center, regional office, and headquarters office toward accomplishing our goals and strategies; and serve as a framework for performance reviews.

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A Message from Chris Oliver

Assistant Administrator for NOAA Fisheries



Dear Friends and Colleagues:

Going into my second year as Assistant Administrator for Fisheries, I am pleased to lay out our strategic priorities and planned accomplishments for 2019. This plan sets the course for NOAA Fisheries to prioritize our annual actions to manage fisheries and marine resources, increase data collection and sharing, and improve our operations and customer service.

Our baseline science mission will always be the highest priority, because our ability to effectively manage fisheries and protected species is highly dependent upon the availability of sound science and assessment data. Our reputation depends upon ensuring constituent trust in our science. While we will preserve the current core assessment levels needed to effectively manage high-value stocks, we will focus assessment improvements on the stocks with the greatest need. We will work closely with states and other partners that support shared data availability as we modernize our fishery information systems and improve real-time reporting. We will leverage new technologies to enhance data collection and improve efficiency. Stock surveys and stock assessments will always be at the top of my priority list. The challenge is to maintain those activities without compromising the other important things we do.

To support the Blue Economy—a NOAA priority—we will amplify the economic value of U.S. fisheries, including aquaculture. We support the long-term sustainability of our fisheries to benefit commercial, recreational, and subsistence fishermen as well as aquaculture producers, the seafood industry, and coastal communities that depend on those fisheries and coastal resources. Our successes at ending overfishing and rebuilding fisheries support a strong U.S. seafood economy. In 2019, we will focus greater attention and involvement in the arena of international seafood marketing and trade. A high-priority objective in the Department of Commerce strategic plan is “increasing marine aquaculture production.” Supplementing U.S. wild-caught fisheries, a healthy marine aquaculture industry has the potential to greatly increase our overall U.S. seafood production and reduce the seafood trade deficit. In 2019, we will give our full support to growing a healthy U.S. marine aquaculture industry. Our first step will be to address the bureaucratic hurdles an applicant faces in the federal permitting process.

Protecting ESA-listed species and marine mammals involves balancing a diverse array of challenging issues including: permitting and consultations for energy exploration, infrastructure development, and national defense; balancing water use needs for farmers and communities while ensuring adequate water for fish; and finding innovative ways to prevent bycatch and entanglement in fishing gear. Conserving and recovering federally protected species and their habitats ensure a productive and diverse marine ecosystem, and I am confident that we can address these challenges.

One of our strategic goals is to improve organizational excellence and regulatory efficiency. As the agency within NOAA and within the Department of Commerce that has by far the most regulatory responsibility, we represent the agency with the most potential to execute the Administration's regulatory reform agenda.

I look forward to another successful year.



Goal 1: Amplify the economic value of commercial and recreational fisheries while ensuring their sustainability.

In 2019, NOAA Fisheries will focus on our core survey and assessment capacity to sustain our ability to achieve optimum yield from fisheries. We will improve our use of Marine Recreational Information Program and electronic monitoring and reporting of data. We will seek to improve data management and accessibility. We will also aim to enhance survey capacity outside of the NOAA fleet by leveraging cooperative research platforms, and other technologies such as unmanned or autonomous drones. We will focus on ensuring U.S. fishermen are not disadvantaged by illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing, unfair trade practices, or deceptive labeling of seafood products. We will create a more predictable and timely process for accelerating the growth of U.S. aquaculture, and support research to advance commercial-scale marine aquaculture production.

PRIORITIES	PLANNED ACCOMPLISHMENT FOR 2019
Support reviews of priority regional fishery management council actions.	Reduce or eliminate the backlog of existing council actions.
Focus assessments on highest priority stocks.	Expand the Stock Assessment Prioritization process to remaining councils and expand to include setting target assessment levels described in the next generation Stock Assessment Improvement Plan.
Incorporate understanding of ecosystem, climate, and habitat condition into assessments and management of U.S. fisheries.	Finalize ecosystem-based fisheries management implementation plans. Quantify the linkages between habitat and fishery productivity. Quantify the linkage between the changing ocean conditions and fishery productivity and distributions.
Ensure U.S. fishermen are not disadvantaged by illegal, unregulated, or unreported (IUU) fishing, unfair trade practices, or deceptive labeling of seafood products.	Audit seafood import monitoring program records for compliance, and refer consignments with missing, incomplete, inaccurate, or unverifiable information for follow-up enforcement investigation. Conduct law enforcement investigations on instances of identified seafood import non-compliance.

PRIORITIES	PLANNED ACCOMPLISHMENT FOR 2019
Improve the competitiveness of U.S. seafood.	<p>Strengthen confidence in the quality and safety of U.S.-produced seafood entering global markets.</p> <p>Support access to export markets through industry outreach, trade analysis, advocacy for trade-friendly import regulations, and negotiated certification agreements.</p> <p>Support the continuous improvement of quality management practices, processing efficiency, and delivery to market by U.S. seafood producers.</p>
Ensure U.S. fisheries allocations remain responsive to current conditions through the use of the fisheries allocation review policy.	Conduct comprehensive reviews, with councils and constituents, of current allocations of priority stocks to ensure they reflect the best available information and are fair and equitable.
Implement the National Policy for Saltwater Recreational Fisheries.	<p>Continue progress under each of the six guiding principles found in the national implementation plan of the National Policy for Saltwater Recreational Fisheries.</p> <p>Increase agency-wide focus on partnership and engagement with the recreational fishing community.</p>
Support growth of marine aquaculture.	<p>Accomplish the DOC aquaculture priorities, including improving regulatory efficiency and certainty through federal coordination (one-stop permitting), pilot and demonstration projects, and expanded aquaculture research.</p> <p>Invest and partner in marine aquaculture science, including coastal planning and siting, disease prevention, and genetics research.</p> <p>Facilitate regulatory efficiency and cross-agency reviews and actions for federal permitting of aquaculture.</p> <p>Support aquaculture projects that improve water quality, fish production, habitat, and coastal economies.</p>
Address impacts on NOAA trust resources, services, and habitats after oil spills and chemical releases.	Finalize five key restoration plans, including Deepwater Horizon Open Ocean Monitoring.

PRIORITIES	PLANNED ACCOMPLISHMENT FOR 2019
Modernize and streamline our fishery information systems and enhance data sharing and accessibility.	<p>Increase accessibility and use of fisheries data (e.g., Marine Recreational Information Program, electronic monitoring and reporting) by scientists, stakeholders, and decisionmakers.</p> <p>Increase accessibility and use of habitat data (e.g., EFH Mapper, regional data portals such as the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council Coral Portal, NOAA Deep-Sea Coral Database) by scientists, stakeholders, and decision makers.</p>
Advance effective and practical electronic technologies to improve collection of fishery-dependent and fishery-independent data.	<p>Increase the use of real-time electronic catch/landing reporting, where appropriate.</p> <p>Augment survey capacity within and beyond the NOAA fleet by using emerging technologies to collect valuable information (e.g., AUV/UAS platforms and remote sensors).</p>
Make habitat conservation investments in habitat requirements and limiting factors identified in MSA fishery management plans.	<p>Refine essential fish habitat (EFH) descriptions and maps.</p> <p>Invest in protecting and restoring habitats that enable robust and productive fisheries.</p>
Enhance fishing opportunities for U.S. fishermen through engagement in regional fishery management organizations.	<p>Maintain access to high seas fisheries by U.S. fishing vessels.</p> <p>Successfully advocate for international sustainable management of shared and migratory stocks.</p>



Goal 2: Conserve and recover protected species while supporting responsible fishing and resource development

In 2019, while ensuring the recovery of protected species, NOAA Fisheries will focus on improving timeliness of service in our environmental review processes to help our federal agency partners and the public while meeting conservation goals. We will implement guidance to ensure NOAA Fisheries operates consistently from region to region when developing recovery plans for threatened and endangered species. We will improve guidance for those who apply for Incidental Harassment Authorizations (IHAs) or Incidental Take Regulations to ensure the applications are adequate and complete, thereby reducing the number of applicant questions and reducing the time needed to conduct analyses. We will also continue to modernize our protected species data collection and information systems to provide the scientific information we need to make timely management decisions. NOAA Fisheries will continue to focus on the habitat requirements and addressing limiting factors identified in ESA recovery plans as we work to recover threatened and endangered species.

PRIORITIES	PLANNED ACCOMPLISHMENT FOR 2019
Make habitat conservation investments in habitat requirements and limiting factors identified in ESA recovery plans.	<p>Conserve habitat for protected resources through landscape-scale conservation partnerships and Habitat Focus Areas.</p> <p>Align Pacific Coastal Salmon Recovery Fund and Community-based Restoration Program projects with specified priorities in ESA recovery plans.</p> <p>Organize a conference to advance the science and techniques for restoration and recovery of Pacific and Caribbean coral reefs.</p>
Improve the efficiency and timeliness of ESA and MMPA consultation and permitting processes.	<p>Improve guidance to applicants of Incidental Harassment Authorizations or Incidental Take Regulations to reduce need for additional information and reduce time to conduct analyses.</p> <p>Reduce the hatchery and genetic management plans (HGMP) review backlog on the West Coast by completing ESA review of 20 HGMPs.</p>
Improve the recovery planning and implementation process, and increase the likelihood of recovering species.	<p>Implement the following recommendations from the ESA Recovery Program Review:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement the Revised Recovery Priority Guidelines • Publish revised recovery planning guidance

PRIORITIES	PLANNED ACCOMPLISHMENT FOR 2019
<p>Reduce the negative impacts of human activities on protected species and their habitats.</p>	<p>Publish national guidelines for safely deterring marine mammals from damaging fishing gear and catch, damaging personal or public property, and preventing entanglement.</p> <p>Implement the deep-sea coral–related habitat action(s) outlined in the Conserve and Manage strategy objective of the National Bycatch Reduction Strategy.</p> <p>Implement emerging research, methods, and technologies in the fishing industry to reduce the bycatch of marine mammals and sea turtles.</p> <p>Improve emergency response to marine mammals or sea turtles entangled in fishing gear (e.g., prioritize safety, increase the number of trained responders, and develop tools to aid safe rescue efforts).</p>
<p>Stabilize highest priority protected species, including Species in the Spotlight as well as other critically endangered species.</p>	<p>Implement recovery actions outlined in species recovery plans and Species in the Spotlight action plans.</p> <p>Use captive propagation and outplanting to maintain or improve critically endangered species status (e.g., white abalone).</p> <p>Initiate collaborative research efforts in support of the International Year of the Salmon.</p> <p>Investigate and develop measures to mitigate threats to the recovery of North Atlantic right whales (e.g., fishing gear research and development, aerial and vessel surveys, investigations into Unusual Mortality Events, and assessment of effectiveness of management measures).</p>
<p>Improve the quality of protected species stock assessments.</p>	<p>Complete expired or uncompleted stock surveys and assessments for priority protected species stocks.</p> <p>Test and implement the use of innovative and cost-effective technologies to improve protected species assessments.</p>
<p>Improve understanding of West Coast water operations and the recovery of salmon, steelhead, and sturgeon.</p>	<p>Collaborate and apply life cycle models for water operations in California’s Central Valley to improve reliability of water supply for listed Chinook salmon and steelhead.</p>
<p>Improve the understanding of, and mitigate where practicable, the impacts of changes in climate on protected species and their habitats.</p>	<p>Complete protected species climate tools to inform ESA and MMPA actions.</p>

PRIORITIES	PLANNED ACCOMPLISHMENT FOR 2019
Ensure enforcement of MMPA and ESA in Joint Enforcement Agreements (JEAs) with state and territorial partners.	Prioritize state and territorial law enforcement of bycatch reduction regulations, gear and area restrictions, human interactions with protected species, and targeted enforcement presence in marine protected areas.
Protect marine mammals in foreign fisheries.	Advocate for adoption of protective measures in foreign fisheries comparable to those implemented in the United States.
Support offshore energy and coastal development, and national defense by minimizing or mitigating their conflict with protected species.	Publicize the availability of NOAA tools and data (e.g., EFH Mapper and BOEM/NOAA Ocean Reporting Tool) to help inform decisionmaking.



Goal 3: Improve organizational excellence and regulatory efficiency

In 2019, NOAA Fisheries will focus on improving customer experience in obtaining our services or authorizations. We will examine and streamline our business processes to reduce timelines, eliminate redundancies, and promote consistent service nationwide. We will address regulatory efficiencies with the regional fishery management councils and support their efforts to remove outdated, unnecessary, and ineffective regulations. High priority will be given to tightening the linkage between our science and regulatory enterprises to address marine resource management. NOAA Fisheries will continue to use and advance a structured process to facilitate priority-based budget increases/decreases.

PRIORITIES	PLANNED ACCOMPLISHMENT FOR 2019
Improve science focus on real-time current management issues and data needs.	Publish results from systematic peer review of science programs to improve integration, identify best practices, and share successes and challenges within the NOAA Fisheries science enterprise.
Improve internal tools and processes for allocating funds toward annual priorities.	<p>Complete Priority Based Resourcing (PBR) profiles for the four NOAA Fisheries enterprises.</p> <p>Use Activity Plan Prioritizations (APP) from each financial management center to optimize annual funding allocations.</p> <p>Implement Base Resource Review (BRR).</p>
Improve agency ability to monitor and measure performance.	Improve the suite of corporate performance measures and ability to report progress.
Clarify and adequately support facilities and infrastructure requirements.	<p>Validate database of current facilities/portfolio and uses.</p> <p>Document and validate baseline facility costs.</p> <p>Document current facilities management and governance.</p>
Ensure that NOAA employees and contractors work in a safe and secure environment.	<p>Implement NOAA's comprehensive sexual assault and sexual harassment prevention program within NOAA Fisheries, per the NOAA Administrative Order 202-1106.</p> <p>Implement the following recommendations proposed in external review of training and safety protocols for at-sea Observer Program:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and implement comprehensive safety standards through all phases of an observer's career • Integrate additional safety measures into observer training, equipment, pre-deployment vessel tours, at-sea reporting, and post-deployment debriefing

PRIORITIES	PLANNED ACCOMPLISHMENT FOR 2019
Proactively recruit qualified individuals at all experience levels and grades, whose diverse backgrounds, educational experiences, and skills will advance the overall mission of the agency.	Review and identify shortcomings in adequately representing local demographics, particularly people with disabilities, veterans, minorities, and women in our workforce.
Improve workforce succession to help meet evolving mission needs.	Implement NOAA Fisheries succession strategies in each financial management center.
Develop technology product and service delivery platforms and digital services that facilitate rapid prototyping and deployment of mission capabilities.	<p>Expand the use of emerging technology capabilities, such as cloud, artificial intelligence, machine learning, and predictive analytics.</p> <p>Develop a data strategy that leverages industry partnerships and open data standards.</p> <p>Establish a NOAA Fisheries digital transformation center.</p> <p>Provide digital services for NOAA Fisheries by sharing content or data via the internet or an electronic network with minimal human intervention.</p>
Prioritize investments in vessel and aircraft assets, including NOAA platforms and partnerships with industry, to maximize data collection efforts.	<p>Collaborate with NOAA's Office of Marine and Aviation Operations' Platform Acquisition Division in the sequencing of vessel construction.</p> <p>Expand cooperative partnerships with industry to develop cost-efficient resource surveys.</p>
Improve communication of data, products, and activities to external audiences.	<p>Continue the NOAA Fisheries Web Modernization project to increase traffic and improve usability of the web communication platform.</p> <p>Ensure consumers have factual information regarding U.S. sustainable wild-caught and marine aquaculture seafood.</p>



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