



2023 Ocean Conservation Work Group Work Plan and Progress Report

Reporting Period: July 2023 - December 2023

Work Group Webpage:

<https://www.midatlanticocean.org/ocean-planning/work-groups-collaborative-efforts/ocean-conservation/>

Work Group Lead: Kevin Hassell (NJ)

Work Group Members: Work Group membership is open to government and non-governmental entities operating in the 5 Mid-Atlantic states that are willing to participate in the activities of the work group. Members are expected to contribute on monthly work group calls and assist with implementation of projects.

Current Members Include:

Last Name	First Name	Organization
Blair	Devon	New Jersey DEP
Bristow	Avalon	MARCO
Camhi	Merry	Wildlife Conservation Society (NY)
Chesnin	Noah	Wildlife Conservation Society (NY)
Coakley	Jessica	MAFMC
Greenfield	Brent	National Ocean Policy Coalition
Haight	Terra	NY DOS
Hansen	Deena	BOEM
Hassell	Kevin	NJ DEP
Hogan	LeAnn	NOAA
Lieske	Kristi	DE NREC

MacDonald	Tony	MACO/Monmouth
Odell	Jay	MACO/Monmouth
Vilacoba	Karl	MACO/Monmouth

Work Group Goals, Objectives and Actions: This work builds on Healthy Ocean Ecosystem Actions 1, 2 and 6 of the 2016 Mid-Atlantic Ocean Action Plan:

Action 1: Identify ecologically rich areas of the ocean in the Mid-Atlantic region and increase understanding of those areas to foster more informed decision making. (p. 40)

Action 2: Map shifts in ocean species and habitats. (p. 41)

Action 6: Incorporate Traditional Knowledge of Tribes regarding ocean health in regional ocean planning in the Mid-Atlantic. (p.44)

ACTIVITY 1 - Provide a Forum

Expected Completion Date: Ongoing

- In 2023 define the realm of ocean conservation this work group will address and how climate change and other drivers will affect this work.
- Sponsor at least three webinars, covering topics such as marine sanctuaries, the state of knowledge on causes of marine mammal strandings, RWSC’s draft Integrated Science Plan for Offshore Wind & Wildlife, understanding workforce development opportunities in monitoring ocean wildlife and carbon dioxide removal and effects on wildlife.

A1 Progress Description: January - June 2023

- In January 2023 the Ocean Conservation WG hosted a webinar on “Marine Sanctuaries as a Conservation Tool.”
- In May 2023 the Ocean Conservation WG held a session at the MACO Ocean Forum (hybrid recorded event - <https://www.midatlanticocean.org/mid-atlantic-ocean-forum/2023-mid-atlantic-ocean-forum/>) covering Ocean Wildlife Conservation topics including; ocean wildlife concerns and new approaches to data synthesis by Pat Halpin; available ocean wildlife data and needs with Jay Odell describing data on the portal, Emily Shumchenia describing the Regional Wildlife Science Collaborative for Offshore Wind and their science needs plan, and Sue Barco using sea turtle data to elucidate data needs and concerns. The presentations ended with Jessica Coakley describing the MAFMC’s ecosystem approach to managing fish and fisheries and Sean Hayes describing protected ocean species efforts of NOAA

and how charismatic megafauna such as whales help support ocean wildlife and ecosystem protection. The session ended with mentimeter questions for the audience, including what should be the priority actions for this work group.

- In June 2023 the WG began the preliminary planning process for a fall webinar focused on understanding workforce development opportunities in monitoring ocean wildlife.

A1 Progress Description: July 2023 - December 2023

- The work group successfully drafted a comprehensive 2024 work plan outlining clear goals and outcomes.
 - The team initially explored a webinar focusing on whales but ultimately pivoted to an alternate conservation topic—sea turtles—following extensive meetings. Notably, a speaker has been secured, and the content for the upcoming webinar is finalized.
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ACTIVITY 2 - Increase Community Engagement

Expected Completion Date: Ongoing

In 2023 the work group will:

- Create content for MARCO's webpage about this work group with assistance from the Communications Team.
- Investigate ways to build stronger connections among stakeholders. Work across different groups to connect them to the common goal of ocean conservation.
- Establish a regular means of communication to facilitate discussion among various groups with various expertise and needs. This could include
 - online blogs or listservs to connect with underserved communities and technical experts in each state.
 - Develop ocean wildlife or ocean conservation Storymap(s) for the portal
- Provide stipends to allow members of underserved communities to attend the May Mid-Atlantic Ocean Forum. MARCO has funding to do this.
- Investigate avenues for reaching Mid-Atlantic Tribes in collaboration with Tribal Rep on the MACO Steering Committee and MARCO's contractor on Tribal Relations.

A2 Progress Description: January - June 2023

- A page was created on the MARCO website for the Ocean Conservation Work Group:

<https://www.midatlanticocean.org/ocean-planning/work-groups-collaborative-efforts/ocean-conservation/>

The page includes the 2023 work plan and will include this 6 month progress report.

- In May 2023 travel assistance was provided to students presenting posters at the Mid-Atlantic Ocean Forum.
- In May 2023 ocean conservation themed questions were asked to registrants and attendees of the Mid-Atlantic Ocean Forum and responses were analyzed to help inform future work for the Ocean Conservation Work Group.
 - Questions & Top Response:
 - What gaps in our ocean wildlife conservation measures keep you up at night? **Lack of data**
 - What additional information on the Ocean Data Portal would help identify ocean wildlife conservation priorities? **Mapped areas of high risk for ocean wildlife**
 - What approaches should MACO's Ocean Conservation Work Group use to advance ocean wildlife conservation over the next 5 years? **Support Research & Monitoring**

A2 Progress Description: July 2023 - December 2023

- In June 2023, MARCO initiated a Request For Qualifications (RFQ) targeted toward indigenous-led Tribal boundary organizations for the purpose of strengthening communication between the Regional Ocean Partnership (ROP) and Tribes. In October 2023, staff selected an Indigenous-led consulting organization and commenced the contract process. Subsequently, MARCO and the contractor held meetings to acquaint the latter with the ROP's structure, goals, and missions. This contract is an important step towards building respectful relationships with indigenous communities in the Mid-Atlantic. It will enable MARCO to identify ocean-related Tribal interests and priorities in a context that fosters mutual understanding. The insights gained will directly inform future capacity-building initiatives for Tribes engaging in the ROP process.

ACTIVITY 3 - Assist with the 30 X 30 Goal to Conserve 30% of the Mid-Atlantic Ocean by 2030

Expected Completion Date: December 2023

- In collaboration with the Portal Team, the work group will create a mechanism in the Ocean Data Portal that helps the general public understand where species abundance, biodiversity, etc. are greatest by:
 - Reviewing all available data layers on the portal.

- Conferring with relevant experts.
- Clearly documenting the synthesis process.
- The work group will work with the Ocean Mapping and Data Team and the Portal Technical Teams to define what a conservation theme encompasses. Initial ideas proposed by the work group for consideration include:
 - Existing and planned conservation areas
 - Space for public comments on proposed areas for conservation - some of which may come out of the 30 x 30 effort.
 - An ocean wildlife conservation theme for the Mid-Atlantic Ocean Data Portal.
 - Grouped layers related to ocean wildlife conservation theme to best depict areas with the highest abundance and diversity of seabirds, marine mammals, sea turtles, fishes, and corals.
- Assist with accurate messaging about activities that can and cannot take place in Marine Sanctuaries and Other Effective Conservation Measures (OECMs)
- Identify and cross-reference in the Mid-Atlantic Ocean Data Portal other portals that address the ocean conservation topic; e.g., [Save Our Seas](#), MMC, [America the Beautiful Atlas](#), etc.
- Investigate innovative methods to achieve ocean conservation goals

A3 Progress Description: January - June 2023

- For the May monthly work group meeting Michelle Lennox of NOAA was invited to attend to discuss NOAA's progress on the 30 x 30 America the Beautiful goal and the Atlas.
- In May and June 2023 the group discussed creation of an Ocean Conservation theme for the Portal. An outline/concept pare was created by Jay Odell and Karl Vilaboa and brought to the WG for comments/edits (see <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1xQi1dH2bV4N2SR2VzDEDpScUSSDW-vxV>).

A3 Progress Description: July 2023 - December 2023

- A new [Conservation theme](#) was created on the Portal to highlight areas where ocean and coastal conservation measures are proposed or currently in place in the Mid-Atlantic. It initially contained over a dozen maps, with plans to expand its offerings in the year ahead.
- [Three map layers](#) showing sanctuaries for blue crabs, oysters and submerged aquatic vegetation in the Chesapeake Bay and along Virginia's shoreline have been added to the Portal's new Conservation theme. The data was provided by the Virginia Marine Resources Commission (VMRC) through its [Chesapeake Bay Map web app](#).

- Work continued to evaluate options for visualizing conserved coastal lands on the Portal. A group of USGS map layers are now on the Portal Staging site and will be compared with data expected to be released in 2024 by the Nature Conservancy.

