

Strategic Planning Focus Areas
Developed by the NOAA Sea Grant College Program Strategic Planning Committee
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After careful review of the national, state and regional priorities reflected in recent plans and stakeholder outreach efforts, and an attempt to identify driving forces on the planning horizon, the Sea Grant Strategic Planning Committee has identified four strategic focus areas for the next national Sea Grant strategic plan. In addition, four cross-cutting themes that affect all the focus areas have been identified. Over the next five years, Sea Grant will work with its partners to make meaningful and measurable progress in all four focus areas, recognizing that individual state programs and regional consortiums will also emphasize other issues of importance in their states and regions.

Focus Areas

1. Sustainable Safe Seafood Supply

Rationale: The U.S. has witnessed the decline of many of its major fisheries at the same time that seafood consumption is on the rise, resulting in a seafood trade deficit of about \$9 billion a year. Over-fishing, habitat degradation, and increasing competition among coastal users have put our fishing industry in great jeopardy. Seafood safety is a growing concern as international trade increases and fish diseases and contamination become bigger problems. Aquaculture is opening up new opportunities to meet the growing seafood demand, but it raises concerns that need to be addressed for its full potential to be realized. Sea Grant has key roles to play in advancing our understanding of the nature of these problems and opportunities and in using its research, education and outreach capacities to support informed public and private decision-making and management activities that will lead to a sustainable supply of safe seafood into the future.

2. Sustainable Coastal Development

Rationale: Decades of population migration to the coast have transformed our coastal landscapes and greatly intensified demand on finite coastal resources. New housing developments, recreation facilities, energy development activities, port expansions and other business activities are bringing more people, jobs and recreational opportunities to coastal communities. They are also increasing the pressure on coastal lands, water supply, traditional coastal businesses, and on the coastal culture and way of life. To accommodate more people and activity and resolve the growing number of conflicts, we must develop new policies and management approaches to balance the conservation and use of coastal, ocean and Great Lakes resources. Sea Grant's well established roles as an honest broker and source of unbiased information make it a key player in responding to the needs for sound information for decision-makers, for convening stakeholders to seek common ground, and for facilitating the development and implementation of new coastal policies, plans, management approaches and conflict resolution strategies related to sustainable coastal development and economies.

3. Healthy Coastal Ecosystems

Rationale: Intensified development along the coast and related human activities are leading to water quality degradation, wetlands loss, invasive species and a host of other challenges that need to be understood and addressed in order to restore and maintain the healthy ecosystems that are the foundation for all life along the coast. Ecosystem based management, reduction and mitigation of anthropogenic impacts, protection of critical areas, and regional habitat restoration are some of the avenues we have identified to address these challenges. Sea Grant research, education and outreach initiatives must continue to play a major role in building our understanding of how these natural systems function, in advancing regional problem solving, and in supporting planners and decision-makers at all levels of government in moving toward an ecosystem-based approach to managing coastal resources.

4. Coastal Hazard Resiliency

Rationale: Sea level rise, increased number and intensity of coastal storms, and other climate-related changes are putting more people and property at risk along the nation's coasts with major implications for human safety and the economic vitality of coastal communities in coming decades. It is essential that residents and leaders in coastal communities understand these risks and learn what they can do to reduce their vulnerability and respond quickly and effectively to these events. Sea Grant with its strong education and outreach capabilities can play a major role in helping local citizens, decision-makers and businesses understand and plan for these events and maximize their communities ability to prepare, respond and rebuild when natural hazards strike.

Cross-Cutting Themes

Four cross-cutting themes were noted during the stakeholder input process. They will play significant roles in the selection of goals and strategies in each of the four focus areas.

Globalization. Globalization of technology, people, finance, products, education and decision-making is one of the major trends in the world today. The value of goods imported by the U.S. has doubled since fiscal 2000, with major implications for U.S. businesses, port capacity, and product safety. Ecosystem health is affected by factors beyond local, regional and national borders. Today, people and business have to function in a highly competitive global economy. A significant amount of policy development is taking place in international forums and being brought to national governments for ratification. All coastal, ocean and Great Lakes related thinking and action now requires a global perspective.

Climate Change Impacts. Climate change is accompanied by increases in the rate of sea level rise, more powerful storms, and ocean acidification, all with implications for coastal residents and property and the long-range futures of human and natural coastal communities. Alternative energy development has emerged as a national priority and coastal areas are now a major focus for alternative energy development: LNG terminals, wind turbines, tidal buoys, etc., with significant economic and environmental impacts. All coastal related planning and decision-making needs to take climate change and alternative energy development into account.

Coastal and Ocean Literacy. With more than half of the U.S. population living along or near the coast it becomes increasingly important that the American public and its federal, state and local decision-makers have a fundamental understanding of the issues and trade-offs related to managing our coasts. We cannot hope to address all of the challenges we face with regard to the protection, use and enjoyment of coastal, ocean, and Great Lakes resources unless we raise the level of understanding about the inter-connectedness and vulnerability of these resources. Equipping ourselves to deal with the challenges we face requires a wide range of educational activities: design and execution of K-12 and adult education curricula and programming, creation and application of usable knowledge for decision-makers, and recruitment for and provision of advanced marine professional education programs.

Decision-Making Capacity. Management and decision-making structures and processes are not keeping up with the growing pressures on the coastal environment. There is greater conflict among users at a time when decision-making remains fragmented and narrowly focused. Data and mechanisms are inadequate for identifying and addressing the short and long-term socio-economic impacts of the choices we face, the competing interests we need to balance, and the conflicts we need to resolve. Collectively, we need to transform our coastal management and decision-making processes in keeping with the growing complexity of the problems we face, and learn to integrate public and private decision-making and activities to create and sustain healthy human and natural coastal, ocean and Great Lakes communities. Sea Grant must harness its particular strengths to work collaboratively with university, intra-agency, inter-agency, and public-private partnerships to find integrated solutions to problems at the local, state, regional, national and international levels.