

The Bush Administration is Improving Our Ocean and Coastal Water Quality and Conserving their Living Resources

Water Quality

- Beginning in 2005, "Beach Watch," an EPA website with advisories and closings from the previous beach season, will include water quality monitoring data as well as notification data.
- As of December 2002, nitrogen pollution into Long Island Sound had been reduced by more than half of the reduction target of 58.5% through an innovative, cost-effective water quality trading program.
- Since 2002, USDA has worked to prevent over 1,000,000 tons of sediment from entering near-shore aquatic ecosystems in Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands, and reduced nutrient runoff on approximately 17,000 acres of private cropland.
- In 2002, the Navy successfully removed nearly 2 million gallons of heavy fuel oil from the *USS Mississinewa*, an oil tanker that sank during WWII, in an operation that cost close to \$5 million.
- In 2002, NOAA found the source of a mystery oil spill off San Francisco that had been blamed for the deaths of hundreds of seabirds in the past decade. The *S.S. Jacob Lukenbach*, which sank in a collision in 1953, was determined to be the culprit – and a salvage operation to remove the leaking oil from the vessel has been completed.
- In 2003, NOAA, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and fellow state and Federal agencies worked together to eradicate the invasive seaweed *Caulerpa taxifolia*, also referred to as "killer algae", in southern California estuaries. The seaweed is believed to have been contained and controlled within the two known infestation sites.
- In 2003, the first iteration of the mercury in marine life database was completed by EPA which includes more than 15,000 records, 250 of which are fish and shellfish species from 24 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico.
- In 2003, the USGS and EPA developed a collaborative Mid-Atlantic Coastal Plan monitoring design to optimize monitoring and water management actions for nutrient and pesticide contamination.
- In December 2002, EPA issued new effluent limitations guidelines and permitting regulations for Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs), requiring all CAFOs (about 15,500 nationwide) to obtain permits by 2006.

Coral Reefs

- In 2003, the National Park Service issued regulations to protect the new Virgin Islands Coral Reef National Monument (12,708 acres) and the expanded Buck Island Reef National Monument (18,135 acres) from fishing and anchoring-related impacts. The National Park Service has partnered with NOAA to conduct the biogeographical assessments necessary to determine the effectiveness for this management action.
- In 2002, the National Park Service successfully intervened in a petition before the Hawaii Land Use Commission to prevent pollution of National Park coral reef resources from industrial development. The landmark decision has led to best management practices to prevent stormwater and wastewater runoff.
- Over the last five years, the National Park Service has collected \$3.3 million in damages to fund ongoing restoration of coral reefs and seagrass beds damaged by Florida vessel groundings.
- In 2000, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service broke up a coral trafficking ring that illegally harvested 1.5 tons of live rock (coral) from Hawaiian waters for sale on the U.S. mainland. In 2003, three individuals were successfully prosecuted and ordered to pay more than \$111,000 in restitution to the State of Hawaii.
- In 2002, the US Coral Reef Task Force completed the first ever status report on the condition of U.S. coral reef ecosystems. It will complete the next status report in 2004.
- Since 2002, NOAA has completed over 200 field assessments and recovered approximately \$675,000 in damages from vessel groundings in the Florida Keys. Plans to restore 30 damaged sites are underway.
- In 2002, NOAA launched the NOAA Coral Reef Information System (CoRIS), as a single access point for all NOAA data and information on coral reef ecosystems. CoRIS (www.coris.noaa.gov) now provides online access to over 8,000 coral reef data products and an extensive number of coral reef reference materials and publications.

- In 2002 and 2003, NOAA and Department of the Interior supported over \$10 million in grants for coral reef conservation activities in the U.S. and internationally through the Coral Reef Conservation Grant Program.
- In 2002 and 2003, NOAA and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation Coral Reef Conservation Fund leveraged \$1.87 million in NOAA funds with \$3.55 million in non-federal matching funds for a total of \$5.42 million to support 66 on the ground projects to conserve and protect coral reef habitats.
- In 2003, NOAA worked with the International Maritime Organization to create nationally accepted coral reef protection zones. Coral reefs within the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary will become the first in U.S. waters to receive this international protection by being designated a particularly sensitive sea area (PSSA) – one of five in the world.

Hypoxia and Harmful Algal Blooms

- In July 2003, NOAA issued the first ecological forecast of the “dead zone” in the Gulf of Mexico. The Department of the Interior is working with states and Tribes to implement the Action Plan that was sent to Congress in 2002 to address these oxygen-starved waters which threaten one of the Nation’s most valuable fishing grounds.
- Since March 2003, USDA has been participating in the Upper Mississippi River Stewardship Initiative, a public-private partnership initiative to identify the major sources of sediments and nutrients which contribute to hypoxia; increase and target financial and technical assistance; develop new solutions; and create a basin-wide monitoring network for outreach and coordination.
- In 2003, NOAA, in partnership with academic and Canadian scientists, led a multi-million dollar research project to study the ecology and oceanography of a marine algae that produces a neurotoxin. These studies will assist scientists in developing a model to forecast harmful algal blooms, greatly reducing the harmful impact they have on coastal communities and the region.
- In 2004, NOAA will transition the Gulf of Mexico Harmful Algal Bloom Forecast System demonstration project to an operational system. Once operational, resource and public health managers will receive two bulletins each week allowing them to more efficiently prepare for and respond to associated potential public health and environmental impacts.
- In the Ohio River Basin USDA is working with EPA, states, and Tribes in establishing market-based solutions that create incentives for cleaner and more efficient agricultural production.

Marine Mammals and other Protected Resources

- As of April 2004, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service designated manatee refuges and sanctuaries in coastal Florida waters, encompassing 100 acres, and spanning eight counties. The designations protect 30-50 percent of the manatees in Florida vulnerable to watercraft collision.
- In Alaska and Hawaii, NOAA and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service have worked in collaboration with the longline industry and university researchers to reduce the incidental catch of albatrosses and other seabird species. Albatross takes in the Hawaii longline fishery decreased from several thousand birds in 2000 to about 100 in 2002.
- In July 2002, NOAA and the Minerals Management Service agreed to implement protective measures to avoid harm to endangered sperm whales from noise associated with seismic exploration for oil and gas reserves in the Gulf of Mexico.
- In 2003, NOAA launched “SPLASH,” an international, basin-wide study of humpback whale abundance, population structure and status.
- In 2003, the Coast Guard issued 154 manatee speed zone violations in Florida for a total of \$23,000, helping reduce the risk of manatee extinction.
- In 2003, NOAA scientists developed a DNA-based method for identifying cooked and raw turtle meat, eggs, and trace evidence such as blood, providing a powerful new tool in sea turtle conservation and the prosecution of poachers.
- In 2003, endangered Kemp’s ridley sea turtles nested in record numbers at Padre Island National Seashore in Texas, where Department of Interior biologists and volunteers are protecting turtle nests and hatchlings and establishing a second nesting colony.

- NOAA, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Marine Mammal Commission, and Department of Defense worked together to develop an Administration Marine Mammal Protection Act reauthorization bill that would improve the way marine mammals are managed and protected. The bill was transmitted to Congress in February 2003.
- In February 2003, NOAA published regulations requiring larger openings on turtle excluder devices in the southeast shrimp trawl fishery.
- In April 2003, NOAA listed the smalltooth sawfish as an endangered species, making it the first marine fish in the United States to receive this protection.
- With over \$8 million per year from the Navy, marine mammal research has led to new detection and tracking equipment as well as better understanding of physical and behavioral responses to anthropogenic noise.
- The Navy has implemented both Northern Right Whale and Humpback Whale ship strike avoidance measures on all vessels, and hosts the northern right whale surveillance and early warning system.
- As a result of continuing cooperative management by NOAA Fisheries and the Alaska Eskimo Whaling Commission, the Bering/Chukchi/Beaufort Sea stock of the endangered bowhead whale has grown at approximately 3 percent per year for the last two decades. This stock, once nearly eradicated by commercial whaling, now numbers over 10,000 animals.
- NOAA has continued its work with Alaskan Natives to reduce the harvest of the Cook Inlet beluga whale, a depleted species whose harvest has now been reduced by over 90 percent. A comprehensive Conservation Plan is also being developed to guide other recovery actions for these whales.

Marine Protected Areas

- Since 2001, NOAA, the U.S. Coast Guard, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and other agency partners have removed 264 tons of marine debris from reefs and beaches of the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands.
- In 2001, NOAA prohibited anchoring within the Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary in an effort to protect the sanctuary's coral reef resources.
- In 2001, the Secretary of Commerce approved and implemented regulations to ban the use of personal watercraft in the Gulf of the Farallones National Marine Sanctuary in California in order to further protect sanctuary resources.
- In 2001, NOAA designated the 150 square nautical mile Tortugas Ecological Reserve in the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary.
- In 2002, the Secretary of Commerce initiated the process of designating the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands Coral Reef Ecosystem Reserve (NWHI) as the 14th national marine sanctuary. When designated, the NWHI will be the largest marine protected area in the Western Hemisphere.
- In 2003, the Secretary of Commerce designated the San Francisco Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve, the 26th Reserve in the National Estuarine Research Reserve System.□
- In 2003, the Secretary of Commerce selected and convened a 30-member Marine Protected Areas Federal Advisory Committee to provide expert advice to the Secretaries of Commerce and Interior on the implementation of the MPA Executive Order (E.O. 13158).

Marine Transportation

- In 2004, the Coast Guard published regulations establishing a national mandatory ballast water management program for all vessels equipped with ballast water tanks that enter or operate within U.S. waters.
- From 2001 to 2003, NOAA brought five Physical Oceanographic Real-Time Systems (PORTS) online to provide mariners with accurate real-time information to avoid groundings and collisions in Chesapeake Bay, Anchorage, Los Angeles/Long Beach, Soo Locks (Michigan), and the Delaware River and Bay.
- The percentage of ships that can meet a 95 percent ballast water removal standard will go from less than 1 percent in 2002 to nearly 90 percent in 2008 as a result of technologies funded and developed by NOAA.
- As of September 2003, NOAA expanded its suite of Electronic Navigational Charts (ENCs) from 65 to 335 charts, and over one million ENCs have been downloaded.
- In 2003, NOAA partnered with seven federal agencies to develop the Portfields initiative that will assist the Ports of New Bedford, Massachusetts, Bellingham, Washington, and Tampa, Florida, to revitalize their waterfront areas, enhance marine transportation and port security, and protect and restore coastal resources.

- The Administration's May 2003 Surface Transportation Reauthorization proposal includes provisions to expand the capacity and efficiency of the Nation's freight system by establishing a National Highway System (NHS) set-aside to fund highway connections between the NHS and intermodal freight facilities, such as ports and freight terminals and encourages greater coordination of transportation planning with freight officials.
- The Ballast Water Management Program, launched in January 2004, facilitates shipboard testing of ballast water treatment systems in order to help the marine industry develop more options for ballast water management.