

DRAFT

GULF OF MAINE ACTION PLAN

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For Review by the Council on the Marine Environment



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Introduction

Just as no man is an island, so too marine water bodies do not exist in isolation. The incongruity of applying political boundaries to common property resources is readily apparent when considering the realities of acid rain, marine wastes or declining fish stocks. Marine ecosystem health is the product of a multitude of precisely interwoven physical factors, many of which are not fully understood. Thus, a proper management approach for any marine water body must reflect the interrelated nature of the ecosystem and itself be comprehensive in character.

The Gulf of Maine, perhaps more than any other North American marine region, illustrates the need for a coordinated approach to environmental management. The boundaries that define the Gulf of Maine are physical rather than political. Separated from the North Atlantic by underwater banks, the Gulf acts as a semi-enclosed sea. Currents, nutrient cycles, water temperature and migratory patterns of marine animals combine to form a distinct marine region.

But evidence is accumulating that the Gulf's vitality may be at risk. Pollution, habitat destruction and overuse of resources threaten to degrade the health of the Gulf. Toxic contaminants are found in the Gulf's deepest basins; sediments found in several of its harbors contain exceptionally high levels of toxic substances. Pollution from sewage has forced the closure of thousands of acres of productive shellfish flats throughout the Gulf's shoreline. Steady eradication of habitat threatens wildlife, waterfowl and fisheries. Yet none of these problems live in isolation from one another. Constant and cumulative harm to the Gulf ecosystem proceeds as coastal population and intensive use of marine resources continues.

The great biologic wealth of the Gulf of Maine has been shared for centuries by the bordering states and provinces, though not without periodic conflict. It is this shared history that has provided a strong foundation for cooperative efforts by the states and provinces to draft the Gulf of Maine Action Plan, to protect the Gulf's environmental integrity. The Action Plan is designed to accomplish two tasks: to protect and improve the environmental health of the Gulf ecosystem and to minimize risks to public health from Gulf waters and resources. Accomplishing bold goals such as these in a large geographic region is made more complex by separate and, in certain cases, conflicting national jurisdictions. At its core, the Action Plan represents the consensus of the states and provinces that the ecological integrity of the Gulf of Maine supercedes all other interests. Thus goals regarding the sustainable development of its resources logically flow from this basic premise.

Within the Plan, broad goals are classified as they relate to three topics: Environmental Quality, Coastal Resources, and Marine Resources. The goals are general statements that represent the ultimate aim of the states and provinces for that issue. From the goals grew the particular objectives. The 47 objectives describe more specific tasks that, as completed, will slowly achieve the goals. However, simple description of a task has little more value than the paper it is written on. To assure that the objectives become concrete results, detailed actions were agreed upon to answer the questions of who will do what, and when. Where possible, a time schedule and anticipated budget are given for each action. Thus a clear schedule of tasks will direct state and provincial agencies and the Council on the Marine Environment in their efforts.

Progress toward achievement of Action Plan goals will be evaluated by the Council five years after adoption of this Plan by the premiers and governors of the region.

ACTION PLAN MISSION STATEMENT:

TO MAINTAIN AND ENHANCE MARINE ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY IN THE GULF OF MAINE AND TO ALLOW FOR SUSTAINABLE RESOURCE USE BY EXISTING AND FUTURE GENERATIONS

DEFINITIONS:

ACTION PLAN: a compilation of agreed-upon goals and objectives and a list of specific strategies or actions that will achieve the objectives for each goal

GOAL: general statements that describe what the community would like to achieve in the future. Goals reflect a consensual vision for a specific or general resource.

OBJECTIVE: specific, measureable milestones that, as achieved, incrementally attain long-term goals

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: use of resources in a manner that meets present needs and assures continued resource use by future generations

POLLUTANT: the introduction by man, directly or indirectly, of substances or energy into the marine environment which results in such deleterious effects as harm to living resources, hazards to human health, hindrance to marine activities including fishing, impairment of quality for use of sea water and reduction of amenities

CONTAMINANT: addition to the marine environment that does not cause adverse effects

HABITATS OF REGIONAL CONCERN: coastal and marine areas that provide habitat for animal or plant species and, due to specific factors, are important within the Gulf of Maine region

The Council on the Marine Environment

The Council on the Marine Environment will play a crucial role in the application of the Gulf Action Plan. As the link between the many state, provincial and federal agencies involved in Gulf management, the Council will be able to facilitate ongoing or future efforts by the five jurisdictions to maintain and enhance the health of the Gulf. Council support will come in many forms: funding assistance, dissemination of scientific data, improved state, provincial and federal communications, or heightened public awareness. The Council goal with respect to the components of the Action Plan will be to develop interjurisdictional mechanisms for resolving environmental problems within the Gulf region.

Council on the Marine Environment Action Plan Objectives:

1. to support existing and future regional agreements on shared environmental issues of concern, including but not limited to state/provincial oil spill contingency plans and scientific response plans, land-based toxics reduction plans, regional critical habitat protection plans;
2. to support regional efforts which facilitate the coordination of appropriate research initiatives in the region;
3. to encourage and help harmonize public education and participation initiatives in the region;
4. to support regional recommendations for improved coordination of marine and coastal management and enforcement programs; and
5. to support regional efforts to develop funding options for components of the Action Plan.

These objectives of the Council on the Marine Environment with regard to the provisions of the Action Plan may be expanded further as the Plan is developed and implemented.

The Action Plan contains three major issue categories: *Environmental Quality, Coastal Resources, Marine Resources*

Under each issue category are four areas of concentration: *Coordinated Management, Monitoring, Research, and Public Education and Participation*

1.0 Environmental Quality, goal: to sustain the integrity of the Gulf of Maine ecosystem

1.1 *Coordinated Management, goal:* to develop harmonious management approaches for the maintenance and enhancement of the environmental quality of the Gulf

Objectives:

1.1.1. to facilitate integration of Gulf monitoring, research and management programs

1.1.2. to assist in the development of a regional strategy to reduce point and non-point sources of pollution to the Gulf

1.1.3. to encourage the federal agency cooperation on state/provincial pollution control actions

1.1.4. to assist in the development of scientific strategies that ensure prompt assessment of the impacts of environmental catastrophes

1.2 *Monitoring, goal:* to provide information on the status, trends and sources of risks to marine ecosystem integrity (which includes habitat) in the Gulf of Maine

Objectives:

1.2.1. to assess the existing status and trends of ecosystem health by monitoring appropriate indicators, especially those that will allow early identification of change in environmental quality

1.2.2. to assess the impact of environmental management actions on risks to public health, the viability of harvestable resources, ecosystem health, and local economies as measured by the indicators developed for the monitoring program

1.2.3. where environmental degradation is suspected, identify the causes, especially as they reflect anthropogenic impacts and cumulative effects

1.3 *Research, goal:* to obtain and make available information required by resource managers to sustain the environmental quality of the Gulf of Maine

Objectives:

1.3.1. to coordinate and share scientific information and data on the environmental health of the Gulf

1.3.2. to coordinate research into the sources, fates of pollutants, particularly persistent toxics, and assess the cumulative impacts from those pollutants upon environmental quality

1.3.3. to establish protocols to standardize methodologies and create compatible QA/QC agreements for monitoring, testing of Gulf environmental quality

1.4 *Public Education and Participation, goal:* to cultivate a sense of stewardship among the citizens of the Gulf and to enable them to make responsible decisions

Objectives:

1.4.1. to facilitate development of a compatible regional PEP strategy for the Gulf

1.4.2. to assist and coordinate creation of educational publications on GOM environmental quality for a variety of user groups, including the general public, elected officials, and the media

1.4.3. to promote study of public attitudes toward and knowledge of the GOM

1.4.4. to support designation of a Gulf day or week, with specific events taking place, sponsored by states and provinces

2.0 Coastal Resources, goal: to assure the sustainable use of coastal land and water resources

2.1 *Coordinated Management, goal:* to develop interjurisdictional strategies for the sustainable use of coastal land and water resources

Objectives:

2.1.1. to support development of a comprehensive, integrated public health protection strategy for the GOM

2.1.2. to encourage evaluation of the enforcement of existing laws and regulations relating to coastal land and water resources

2.1.3. to encourage regional efforts to control the disposal of marine debris and marine wastes within the Gulf

2.1.4. to encourage the restoration, enhancement and protection of waterfowl, fisheries and wildlife habitat

2.2 *Monitoring, goal:* to provide information on status, trends and sources of marine-based human health risks in the Gulf of Maine and to provide appropriate and timely information to environmental and resource managers that will allow both efficient and effective management action and evaluation of such action.

Objectives:

2.2.1. to assess the existing levels, the trends, sources and economic impacts of acute and chronic risks to human health from pathogens in the marine environment

2.2.2. to assess the existing levels, the trends, sources and economic impacts of acute and chronic risks to human health from toxic compounds transmitted through marine foods and water contact

2.2.3. to assess the existing levels, the trends, sources, and economic impacts of acute and chronic risks to human health from biotoxins transmitted through marine foods

2.2.4. to provide information generated by monitoring activities to resource and environmental managers in a format that will allow design of appropriate rehabilitation, mitigation, damage avoidance procedures, and other management actions

2.2.5. to provide timely analysis, interpretation and presentation of program results; evaluate and update monitoring program based on these results as required

2.3 *Research, goal:* to obtain and make available information required by resource managers to sustain the environmental quality of the Gulf of Maine

Objectives:

- 2.3.1. to encourage development of a systematic approach to identification of coastal habitats of regional concern
- 2.3.2. to encourage development of a systematic approach to protection of identified coastal habitats of regional concern
- 2.3.3. to support evaluation of existing mitigation and restoration techniques for coastal habitats of regional concern

2.4 *Public Education and Participation, goal:* to cultivate a sense of stewardship among the citizens of the Gulf and to enable them to make responsible decisions regarding coastal resources

Objectives:

- 2.4.1. to encourage the public to become involved in coastal resource management issues at the local level
- 2.4.2. to facilitate educational exchanges among teachers and marine educators throughout the Gulf region
- 2.4.3. to foster improved communication among the scientific community, media, and elected officials
- 2.4.4. to support educational events for elected officials, with the participation of the business community
- 2.4.5. to encourage development of educational publications and other materials on coastal resource issues for specific user groups, such as tourists, recreational fishermen, visiting boaters

3.0 Marine Resources, goal: to assure the sustainable use of submerged marine land and water resources

3.1 *Coordinated Management, goal:* to develop interjurisdictional strategies for the continued sustainable use of marine land and water resources

Objectives:

3.1.1. to promote an ecosystem approach to marine resource management at the federal, state, provincial and local levels

3.1.2. to improve communication among state and provincial agencies about existing management strategies for specific marine resources

3.2 *Monitoring, goal:* to provide information on status, trends and sources of marine-based human health risks in the Gulf of Maine and to provide appropriate and timely information to environmental and resource managers that will allow both efficient and effective management action and evaluation of such action.

Objectives:

3.2.1. to develop a status and trends monitoring program to monitor the quality of specific marine habitats

3.2.2. to assess the existing status and trends in the ecological and economic viability of fish stocks, and identify the causes of change, especially those that can be related to harvesting

3.2.3. to assess the existing levels, the trends, sources, and economic impacts of acute and chronic risks to human health from biotoxins transmitted through marine foods

3.2.4. to assess the existing levels, the trends, sources and economic impacts of acute and chronic risks to human health from pathogens in the marine environment

3.2.5. to assess the existing levels, the trends, sources and economic impacts of acute and chronic risks to human health from toxic compounds transmitted through marine foods and water contact

3.2.6. to provide information generated by monitoring activities to resource and environmental managers in a format that will allow design of appropriate rehabilitation, mitigation, damage avoidance procedures, and other management actions

3.2.7. to provide timely analysis, interpretation and presentation of program results; evaluate and update monitoring program based on these results as required

3.3 *Research, goal:* to obtain and make available information required by resource managers to sustain the environmental quality of the Gulf of Maine

Objectives:

- 3.3.1. to promote adoption of coordinated approaches to marine research by federal, state and provincial agencies and among private laboratories
- 3.3.2. to support research projects devoted to the analysis of harvesting method effects on benthic habitat and GOM productivity
- 3.3.3. to encourage development of a systematic approach to identification of marine habitats of regional concern
- 3.3.4. to encourage development of a systematic approach to the protection of marine habitats of regional concern

3.4 *Public Education and Participation, goal:* to cultivate a sense of stewardship among the citizens of the Gulf and to enable them to make responsible decisions regarding marine resources

Objectives:

- 3.4.1. to facilitate educational exchanges among teachers and marine educators throughout the Gulf region
- 3.4.2. to foster communication among the scientific community, the media and elected officials
- 3.4.3. to encourage development of educational publications and other materials on marine resource issues in the GOM for specific user groups, such as commercial fishermen, shipping firms, ferry travelers

4.0 The Unfinished Agenda

Within this category will lie those particular Objectives and related Actions that are not found in the previous three categories. The Objectives and Actions of the Unfinished Agenda category merit attention but are not as high in priority as those listed above; they will be further developed as the Action Plan is reviewed and amended.

