

**Ocean Policy Committee**  
**Ocean Resource Management Subcommittee Implementation Plan to**  
**Increase Public Access to Marine Data and Information**

September 2019

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**Background**

Marine industries, researchers, the public, and government officials rely on and benefit from access to accurate, up-to-date marine data. The Federal government collects many types of marine data, including those related to habitats and living resources, human uses and activities, physical and chemical conditions, economic indicators, jurisdictional boundaries, and other coastal and marine characteristics. However, not all these data are readily available, or, in many cases, data need to be converted into a format that is more accessible for the user.

To improve access to ocean data, Executive Order 13840, *Ocean Policy to Advance the Economic, Security, and Environmental Interests of the United States*, directs the Ocean Policy Committee (OPC) to “coordinate the timely public release of unclassified data and other information related to the ocean, coasts, and Great Lakes that agencies collect, and support the common information management systems, such as the Marine Cadastre, that organize and disseminate this information.” [MarineCadastre.gov](http://MarineCadastre.gov) is a central resource for visualizing and sharing authoritative ocean data. In addition, it provides an efficient way for states, regional ocean partnerships, and other organizations to acquire and customize Federal data for use by stakeholders through regional ocean data portals.

**Process**

The Ocean Resource Management (ORM) subcommittee developed a [workplan](#) with three components: 1) identify regional data needs; 2) identify and review agency data availability; and 3) develop and implement a data plan.

An [initial survey](#) of selected coastal and ocean managers identified marine data needs in the nine coastal regions of the United States, including Northeast, Mid-Atlantic, South Atlantic, Caribbean, Gulf of Mexico, West Coast, Pacific Islands, Alaska, and Great Lakes. The survey focused primarily on geospatial data that have already been collected, but are not easily accessible or formatted in a way that meets the needs of the ocean and coastal management community. The priority regional data needs are listed in the table below.

**Priority Regional Marine Data Needs**

<b>Data type</b>	<b>Data description</b>
Jurisdictional and Regulated Areas	Legal boundaries of Federal, State, Tribal, and local sovereignty
Marine Species	Abundance and distribution of marine mammals, birds, fish, corals, and other species
Synthesized Oceanographic Parameters	Physical, chemical, kinetic, and other properties of bodies of water

Fishing Effort	Locations where people fish, catch, bycatch, gear used, vessel and landing information
Commercial Vessel Traffic	Vessel name, characteristics, speed, location, and cargo, of commercial ships
Human and Cultural Use Areas	Areas designated or used for recreational activities and those of cultural or historical significance
Bathymetry	Submarine topography, or the depths and shapes of underwater terrain
Sand/Sediment Resources and Borrow Sites	Locations of sand, gravel, or mineral deposits that represent potential useful material and leased borrow sites
Marine Habitat	Locations that provide the basic needs of marine species including food and shelter

After the ORM subcommittee identified the priority needs, agencies reviewed their geospatial data holdings, identified data responsive to the priority regional data needs, and examined issues associated with the release of these data. The agencies identified numerous data holdings to meet the priority needs, the majority of which are already publicly available. However, the ORM subcommittee also determined that there are a number of data holdings that if converted into a more useable format would greatly enhance decision making for our ocean and coastal management communities. In addition, publishing these data in more usable formats will enhance the effectiveness of common information management systems, such as [MarineCadastre.gov](http://MarineCadastre.gov), that organize and provide marine information. In addition, some data holdings are complex/multifaceted and require concerted agency effort and/or ongoing collaboration in order to provide the greatest utility to regional stakeholders. Priority data identified for release in fiscal year (FY) 2020 were selected based on responsiveness to regional needs; ability to meet technical, legal, and administrative standards in a reasonable timeframe and with existing resources; and value to the agencies’ mission in the context of ocean and coastal management.

**Results**

For FY 2020, Federal agencies will prioritize the release and/or improvement in quality of **vessel traffic, fishing effort, marine species, and offshore infrastructure** data to support state, regional, tribal, and other stakeholder interests.

**Vessel Traffic Data** – Improved access to the most up-to-date Automated Information System (AIS) data will support planning and decision-making for ports, energy, aquaculture, and other offshore infrastructure; provide regional stakeholders with better information to develop maps and tools that address their specific needs; and gain efficiencies in Federal agency data processing.

**Fishing Effort Data** – Improved access to Vessel Monitoring System and Vessel Trip Reports data will improve stakeholders’ and agencies’ ability to characterize and better understand fishing activity. These efforts will better convey patterns of fishing activity and their value, which supports more informed consideration of the fishing industry in planning and decision-making.

**Marine Species Data** – Updated and improved marine species data will provide more accurate characterizations and understanding of the marine environment; the development of improved impact assessments; and support conservation, planning and decision-making for offshore infrastructure, and fishery and habitat management.

**Offshore Infrastructure Data** – Improved access to the geographical location data of physical infrastructure such as aquaculture, marine cables, energy facilities (oil, gas, and renewable), including lease areas and releasable construction plans will improve stakeholder and agency characterization and understanding of the identified activity. These data allow stakeholders to identify, evaluate, and assess impacts of facilities and proposed infrastructure to other uses of the ocean or coastal space.

### **Next steps**

The nine coastal regions are currently engaging stakeholders to discuss and refine the regional data needs reported in the initial survey. In addition, OPC member agencies will engage marine industries and other stakeholders to identify potentially accessible non-government marine data, and the terms by which they could be publicly released. Based on the results of these discussions, the OPC will develop an out-year implementation plan and schedule for FY 2021 and beyond that identifies additional data to be released and/or converted into a format more accessible to users.

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