



# Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council

*Managing Fishery Resources in the U.S. Federal Waters of the Gulf of Mexico*

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July 8, 2015

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Heather Blough  
Special Assistant to the Regional Administrator  
NOAA Fisheries Southeast Regional Office  
263 13th Avenue South  
Saint Petersburg, Florida 33701

Dear Ms. Blough:

Below, as per your request, please find a list of comments provided by our staff on the NMFS SERO Draft Strategic Plan.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any additional questions.

Sincerely,

Douglas Gregory  
Executive Director

## **Gulf Council Staff Comments on the March 2015 SERO Draft Strategic Plan**

**Page 9 - 2.1 Background - 1st paragraph** - There are numerous references to increases in demand for the various services that SERO provides yet the driving forces behind these increases are not laid out. A little more explanation would be helpful.

**Page 9 - 2.1 Background - 1st paragraph** - Consider changing "Safe and 'affordable' sources of Seafood" to "Safe and 'reliable' sources of Seafood".

**Page 9 - 2.1 Background - 3rd paragraph** - This paragraph states that "All other NOAA Fisheries programs, projects, and investments (including science and technology, habitat conservation, **enforcement**, international affairs, and aquaculture) are to be designed and conducted in a manner that supports these core mandates". NOAA Enforcement, on March 25, released its latest edition of the National and Division Enforcement Priorities for NOAA's Office of Law Enforcement (<http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/ole/priorities/priorities.html>). Both SERO and NOAA Enforcement should review their respective priorities to ensure that there are no conflicts, and that the two policies mesh seamlessly together.

**Page 9 - 2.1 Background - 4th paragraph** – The phrase "ecosystem resilience contributes to resilient communities" seems awkward as it is resilient populations and communities that contribute to resilient ecosystems.

Suggest adding "and recreational fishing opportunities" after "sustainable seafood" in the following sentence: "Specifically, our role in supporting vibrant ecosystems helps provide sustainable seafood **and recreational fishing opportunities** for our nation, protect threatened and endangered species on their way to recovery, and ensure healthy habitat necessary to support these resources."

**Page 9 – 2.1 Background – 5<sup>th</sup> paragraph** – This paragraph states that "Lost or degraded habitat has direct biological, economic, and social consequences". Before this can be accomplished a baseline and metric for measuring current habitat health needs to be fully defined in order to make conclusions about the consequences of habitat loss and degradation.

**Page 10 – 2.2 Background – 1st paragraph** – "Living document" seems vague and it says updated as needed on annual basis. If the update occurs on a pre-determined schedule then it does not seem to be "as needed".

**Page 12 - 4.3 - Key Issues - second bullet (Anticipated Influx of Large-Scale Gulf of Mexico Restoration Projects)** - In the phrase, "boost recovery of commercially valuable species", replace recovery with sustainability so it reads, "boost **sustainability** of commercially valuable species". This makes the phrase more inclusive. Many of our commercial valuable species are currently healthy and not in need of recovery, but may be in need of actions to help maintain sustainability.



**Page 12 - 4.3 - Key Issues - third bullet (Changing Regulatory Landscape)** – This entire bullet needs to be re-worked. As indicated above, many of the Gulf of Mexico stocks are healthy, and it is only some stocks that are transitioning from overfished to rebuilt. Even after a stock is rebuilt, year-to-year fluctuations result in changing ABCs, quotas, seasons, etc., so regulations will not necessarily be simplified. Quotas and fishing days will not necessarily be increased. In fact, we have healthy stocks where the annual ABCs are decreasing yield streams (e.g., gag). The Science Center does not currently provide information to implement a constant catch ABC except at a very conservative level (e.g., the lowest ABC within a yield stream). Perhaps it would be better to state that one of the issues to be addressed is to develop a stable regulatory environment for healthy stocks. A suggested revision:

Within the Southeast Region several fisheries are transitioning from overfished to rebuilt status, but under the current management approach they may still be subject to year-to-year fluctuations in abundance, ABC, and associated fishing regulations. For healthy and rebuilt stocks there is a need to consider new tools and approaches to provide a stable regulatory environment that will increase user benefits (e.g., constant catch quotas and fishing days, enhanced fishing opportunities, streamlined reporting processes, simplified regulations) while maintaining conservation gains and protections for marine mammals and listed species. At the same time, the region faces largescale habitat loss and degradation that threatens to compromise fishery and protected species recovery objectives.

**Page 15 – Strategy 1.3.2 and 1.3.6** – Consider also having members from each division identify training needs in addition to OMI who may or may not be aware of strengths and weaknesses within a dept.

**Page 16 – Strategy 1.3.7** - Additional training for project leaders is always beneficial.

**Page 18 – Goal 2: Promote economically vibrant fisheries and communities** – Only one objective under this goal directly relates to economics.

**Page 18 - Objective 2.1** - If the above suggestion under Key Issues is accepted, then this objective should be revised to read:

Objective 2.1: In collaboration with the regional fishery management councils, increase user benefits (e.g., stable quotas and fishing days, enhanced fishing opportunities, streamlined reporting processes, consistent state and federal regulations) in Gulf of Mexico, South Atlantic, or U.S. Caribbean fisheries while sustaining fish stocks, protected resources, and habitats.

**Page 18 - Objective 2.1** - We suggest this additional strategy only because the subject of artificial reefs frequently comes up, and the prospect of increasing stock production through artificial habitats makes at least as much sense as Strategy 2.1.6 - stock enhancement (i.e., hatcheries).

Strategy 2.1.7: Explore and evaluate the potential for artificial reefs/habitats as a tool to increase stock productivity, fishing opportunities, and recover protected species. (who: ??)

**Page 18- Objective 2.1, Strategies 2.1.1 and 2.1.3.** – The Gulf Council staff fully supports these strategies and feels these would better inform the management plans and amendments.

**Page 18- Objective 2.1** - Please consider the following language. The goal to accomplish *one* recovery plan seems ripe for scrutiny. For example, were this goal to be unmet, it would leave the reader to believe that nothing was accomplished. Of course, this is not true but is a logical conclusion based on the text provided. Same comment applicable to Strategy 5.3.1, 5.4.1, 5.4.2.

**Page 19 - Strategy 2.3.1 and 2.4.1** - Add PRD to the list of responsible departments.

**Page 19 – Strategy 2.3.2** - There is also a need to better integrate our IPT process with NEPA.

**Page 19 - Strategy 2.5.1:** Finalize at least one new recovery plan for listed species using a recovery team that has interdisciplinary and interagency expertise to promote improved coordination and information exchange. (who: PRD)

**Page 20 – Strategies 2.6.1 and 2.6.4** – Include the GMFMC as a partner.

**Page 22 - Strategy 3.5.1** - Why is NEPA the appropriate division. Should this also include PRD, SFD, RESTORE and GoMex and HCD?

**NOAA Fisheries  
Southeast Regional Office**

**DRAFT  
Strategic Plan**

**FY2016 – FY2020**

**March 2015**

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## Acronyms

AQU	SERO Aquaculture Program
COMMS	SERO Communications Staff
Corps	U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
CRP	Cooperative Research Program
CWPPRA	Coastal Wetlands Planning, Protection and Restoration Act
DIR	SERO Directorate
ESA	Endangered Species Act
FSSI	Fish Stock Sustainability Index
FWC	Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
FWRI	FWC Fish and Wildlife Research Institute
FY	Fiscal Year, October 1 through September 30
GOMA	Gulf of Mexico Alliance
GoMEC	SERO Gulf of Mexico Environmental Compliance Program
HCD	SERO Habitat Conservation Division
IOOS	Integrated Ocean Observing System
MARFIN	Marine Fisheries Initiative
MMPA	Marine Mammal Protection Act
MSA	Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act
NEPA	National Environmental Policy Act
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NOAA AOML	NOAA Atlantic Oceanographic & Meteorological Laboratory
NOAA GC	NOAA Office of General Counsel

NOAA NOS	NOAA National Ocean Service
NOAA OAR	NOAA Office of Oceanic and Atmospheric Research
OMI	SERO Operations, Management and Information Services Division
PRD	SERO Protected Resources Division
RESTORE Act	Resources and Ecosystems Sustainability, Tourist Opportunities and Revived Economies of the Gulf Coast States Act
SARP	Southeast Aquatic Resources Partnership
SEFSC	NOAA Fisheries Southeast Fisheries Science Center
SERO	NOAA Fisheries Southeast Regional Office
SFD	SERO Sustainable Fisheries Division
S-K	Saltonstall-Kennedy
USF	University of South Florida



## Glossary

Division	One of SERO's four divisions (i.e., Habitat Conservation; Operations, Management and Information; Protected Resources; Sustainable Fisheries)
Goal	Aspirational, qualitative statement of what the organization hopes to achieve to advance its mission and address relevant problems, needs, challenges, and opportunities
Implementation Strategies	Specific actions designed to achieve objectives
Annual Operating Plans	Detailed tasks, projects, actions that will be undertaken each year to support implementation strategies
NOAA Fisheries' Core Mandates	Defined in NOAA Fisheries' FY15 priorities document as: (1) Ensure the productivity and sustainability of fisheries and fishing communities through science-based decision-making and compliance with regulations, and (2) Recover and conserve protected resources through the use of sound natural and social sciences.
NOAA Fisheries' Priorities	Defined by annual priorities document (currently <i>Fisheries Priorities and Annual Guidance for 2015</i> )
Objectives	Achievable, quantitative actions designed to achieve goals
SERO/Organizational Priorities	Organizational priorities to be defined and reviewed annually and informed by NOAA Fisheries' core mandates, using process described in Goal 1; Objective 1.1
Statutory Mandates	Legal requirements set forth in legislation (MSA, ESA, MMPA, etc.)
Program	A NOAA Fisheries HQ or regional program (i.e., Aquaculture; Gulf of Mexico Environmental Compliance; Habitat

Conservation; Protected Resources;  
Sustainable Fisheries)

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## 1.0 Executive Summary

As demand for NOAA Fisheries' services grows, the agency is focusing limited federal budget resources to support two core mandates:

- Productivity and sustainability of fisheries and fishing communities.
- Recovery and conservation of protected resources.

The Southeast Regional Office's (SERO) strategic planning initiative is one component of a national effort to ensure the agency's regulatory and science programs are transparent and effectively aligned with those two core mandates.

SERO's Strategic Plan (Plan) considers the agency's core mandates in the context of current fiscal conditions. The Plan is not intended to capture everything the SERO organization will accomplish during Fiscal Years 2016-2020. Instead, it identifies new operational and programmatic strategies that are intended to help SERO accomplish its core mandates more effectively and efficiently, and better adapt and respond to changing priorities and fiscal conditions.

The five strategic goals outlined in the Plan are designed to better position SERO to address the following key conservation and management challenges over the 5-year planning period:

- Increased demand for Endangered Species Act and Essential Fish Habitat consultations.
- Anticipated influx of large-scale Gulf of Mexico restoration projects funded by Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill settlement agreements and other legislation.
- Changing regulatory landscape and desire for increased economic opportunities.
- Elevated scrutiny of the science supporting conservation and management decisions.
- Expectation to provide additional services with less resources.

The five goals, each of which is of equal importance, aim to:

1. Improve SERO's organizational effectiveness by better aligning SERO budget, people, and information management resources with regional priorities and NOAA Fisheries core mandates.
2. Promote economically vibrant fisheries and communities by better integrating SERO protected resources, habitat, fishery, and aquaculture programs to maximize the benefits of conservation and management initiatives.
3. Improve management of NOAA trust resources by acquiring and applying the best available science.
4. Leverage limited resources in support of organizational priorities by enhancing partnerships and communications.
5. Maximize the benefits of consultation resources by focusing Endangered Species Act and Essential Fish Habitat engagement on projects with the greatest potential conservation impacts.

Each goal encompasses specific objectives and implementation strategies which will be advanced through NOAA Fisheries' annual operations plans to include key deliverables and milestones. SERO considers this Plan to be a living document and may add or modify objectives and/or strategies as new opportunities and emerging issues arise.

Section 2.0 of the Plan provides more information on the background and purpose of this planning initiative. Section 3.0 describes NOAA Fisheries and SERO's mission and vision. Section 4.0 presents a summary overview of SERO's organizational structure and programs, as well as current conservation and management challenges. Section 5.0 outlines the strategic goals, objectives and implementation strategies intended to address key challenges during the 5-year planning period. Section 6.0 includes several appendices with information on NOAA's mission and vision, and Department of Commerce, NOAA and NOAA Fisheries planning documents (Appendix 6.1); SERO's organizational structure, programs, and divisions (Appendix 6.2); key regional outreach and education mechanisms (Appendix 6.3); and regional partners (Appendix 6.4).

## 2.0 Background and Purpose

### 2.1 Background

Demand continues to increase for the vital services NOAA Fisheries provides the nation, including:

- Productive and sustainable fisheries.
- Safe and affordable sources of seafood.
- Recovery and conservation of protected resources.
- Healthy habitats that support healthy ecosystems.

As demand for these services grows, NOAA Fisheries has directed staff to focus limited federal budget resources to support two core mandates:

- Productivity and sustainability of fisheries and fishing communities.
- Recovery and conservation of protected resources.

All other NOAA Fisheries programs, projects, and investments (including science and technology, habitat conservation, enforcement, international affairs, and aquaculture) are to be designed and conducted in a manner that supports these core mandates and that, in the long run, makes ecosystems and communities more resilient.

Because marine and coastal species are part of healthy ecosystems, ecosystem resilience contributes to resilient communities. Specifically, our role in supporting vibrant ecosystems helps provide sustainable seafood for our nation, protect threatened and endangered species on their way to recovery, and ensure healthy habitat necessary to support these resources.

Habitat conservation and restoration remains fundamental to achieving our core mandates, maintaining ocean ecosystem stewardship, and supporting living marine resources. Lost or degraded habitat has direct biological, economic, and social consequences and can threaten the sustainability of fisheries and protected resources as well as the communities that rely on these resources.

### 2.2 Purpose

This strategic planning initiative is one component of a national effort to ensure NOAA Fisheries' regional and headquarters regulatory and science programs are transparent and effectively aligned with the agency's core mandates. NOAA Fisheries Southeast Regional Office's (SERO) Strategic Plan (Plan) considers the agency's core mission functions in the context of current fiscal conditions. The Plan is not intended to capture everything the organization will accomplish during Fiscal Years (FY) 16-20. Instead, it identifies new operational and programmatic strategies that are intended to help SERO accomplish its core mandates more effectively and efficiently and provide SERO greater flexibility to adapt and respond to changing priorities and fiscal conditions.



The Plan is a living document to be reviewed and updated, as appropriate, on an annual basis. It will inform the development and execution of NOAA Fisheries' Annual Operating Plans and associated milestones over the 5-year planning period. The Plan also will be used in communicating with employees, external partners, and the public about organizational strategies for achieving NOAA Fisheries core mandates, as well as related challenges and opportunities.

By promoting transparent, effective and efficient planning, management, and execution over the next five years, this effort also complements and strengthens NOAA and Department of Commerce implementation of the [Government Performance and Results Modernization Act](#) (2011).

### **3.0 Southeast Regional Office Mission and Vision**

NOAA Fisheries' mission is the stewardship of living marine resources through science-based conservation and management, and the protection and restoration of healthy ecosystems. To support this mission, SERO upholds the vision:

*To achieve and maintain healthy ecosystems, sustainable living marine resources, and economically vibrant and resilient coastal communities in the southeastern United States (U.S.) and U.S. Caribbean through an empowered workforce, innovative solutions, management flexibility, adaptability, and science excellence.*

Information on NOAA's mission and vision, and the agency documents informing the Plan's development is in Appendix 6.1.

### **4.0 Southeast Regional Office Overview**

#### **4.1 Role of Southeast Regional Office**

SERO manages, conserves, and protects living marine resources and their habitats in the Gulf of Mexico, South Atlantic, and U.S. Caribbean. Within this broad geographical area, the organization works with 17 states, commonwealths and territories; 2 interstate marine fisheries commissions; 3 regional fishery management councils; 4 Divisions and 8 Districts of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers; and other federal partners, academics, non-governmental organizations, and regional partnerships to rebuild and sustain fisheries, recover protected species, and restore and enhance important marine, estuarine, and riverine habitats.

SERO is based in St. Petersburg, Florida, and is supported by 12 field offices from North Carolina through Texas and the U.S. Caribbean. The

organization employs about 140 people, with an annual budget of about \$50 million (2014).

## **4.2 Organizational Structure**

Appendix 6.2 describes SERO's organizational structure, programs, and divisions. Appendix 6.3 summarizes key regional outreach and education mechanisms. In summary, SERO is composed of the Directorate office and four divisions: (1) Habitat Conservation; (2) Operations, Management, and Information Services; (3) Protected Resources; and (4) Sustainable Fisheries.

The Directorate office houses the region's Aquaculture and Gulf of Mexico Environmental Compliance (GoMEC) Programs.

- The Aquaculture program works to foster sustainable aquaculture to create employment and business opportunities in coastal communities, and increase the supply and diversification of seafood in harmony with NOAA Fisheries' conservation and management mission.
- The GoMEC program is helping SERO to prepare for and manage the increasing Endangered Species Act (ESA) and Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) consultation workload associated with numerous, large-scale coastal restoration projects funded by the RESTORE Act and by Natural Resource Damage Assessment and Clean Water Act settlement agreements related to the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill.

All other SERO programs are housed within the four divisions.

- Under the authority of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA), Federal Power Act, and Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act, the Habitat Conservation Division (HCD) engages with citizens, businesses, and state and federal agencies to consult on activities that may impact these important aquatic habitats to ensure a balanced approach to the development, use, and conservation of NOAA trust resources.
- The Operations, Management, and Information Services Division (OMI) provides SERO administrative, operational, and budget support, including facilities management, human resources management, grants and contracts management, and information management and record-keeping.
- Through implementation of the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) and ESA, the Protected Resources Division (PRD) manages marine mammals, and endangered and threatened species to ensure the recovery and survival of protected marine species for future generations.
- Through implementation of the MSA, the Sustainable Fisheries Division (SFD) works with the South Atlantic, Gulf of Mexico, and Caribbean Fishery Management Councils to conserve and manage the largest recreational fisheries and the second largest (by volume) commercial fisheries in U.S. federal waters.

### 4.3 Key Issues

Key conservation and management issues in the Southeast Region are influenced by many diverse factors which are constantly evolving and are expected to change during the five years covered by this Plan. The following were identified as major issues to be addressed over the 5-year planning period:

- **Increasing Demand for ESA and EFH Consultations:** Increasing coastal development activities associated with growing coastal populations and economic recovery in the region is placing pressure on SERO-managed resources. Accordingly, demand has increased for consultation services under the authorities of the ESA, MSA, Federal Power Act, and Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act. SERO is struggling to keep up with the pace of these requests and to support national-level initiatives aimed at further streamlining federal permitting processes. Such processes include the Federal Infrastructure Permitting Program and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' (Corps) SMART planning process; the latter aims to complete feasibility studies in three years or less at a cost of not more than \$3 million with the continued involvement of the Corps' District, Division, and Headquarters Offices.
- **Anticipated Influx of Large-Scale Gulf of Mexico Restoration Projects:** Numerous large coastal restoration projects in the Gulf of Mexico to be funded by the Resources and Ecosystems Sustainability, Tourist Opportunities, and Revived Economies of the Gulf Coast States (RESTORE) Act, Natural Resource Damage Assessment, and Clean Water Act settlement agreements related to the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill provide a unique opportunity to reverse decades of habitat degradation and boost recovery of commercially valuable species, protected species, and the habitats upon which they depend. Many additional restoration projects will be funded by the Gulf of Mexico Energy Security Act beginning in FY17. These efforts will require considerable coordination and resources to ensure the region is effectively engaged in project development and implementation and able to handle the associated ESA and EFH consultation workload. These activities will be critical to ensuring restoration projects are science-based and successful.
- **Changing Regulatory Landscape:** Southeast Region fisheries are transitioning from overfished to rebuilt status, creating expectations for increased fishing and business opportunities as well as the need to consider new tools and approaches to increase user benefits (e.g., increased quotas, increased fishing days, enhanced fishing opportunities, streamlined reporting processes, simplified regulations) while maintaining conservation gains and protections for marine

mammals and listed species. At the same time, the region faces large-scale habitat loss and degradation that threatens to compromise fishery and protected species recovery objectives.

- **Elevated Scrutiny of the Science Supporting Management Decisions:** Effectively executing NOAA Fisheries' mission requires sound science. In recent years, the demand for more and better science has increased in response to new MSA requirements, marine mammal and fishery interactions, increased petitions to list species under the ESA, anticipated funding for major coastal restoration projects, climate change; and large-scale disasters (e.g., hurricanes and oil spills). Meeting this demand will require a more systematic and collaborative way of identifying and prioritizing science priorities and filling identified gaps.
- **Expectation to Provide Additional Services with Less Resources:** While federal budgets have been declining or flat in recent years, demand for SERO's services continues to grow. This has created the need to be more effective and efficient through operational improvements, increase internal and external partnerships and collaborations, and make informed, strategic decisions about the most effective application of limited resources.

## 5.0 Regional Goals, Objectives, and Strategies

For the FY16-20 planning period, SERO has identified five strategic goals which are designed to better position the organization to address the issues identified in Section 4.2 and respond to emerging issues. Each goal is of equal importance. There is no significance to the order in which they are presented.

The five goals aim to:

1. Improve SERO's organizational effectiveness by better aligning SERO budget, people, and information management resources with regional priorities and NOAA Fisheries core mandates.
2. Promote economically vibrant fisheries and communities by better integrating SERO protected resources, habitat, fishery, and aquaculture programs to maximize the benefits of conservation and management initiatives.
3. Improve management of NOAA trust resources by acquiring and applying the best available science.
4. Leverage limited resources in support of organizational priorities by enhancing partnerships and communications.
5. Maximize the benefits of consultation resources by focusing ESA and EFH engagement on projects with the greatest potential conservation impacts.

Each goal encompasses strategic objectives and implementation strategies which will be advanced through NOAA Fisheries' annual operations plans to include key deliverables and milestones. SERO considers this strategic plan to be a living document and may add or modify objectives and/or strategies as new opportunities and emerging issues arise.

Each implementation strategy identifies the SERO program(s) or staff members with primary responsibility for its implementation. The lead program or staff is identified first. Successfully implementing many of these objectives and strategies also will require the cooperation and participation of our partners which are identified in Appendix 6.4.

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**Goal 1: Improve SERO’s organizational effectiveness by better aligning budget, personnel, and information resources with regional priorities and NOAA Fisheries’ core mandates**

*Goal 1 aims to advance organizational excellence by establishing a systematic process to identify and communicate annual priorities, as well as processes and mechanisms to align SERO resources in support of those priorities.*

<p><b>Objective 1.1:</b> Annually, identify and communicate existing and emerging SERO priorities.</p>	<p><u>Strategy 1.1.1:</u> Establish systematic process to analyze the availability of existing budget, personnel, and information resources and identify gaps in resources relative to NOAA Fisheries’ statutory requirements and core mandates. (who: OMI)</p>
	<p><u>Strategy 1.1.2:</u> Prioritize identified resource gaps. (who: DIR, OMI, HCD, PRD, SFD)</p>
	<p><u>Strategy 1.1.3:</u> Communicate gaps and annual organizational priorities, both within and outside the organization. (who: DIR, OMI, HCD, PRD, SFD)</p>
<p><b>Objective 1.2:</b> Better align budget resources with organizational priorities.</p>	<p><u>Strategy 1.2.1:</u> Explore flexibilities in the budget (i.e., Program, Project, and Activity [PPA]) structure when executing regional program budgets to achieve maximum program effectiveness within legal constraints. (who: OMI)</p>
	<p><u>Strategy 1.2.2:</u> Explore mechanisms and establish processes if appropriate, to enable SERO to have more meaningful participation in the budget formulation process to generate support for organizational priorities in agency budget requests. (who: OMI, HCD, PRD, SFD)</p>
<p><b>Objective 1.3:</b> Use retention, training, succession, and recruitment strategies to plan for employee growth in support of organizational priorities.</p>	<p><u>Strategy 1.3.1:</u> Annually review and update the SERO strategic workforce plan to ensure it is consistent with organizational priorities identified in Objective 1.1, and communicate with staff about the plan. (who: OMI)</p>
	<p><u>Strategy 1.3.2:</u> Implement a comprehensive regional training program to address multiple objectives, including developing skills for the occupational series identified in the SERO strategic workforce plan and cross-training staff to perform multiple functions. (who: OMI)</p>
	<p><u>Strategy 1.3.3:</u> Develop programmatic protocols and policies to prepare a SERO workforce response to large-scale disasters (e.g., oil spills, hurricanes). (who: DIR, AQU, COMMS, GoMEC, HCD, NEPA, OMI, PRD, SFD)</p>
	<p><u>Strategy 1.3.4:</u> Enhance labor-management relations through the SERO Labor-Management Council and</p>

	Workplace Improvement Committee. (who: DIR, OMI, SERO Bargaining Unit, SERO Workplace Improvement Committee)
	<u>Strategy 1.3.5</u> : Seek maximum recognition for employee accomplishments through execution of regional and national awards policies (e.g., SERO Awards Policy, Employee of the Year, DOC Medal Awards, etc.). (who: DIR, OMI, HCD, PRD, SFD)
	<u>Strategy 1.3.6</u> : Develop a regional succession plan to identify key positions that may be vacated within the next five years and strategies for transferring corporate knowledge (e.g., overlap backfills, mentoring and shadowing opportunities, scientific and administrative career ladder progressions). (who: OMI)
	<u>Strategy 1.3.7</u> : Explore the potential of creating new Team Leader positions in the SERO organization, <a href="#">consistent with OPM standards</a> , project lead opportunities, and increasing use of Acting designations when supervisors are absent to help distribute workload while enabling staff to develop skills for higher level supervision, management and leadership responsibilities. (who: DIR, OMI, HCD, PRD, SFD)
	<u>Strategy 1.3.8</u> : Establish standardized processes for prioritizing recruitment actions consistent with SERO priorities, determining when and how to offer recruitment, relocation, and retention incentives, and evaluating career ladder promotions. (who: OMI)
<b>Objective 1.4:</b> Better utilize existing information management capabilities to meet business needs in support of organizational priorities.	<u>Strategy 1.4.1</u> : Establish a cross-divisional team to identify information management needs and opportunities. (who: OMI)
	<u>Strategy 1.4.2</u> : Evaluate the potential applications of existing capabilities to meet the needs identified by the cross-divisional team. (who: OMI)
	<u>Strategy 1.4.3</u> : Identify and prioritize information management gaps. (who: DIR, OMI, HCD, PRD, SFD)
	<u>Strategy 1.4.4</u> : Broaden or modify the application of existing information management programs, where possible, to address priority gaps. (who: OMI)
	<u>Strategy 1.4.5</u> : Evaluate the potential for using cloud-based services for public-facing software applications (e.g., Catch Shares and Permits Online systems) and for select internal applications (e.g., Permits Information Management System). (who: OMI)
	<u>Strategy 1.4.6</u> : Evaluate the need for infrastructure changes or upgrades (i.e., network and telephone

	services) to better support the needs of the SERO user community. (who: OMI)
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**Goal 2: Promote economically vibrant fisheries and communities by better integrating SERO protected resources, habitat, fishery, and aquaculture programs to maximize the benefits of conservation and management initiatives**

*Goal 2 promotes enhanced cross-program coordination to leverage resources in support of statutory mandates and organizational priorities.*

<p><b>Objective 2.1:</b> In collaboration with the regional fishery management councils, increase user benefits (e.g., increased quotas, increased fishing days, enhanced fishing opportunities, streamlined reporting processes, consistent state and federal regulations) in Gulf of Mexico, South Atlantic, or U.S. Caribbean fisheries while sustaining fish stocks, protected resources, and habitats.</p>	<p><u>Strategy 2.1.1:</u> In collaboration with the regional fishery management councils, identify and prioritize fisheries with the potential to provide greater user benefits under an alternative management approach. (who: SFD)</p>
	<p><u>Strategy 2.1.2:</u> Use NOAA Fisheries' <a href="#">National Saltwater Recreational Fisheries Policy</a> and national and regional action agendas to help identify potential recreational fishing improvements and opportunities. (who: DIR, SFD)</p>
	<p><u>Strategy 2.1.3:</u> Coordinate with the SEFSC to ensure the most up-to-date information is provided to the regional fishery management councils to inform allocation decisions. (who: SFD)</p>
	<p><u>Strategy 2.1.4:</u> Expand the use of electronic monitoring and/or electronic reporting (EM/ER) for federally-managed fisheries in the Southeast Region by implementing the SERO EM/ER plan. (who: SFD)</p>
	<p><u>Strategy 2.1.5:</u> In collaboration with NOAA Fisheries' Finance Program, develop an individual fishing quota finance program for entry level fishermen and fishermen who fish from small vessels. (who: SFD)</p>
	<p><u>Strategy 2.1.6:</u> Explore and evaluate the potential for stock enhancement as a tool to increase fishing opportunities and recover protected species. (who: AQU, PRD, SFD)</p>
<p><b>Objective 2.2:</b> Demonstrate and increase the benefits of habitat conservation to NOAA Fisheries' core mandates.</p>	<p><u>Strategy 2.2.1:</u> Develop metrics, processes, programs, and visual aids to quantify and report the effectiveness of habitat conservation efforts (e.g., acres/linear feet of various habitat types protected). (who: HCD, PRD, SFD)</p>
	<p><u>Strategy 2.2.2:</u> Promote the development of tools that evaluate the ecosystem values of different habitats (e.g., Integrated Ecosystem Assessments, Habitat Equivalency Analyses, Uniform Mitigation Assessment Method) by submitting proposals, participating in workshops, and sponsoring workshops or research as resources permit. (who: GoMEC, HCD, PRD, SFD)</p>

	<p><u>Strategy 2.2.3:</u> Assist the regional habitat assessment prioritization workgroup led by the SEFSC to prioritize FSSI Index stocks in managed fisheries in accordance with <a href="#">NOAA Fisheries' Habitat Assessment Prioritization report</a>. (who: HCD, SFD)</p>
	<p><u>Strategy 2.2.4:</u> Use the findings and conclusions of the FSSI prioritization initiative and new information obtained through the application of ecosystem valuation tools to inform future habitat conservation prioritization efforts. (who: GoMEC, HCD)</p>
<p><b>Objective 2.3:</b> Better integrate and inform consultation processes for managed fisheries.</p>	<p><u>Strategy 2.3.1:</u> Develop standardized criteria to use in identifying for more focused engagement those projects with high potential EFH impacts (e.g., diversions). (who: HCD,SFD)</p>
	<p><u>Strategy 2.3.2:</u> Discuss with regional fishery management councils the need for ESA/MSA Integration Agreements to better integrate fishery management planning processes with ESA Section 7 processes, consistent with the <a href="#">2015 NOAA Fisheries Policy Directive</a>. (who: PRD, SFD)</p>
<p><b>Objective 2.4:</b> Maximize conservation gains when developing regulations to reduce bycatch of fish and/or protected species.</p>	<p><u>Strategy 2.4.1:</u> In collaboration with the regional fishery management councils, focus new standardized bycatch reporting program efforts and improvements on fisheries with bycatch across a range of species. (who: SFD)</p>
	<p><u>Strategy 2.4.2:</u> Communicate this multispecies bycatch reduction objective to regional fishery management councils, to SERO staff developing new bycatch regulations for protected species and marine mammals, and to SEFSC staff responsible for developing and monitoring fishing gear. (who: DIR, PRD, SFD)</p>
	<p><u>Strategy 2.4.3:</u> Emphasize this multispecies bycatch reduction objective in regional grant program priorities (e.g., MARFIN, CRP, S-K). (who: OMI, PRD, SFD)</p>
<p><b>Objective 2.5:</b> Apply interagency and interdisciplinary approaches to new protected species conservation initiatives.</p>	<p><u>Strategy 2.5.1:</u> Finalize at least one new recovery plan for listed species using a recovery team that has interdisciplinary and interagency expertise to promote improved coordination and information exchange. (who: PRD)</p>
	<p><u>Strategy 2.5.2:</u> Work with federal partners to develop a collaborative agreement to more effectively use their authorities and programs under section 7(a)(1) of the ESA to advance recovery of listed species. (who: PRD)</p>
	<p><u>Strategy 2.5.3:</u> Work with federal, state, and regional</p>



	partners to develop initiatives and projects to recover marine mammal species effected by the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill. (who: PRD)
<b>Objective 2.6:</b> Provide opportunities to increase the supply and diversification of seafood through aquaculture in harmony with NOAA Fisheries conservation and management mission.	<u>Strategy 2.6.1:</u> Fully integrate a comprehensive Gulf of Mexico offshore aquaculture permit review system into the SERO organization. (who: AQU, GoMEC, HCD, NEPA, PRD, SFD)
	<u>Strategy 2.6.2:</u> Develop and implement interagency guidance documents to promote timely and efficient marine aquaculture permitting processes in state and federal waters. (who: AQU, GoMEC, HCD, NEPA, PRD, SFD)
	<u>Strategy 2.6.3:</u> Advance the National Shellfish Initiative by fostering regional efforts to advance shellfish aquaculture and restoration. (who: AQU)
	<u>Strategy 2.6.4:</u> Coordinate and communicate with aquaculture stakeholders and partners to identify industry trends, management, and science needs. (who: AQU)

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**Goal 3: Improve management of NOAA trust resources by acquiring and applying the best available science**

*Goal 3 aims to improve the scientific basis for SERO’s conservation and management efforts by establishing a systematic process for collaboratively identifying and communicating SERO’s science priorities within the context of NOAA Fisheries’ core mandates.*

<p><b>Objective 3.1:</b> Annually, and in conjunction with the SEFSC, identify the top five regional science priorities for each program area.</p>	<p><u>Strategy 3.1.1:</u> Use established processes in the SERO/SEFSC operating agreement to identify joint SERO/SEFSC science priorities. (who: DIR, OMI)</p>
	<p><u>Strategy 3.1.2:</u> Incorporate input from existing priority-identification processes (e.g., National Habitat Assessment Workshop; recovery team recommendations; Take Reduction Team recommendations; Southeast Data, Assessment, and Review recommendations; regional fishery management council research recommendations; RESTORE Science Program). (who: DIR, AQU, GoMEC, HCD, OMI, PRD, SFD)</p>
	<p><u>Strategy 3.1.3:</u> Distribute a draft science priority list to the SEFSC and partners to gather feedback, and share the final science priority list with the SEFSC and partners for informational purposes. (who: DIR)</p>
<p><b>Objective 3.2:</b> Identify the capabilities of potential science providers to fulfill science needs.</p>	<p><u>Strategy 3.2.1:</u> Identify potential science providers to fulfill science needs (e.g., SEFSC, NOS, OAR, regional collaboration teams and alliances, RESTORE Science Program, NOAA Cooperative Institutes, NOAA regional IOOS partners). (who: AQU, GoMEC, HCD, OMI, PRD, SFD)</p>
	<p><u>Strategy 3.2.2:</u> Establish a process, schedule, and mechanism for determining which potential science providers have the capability and capacity to address priority science needs. (who: DIR, AQU, GoMEC, HCD, OMI, PRD, SFD)</p>
<p><b>Objective 3.3:</b> Identify and address at least one priority science gap not addressed by potential science providers.</p>	<p><u>Strategy 3.3.1:</u> Conduct a gap analysis to identify SERO science priorities not met by science providers. (who: DIR)</p>
	<p><u>Strategy 3.3.2:</u> Prioritize identified science gaps by program area, ranking higher needs that cross multiple program areas. (who: DIR, AQU, GoMEC, HCD, OMI, PRD, SFD)</p>
	<p><u>Strategy 3.3.3:</u> Identify the highest priority gaps that can be addressed or closed by SERO. (who: AQU, HCD, OMI, PRD, SFD)</p>
	<p><u>Strategy 3.3.4:</u> Address or close gaps with available</p>

	resources (e.g., HCD and PRD field staff, SFD's Limited Access Privilege Program and Social Science Branches, internal contract and grant resources (MARFIN, CRP, S-K). (who: HCD, OMI, PRD, SFD)
<b>Objective 3.4:</b> Make science available to SERO and partners.	<u>Strategy 3.4.1:</u> Establish SERO Reference Committee with representatives from each program to identify audiences, their needs and best tools for accessing, distributing, and sharing new data and information (e.g., SERO Intranet, EndNote, InPort). (who: DIR, OMI)
	<u>Strategy 3.4.2:</u> Develop and distribute guidance for accessing existing information sources (e.g., NOAA library services, SEFSC technical memoranda) and explore opportunities to expand access to journal articles through existing partnerships (e.g., Science Direct). (who: SERO Reference Committee)
	<u>Strategy 3.4.3:</u> Explore how to enhance use of resources available through local marine science institutions (e.g., USF, FWC, FWRI). (who: SERO Reference Committee)
	<u>Strategy 3.4.4:</u> Encourage publication of SERO staff analyses and collaborative scientific research. (who: SERO Supervisors)
	<u>Strategy 3.4.5:</u> Establish rollout strategies for staff analyses and collaborative scientific research when appropriate. (who: DIR)
<b>Objective 3.5:</b> Incorporate available ecosystem and climate change information into SERO products and analyses (e.g., protected species recovery plans, environmental review documents supporting fishery management actions) to better inform management of trust resources.	<u>Strategy 3.5.1:</u> Establish a SERO committee with representatives from each program to identify and consolidate available ecosystem-based management and climate change guidance into a regional guidance document to be used in preparing relevant SERO work products and analyses. (who: DIR, NEPA)
	<u>Strategy 3.5.2:</u> Explore the potential for developing ecosystem recovery plans (e.g., Southeast and Caribbean coral ecosystems). (who: PRD, HCD, SFD)

**Goal 4: Leverage limited resources in support of organizational priorities by enhancing partnerships and communications**

*Goal 4 aims to promote public stewardship of NOAA trust resources and increase capacity to achieve organizational priorities.*

<p><b>Objective 4.1:</b> Increase use of partnerships to help accomplish organizational priorities.</p>	<p><u>Strategy 4.1.1:</u> Annually, identify for each program area, those activities required to advance organizational priorities that cannot be successfully accomplished without partnerships. (who: AQU, COMMS, GoMEC, HCD, NEPA, OMI, PRD, SFD)</p>
	<p><u>Strategy 4.1.2:</u> Develop a plan for building partnerships to accomplish each activity identified in Strategy 4.1.1. (who: AQU, COMMS, GoMEC, HCD, NEPA, OMI, PRD, SFD)</p>
	<p><u>Strategy 4.1.3:</u> Annually, review memoranda of understanding and other regional agreements to identify any adjustments that would streamline or enhance the collaboration process. (who: HCD, NEPA, OMI, PRD, SFD)</p>
	<p><u>Strategy 4.1.4:</u> Provide leadership and technical expertise to national and regional partnerships, NOAA regional collaboration teams, and regional ocean partnerships (e.g., GOMA, SARP, SECART, CWPPRA) to advance organizational priorities. (who: GoMEC, HCD, PRD, SFD)</p>
<p><b>Objective 4.2:</b> Develop standardized key messages for use in communicating with constituents about SERO’s successes and challenges and enhance understanding of NOAA Fisheries’ mission.</p>	<p><u>Strategy 4.2.1:</u> Identify and vet through a subset of the target audience short phrases and summaries to communicate the activities and values of SERO and its programs. (who: COMMS, AQU, GoMEC, HCD, OMI, PRD, SFD)</p>
	<p><u>Strategy 4.2.2:</u> Annually, identify and communicate the top 2-3 accomplishments of each program area to highlight organizational successes. (who: COMMS, AQU, GoMEC, HCD, OMI, PRD, SFD)</p>
	<p><u>Strategy 4.2.3:</u> Establish standardized processes or mechanisms to communicate external messages to staff (e.g., SERO Intranet, Google Drive), partners, and the general public. (who: COMMS)</p>
	<p><u>Strategy 4.2.4:</u> Offer at least one media or external</p>

	communication training session annually to train the SERO workforce in the effective delivery of external messages. (who: COMMS)
<b>Objective 4.3:</b> Increase and enhance community involvement through coordinated SERO participation in education and outreach activities.	<u>Strategy 4.3.1:</u> Identify at least 2 community activities/events in which each program will participate annually to build a dialogue between SERO and the community. (who: COMMS, AQU, GoMEC, HCD, PRD, SFD)
	<u>Strategy 4.3.2:</u> Establish a team for each identified activity/event to coordinate organization, responsibilities, and expectations. (who: COMMS)
<b>Objective 4.4:</b> Improve internal communication within the SERO organization.	<u>Strategy 4.4.1:</u> Utilize the SERO Workplace Improvement process to help identify and resolve internal communication challenges. (who: COMMS, AQU, GoMEC, DIR, HCD, OMI, PRD, SFD)
	<u>Strategy 4.4.2:</u> Routinely update staff on implementation of the strategic plan and SERO priorities through All-Hands meetings and the SERO Intranet. (who: DIR, HCD, PRD, SFD)

**Goal 5: Maximize the benefits of consultation resources by focusing ESA and EFH engagement on projects with the greatest potential conservation impacts**

*Goal 5 focuses on streamlining ESA and EFH consultation processes to address workload challenges, improve customer service, and maximize the conservation benefits achieved with limited resources.*

<p><b>Objective 5.1:</b> Increase early engagement in projects with the greatest potential conservation impacts.</p>	<p><u>Strategy 5.1.1:</u> On a monthly basis, identify new projects that are led by other federal agencies and that have EFH and protected resources interests. (who: GoMEC, HCD, NEPA, PRD)</p>
	<p><u>Strategy 5.1.2:</u> Annually, recommend to SERO Directorate coordinated engagement in 2-3 projects identified in Strategy 5.1.1 that are determined to have the greatest potential conservation impact. (who: GoMEC, HCD, PRD)</p>
	<p><u>Strategy 5.1.3:</u> Provide joint pre-consultation assistance for 100% of the projects identified in Strategy 5.1.2. (who: GoMEC, HCD, NEPA, PRD)</p>
<p><b>Objective 5.2:</b> Increase SERO’s level of post-consultation participation in projects with the greatest potential conservation impacts.</p>	<p><u>Strategy 5.2.1:</u> Annually, recommend to SERO Directorate coordinated post-consultation participation in 1-2 projects identified in Strategy 5.1.1 that are determined to have the greatest potential conservation impact. (who: GoMEC, HCD, PRD)</p>
	<p><u>Strategy 5.2.2:</u> Provide post-consultation assistance for at least 50% of the projects identified in Strategy 5.2.1. (who: HCD, PRD)</p>
	<p><u>Strategy 5.2.3:</u> Document lessons learned in post-consultation implementation to improve future conservation advice. (who: GoMEC, HCD, PRD)</p>
<p><b>Objective 5.3:</b> Reduce the processing time of Section 7 informal consultations.</p>	<p><u>Strategy 5.3.1:</u> Annually, review and revise as needed the Southeast Region Section 7 Quality Assurance Plan. (who: GoMEC, PRD)</p>
	<p><u>Strategy 5.3.2:</u> Annually, complete at least one programmatic Section 7 consultation. (who: GoMEC, PRD)</p>
	<p><u>Strategy 5.3.3:</u> Within one month of each annual Section 7 program review and each quality assurance audit conducted with NOAA GC, develop written summary of corrective measures to be implemented.</p>



	(who: GoMEC, PRD)
	<u>Strategy 5.3.4</u> : Institute a waiver of legal review for those informal consultations determined to meet pre-established waiver standards. (who: GoMEC, PRD)
	<u>Strategy 5.3.5</u> : Increase staff capacity to address the Section 7 consultation backlog. (who: DIR, PRD)
<b>Objective 5.4:</b> Increase the efficiency of EFH consultations.	<u>Strategy 5.4.1</u> : Review and develop prioritized list of EFH findings requiring updates. (who: HCD)
	<u>Strategy 5.4.2</u> : Annually, update at least one existing EFH finding. (who: HCD)
	<u>Strategy 5.4.3</u> : Develop at least one new General Concurrence. (who: HCD)
<b>Objective 5.5:</b> Consolidate and update, as needed, ESA and EFH technical assistance and consultation guidance.	<u>Strategy 5.5.1</u> : Develop a Regional Compliance Guide for the Southeast Region to assist federal agencies and applicants in understanding ESA and EFH consultation processes and mandates, effects determinations, and Best Management Practices. (who: GoMEC, HCD, NEPA, PRD)
	<u>Strategy 5.5.2</u> : Annually, develop at least one new or updated technical guidance document on mitigation approaches, monitoring, or adaptive management for specific projects or geographic areas (e.g., anadromous fishway prescriptions, coral mitigation). (who: GoMEC, HCD, PRD)
	<u>Strategy 5.5.3</u> : Annually, conduct at least one training program for federal agencies on EFH determinations, appropriate effects determinations, and/or the use of programmatic consultations. (who: HCD, PRD)

## 6.0 Appendices

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## Appendix 6.1: NOAA Mission, Vision, and Planning Documents

### 6.1.1. Mission and Vision

#### 6.1.1.1. Overview

Through its long-standing mission of science, service, and stewardship, the NOAA generates tremendous value for the nation—and the world—by advancing our understanding of and ability to anticipate changes in the Earth's environment, by improving society's ability to make scientifically informed decisions, and by conserving and managing ocean and coastal resources. The mission and vision are articulated in NOAA's Next Generation Strategic Plan (2010).

#### 6.1.1.2. Mission

NOAA's mission is one of science, service, and stewardship. The agency seeks to understand and predict changes in climate, weather, oceans and coasts; to share that knowledge and information with others; and to conserve and manage coastal and marine ecosystems and resources.

NOAA's mission is central to many of today's greatest challenges.

- Climate change
- Severe weather
- Natural and human-induced disasters
- Declining biodiversity
- Ocean acidification
- Threatened or degraded ocean and coastal resources

These challenges convey a common message: human health, prosperity and well-being depend upon the health and resilience of coupled natural and social ecosystems. Managing this interdependence requires timely and usable information to make decisions and the science that underpins our knowledge of these systems. NOAA's mission of science, service, and stewardship is directed to a vision of the future where societies and their ecosystems are healthy and resilient in the face of sudden or prolonged change.

NOAA Fisheries' mission is the stewardship of living marine resources through science-based conservation and management, and the protection and restoration of healthy ecosystems.

#### 6.1.1.3. Vision

NOAA's Vision is resilient ecosystems, communities, and economies: healthy ecosystems, communities, and economies that are resilient in the face of change. Resilient ecosystems, communities, and economies can maintain and improve their health and vitality over time by anticipating, absorbing, and diffusing change. This vision of resilience guides NOAA

and its partners in a collective effort to reduce the vulnerability of communities and ecological systems in the short-term, while helping society to avoid or adapt to long-term environmental, social, and economic changes.

NOAA Fisheries' vision is American people enjoying the riches and benefits of healthy and diverse marine ecosystems.

### **6.1.2. Strategic Goals and Objectives**

There are several layers of Strategic Plans that currently guide NOAA Fisheries:

- Department of Commerce Strategic Plan for fiscal years 2014-2018 (2014) (DoCSP)  
<http://www.commerce.gov/blog/2014/03/10/department-commerce-releases-fy-2014-2018-strategic-plan>
- NOAA's Next – Generation Strategic Plan (2010) (NGSP)  
<http://www.ppi.noaa.gov/ngsp/>
- NOAA Annual Guidance Memorandum for fiscal year 2015
- NOAA Fisheries Priorities and Annual Guidance for fiscal year 2015

#### **6.1.2.1. Department of Commerce Strategic Plan (2014)**

NOAA is located within the Department of Commerce. The Department is comprised of 12 bureaus that work in five key areas:

- Trade and investment
- Innovation
- Environment
- Data
- Operational excellence

NOAA furthers the Department's mission with strong stewardship of the ocean's resources which contribute more than \$250 billion annually to the Nation's economy. (2014)

Specifically tied to the NOAA mission in the Department of Commerce Strategic Plan (2014) is the following goal, objective, and key strategies:

Strategic Goal 3:

*Ensure communities and businesses have the necessary information, products, and services to prepare for and prosper in a changing environment.*

Strategic Objective 3.4

*Foster healthy and sustainable marine resources, habitats, and ecosystems through improved management and partnerships (NOAA)*

Key Strategies for 3.4

- *Strengthen capabilities to assess and monitor fish and protected resources (NOAA)*

Ensuring sustainable populations of living marine resources is a key Departmental mandate. NOAA will increase the precision of stock assessments, performing more robust monitoring, and applying ecosystem-based management to ensure healthy, sustainable populations of living marine resources. NOAA will incorporate integrated biological, physical, and chemical data and ecosystem modeling into fish stock and protected species assessments. NOAA will also produce more advanced technologies for monitoring of living marine resources and ecosystems.

- *Improve recovery of listed species through innovative partnerships (NOAA)*

International, federal, state, local, tribal, and nongovernmental organizations play a role in conservation. NOAA will strengthen partnerships with these stakeholder groups to ensure greater collaboration toward the recovery and conservation of protected species in marine and coastal ecosystems. Greater collaboration will improve the development and implementation of effective recovery and conservation plans for marine mammals and endangered and threatened species.

- *Enhance place-based conservation (NOAA)*

Through its coastal management and place-based conservation programs, NOAA will expand protections at current sites, add protections at new sites, and work with public and private partners. This place-based approach will preserve the economic and environmental benefits of these special places to local communities. NOAA will implement efforts such as the Habitat Blueprint framework, which employs partnerships to improve habitat conditions for fisheries, and coastal and marine life, to achieve economic, cultural, and environmental benefits.

#### **6.1.2.2. NOAA's Next Generation Strategic Plan (NGSP)**

The Next Generation Strategic Plan (2010) (NGSP) conveys NOAA's mission and future vision, as well as the road map for achieving the vision as laid out through the long term goals, and objectives. With the release in 2010 of the Plan and Executive Summary and in the 2013 Addendum, Dr. Kathy Sullivan, Acting Undersecretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere, called on NOAA to focus on the following areas:

- **Climate:** Through collaborative strategies, continue to advance the observations, modeling, and research necessary to understand climate change and its impacts; and transition mature climate science into regular, reliable, and relevant information services.
- **Weather:** NOAA will build a "Weather-ready" nation by preserving and improving its ability to provide timely and accurate forecasts and warnings for the protection of life and property through science,

technology, infrastructure improvements, and collaborative efforts with partners.

- Oceans: NOAA will advance our efforts to ensure the long-term sustainability of marine fisheries and recovery of protected species and their habitats
- Coasts: NOAA will deliver integrated data, information, products, and services needed to support resilient coastal communities and economies.
- Science and Technology: NOAA will focus on developing systems-level understanding of ecosystems and phenomena—across missions and disciplines—with the goal of increasing the resilience of ecosystems, economies, and communities.
- Engagement: NOAA will expand efforts to listen and respond to our customers' and stakeholders' concerns and better relate NOAA mission responsibilities and activities to those concerns.
- Organization and Administration: NOAA will further capitalize on recent initiatives to cut costs and improve effectiveness.

As one of five line offices in NOAA, NOAA Fisheries' mission is most closely tied to the objectives for the Healthy Oceans goal:

*Healthy Oceans: Marine fisheries, habitats, and biodiversity sustained within healthy and productive ecosystems*

Healthy Ocean's goal is to ensure that ocean, estuarine, and related ecosystems- and the NOAA trust resources that inhabit them- are resilient and sustainable in the face of increasing threats and changing conditions. A sound understanding of these ecosystems, communication of this knowledge to decision makers and stakeholders, and the capacity and resources to support key NOAA programs are critical to fulfilling this goal (Draft Goal Implementation Plan, 2012).

The *Strategic objectives* of this Goal are:

- Improved understanding of ecosystems to inform resource management decisions.
- Recovered and healthy marine and coastal species.
- Healthy habitats that sustain resilient and thriving marine resources and communities.
- Sustainable fisheries and safe seafood for healthy populations and vibrant communities.

### **6.1.2.3. NOAA Annual Guidance Memorandum for FY 2015**

The purpose of the Annual Guidance Memorandum (AGM) is to focus the agency's corporate attention on near-term execution challenges and a balanced implementation of NOAA's strategy across mission areas given our mandates, stakeholder priorities, and the fiscal outlook. The AGM for FY15 outlines four priority areas. NOAA Fisheries' work primarily supports



two of these priorities: “provide information and services to make communities more resilient,” and “achieve organizational excellence.”

Within these priorities, NOAA Fisheries-led Focus Areas for FY15 are:

- Implement the next generation stock assessment framework for NOAA-managed fish stocks and promote advancements in monitoring and data collection activities.
- Make measurable progress on recovering protected species.

#### ***6.1.2.4. NOAA Fisheries Priorities and Annual Guidance for 2015***

This document provides guidance to all NOAA Fisheries employees in executing our mission responsibilities by establishing a framework for development of FY15 priority milestones. These priorities consider the core mission functions in context of current fiscal conditions. For FY2015 the focus remains on the two core mandates:

- Ensure the productivity and sustainability of fisheries and fishing communities through science-based decision-making and compliance with regulations.
- Recover and conserve protected resources through the use of sound natural and social sciences.

All other NOAA Fisheries programs, projects, and investments (including science and technology, habitat conservation, enforcement, international affairs, and aquaculture) should be designed and conducted in a manner that supports these two core mandates and in the long run makes communities more resilient.

## Appendix 6.2: Southeast Regional Office Organizational Structure

### ***SERO Directorate***

The SERO Directorate includes the Regional Administrator and Deputy Regional Administrator, as well as staff overseeing regional communications, outreach, and education, NEPA compliance, and the Aquaculture and GoMEC programs.

The region's Aquaculture Program works with agency staff, partners, and industry to foster sustainable aquaculture that will create employment and business opportunities in coastal communities, and provide safe, sustainable seafood, while maintaining healthy and productive marine populations, species, and ecosystems, consistent with the NOAA and Department of Commerce national aquaculture policies.

Recently established in 2013, the region's GoMEC program is responsible for helping SERO to prepare for, coordinate and manage the increasing ESA and EFH consultation workload associated with numerous, large-scale coastal restoration projects funded by the RESTORE Act and by Natural Resource Damage Assessment and Clean Water Act settlement agreements related to the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill. These include projects funded by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation through the Gulf Environmental Benefits Fund. Many additional restoration projects will be funded by the Gulf of Mexico Energy Security Act, beginning in FY17. The program provides intra-NOAA coordination, as well as improved engagement and consultation processes across multiple federal, state, and local jurisdictions throughout the Gulf, ensuring more effective and efficient environmental compliance, better tracking of cumulative and synergistic effects of individual restoration actions, and a more comprehensive approach to Gulf ecosystem restoration.

All other SERO programs are managed under four divisions:

1. Habitat Conservation
2. Operations, Management and Information Services
3. Protected Resources
4. Sustainable Fisheries

### ***Habitat Conservation Division***

The health and extent of coastal and marine habitats are fundamental to the economic viability of commercial and recreational fisheries; coastal community resiliency; and regional commerce, tourism, and energy sectors. Under the auspices of the MSA, Federal Power Act, and Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act, SERO's HCD engages with citizens, businesses, and state and federal agencies to consult on activities that may impact these important aquatic habitats to ensure a balanced approach to the development, use, and conservation of NOAA trust resources. HCD supports the agency's core missions of sustaining fisheries and recovering protected species through activities such as restoring fish passage and opening rivers for migrating fish, rebuilding coastal wetlands,

promoting the use of living shorelines, and encouraging the beneficial use of dredged sediments to restore coastal habitats.

### ***Operations, Management, and Information Services Division***

SERO's OMI provides support for strategic and annual operations planning; budget formulation and execution; grants management; contracts management; human resources management (including Equal Employment Opportunity and diversity); information management and record-keeping; information technology, e-mail, and telecommunications systems. OMI issues Federal Fishing Permits and provides support for environmental compliance, safety, security, and facilities management. OMI conducts analyses and advises the Regional Administrator regarding operational issues, workforce plans, performance management, and awards. Other major functions include procurement, payments, publication services, government vehicles, travel, mail, and all other administrative services in support of SERO employees.

### ***Sustainable Fisheries Division***

Under the authority of the MSA, SERO's SFD works with the South Atlantic, Gulf of Mexico, and Caribbean Fishery Management Councils to conserve and manage the largest recreational fisheries and the second largest (by volume) commercial fisheries in U.S. federal waters. SFD's goal is to increase long-term economic and social benefits to the nation from living marine resources. With partners, and through 19 fishery management plans, SFD manages hundreds of fish and invertebrate species, ranging from diverse, relatively sedentary and vulnerable coral reef fish, like the popular snappers and groupers, to wide ranging pelagic species, like mackerel and mahi mahi (dolphin). These species support over 84,000 commercial fishermen and others employed in related industries, as well as more than 10 million recreational anglers.

### ***Protected Resources Division***

Through implementation of the MMPA and ESA, SERO's PRD manages marine mammals, and endangered and threatened species, including but not limited to corals, sea turtles, sawfish, sturgeon, right whales, bottlenose dolphins and many other species of concern. PRD is made up of four branches: Marine Mammal, Species Conservation, Sea Turtles and Fisheries, and Interagency Cooperation. Through policy, management, and public outreach, PRD strives to ensure the recovery and survival of protected marine species for future generations.

## Appendix 6.3: Regional Outreach and Education

SERO is committed to providing information about its activities and about the ocean in a clear and timely manner. Through its stakeholder engagement, we strive to:

- Provide clear and accessible information about regulatory requirements established by SERO.
- Improve and increase dialogue and feedback mechanisms among the general public, stakeholders, and SERO.
- Improve customer service and stakeholder satisfaction with agency interactions.
- Increase public and internal knowledge of NOAA Fisheries programs and messages.
- Improve collaboration and teamwork among NOAA Fisheries workforce, Councils, and other partner organizations.
- Integrate regional communications program with NOAA Fisheries national communication campaigns as appropriate.

SERO, in partnership with other NOAA offices, provides information to the public and stakeholders through a variety of channels. Information about our programs, regional activities, conservation messages, regulatory requirements and updates, and living marine resources is available through:

- Reports to the regional fishery management councils and interstate marine fisheries commissions about our activities.
- SERO web site with information on specific regulations and requirements and matters of general interest.
- Person to person communications from SERO staff and port agents.
- Public hearings on proposed regulations.
- "Town hall" style meetings on select topics.
- Letters to fishing permit holders.
- Press releases, media stories, social media, and other creative media interactions (e.g. Twitter, Facebook, iPhone on-camera interviews, etc.).
- *Federal Register* notices informing of regulations.
- Fishery Bulletins.
- Announcement of regulations through Vessel Monitoring Systems.
- Announcements through text alert system.
- NOAA Weather Radio and U.S. Coast Guard bulletins.
- Fact sheets and educational materials (pamphlets, cards, compliance guides, kids' activity guides, etc.).
- Presentations to school groups or participation in formal or informal education events (e.g. science fair judging, Skype sessions between scientists and students, career day presentations, presentations at continuing education venues and colleges, participation in the annual St. Petersburg Science Festival and Right Whale Festival, Marine Resources Education Program, etc.).

- Support of K-12 environmental education through the Gulf of Mexico Bay-Watershed Education and Training Program.
- Presentations at professional conferences.
- Public and community events, workshops, and messaging (e.g. boat and fishing shows; banners, signs, and billboards; meetings of fishermen, etc.).
- SERO Brown Bag Lecture Series.

Ways a member of the public can provide information to SERO include:

- Commenting during public sessions at regional fishery management council meetings.
- Participating in teleconferences to update stakeholders on management issues (e.g., recreational fishing for red snapper in the Gulf of Mexico).
- Commenting during SERO public hearings, town halls, or public educational events.
- Tweeting a question via @NOAAFish\_SERO.
- Writing a letter to SERO at any time.
- Calling SERO staff at any time during working hours.
- Responding in writing to a solicitation for information in a *Federal Register* notice.
- Sending an email to relevant staff or to SERO feedback email address found on our website or in announcements seeking comments.
- Asking for an appointment to meet a staff member.
- Visiting any port agent office.

## Appendix 6.4: Regional Partners

Aquaculture industry  
Commercial fishing industry  
Conservation groups  
Educational institutions  
Interstate marine fisheries commissions  
Local communities, city and town governments  
NOAA Fisheries Headquarters  
NOAA Fisheries Southeast Fisheries Science Center  
NOAA Office of General Counsel  
Non-Governmental Organizations  
Other federal agencies, including U.S. Coast Guard, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, U.S. Geological Survey and Federal Highway Administration  
Other NOAA Line Offices, including National Ocean Service, Office of Oceanic and Atmospheric Research (including Sea Grant) and National Weather Service  
Recreational fishing interests  
Regional fishery management councils  
Regional ocean partnership programs  
State agencies  
Take Reduction Teams