

US Gulf of Maine Habitat Restoration & Conservation Initiative

Increasing the Pace of Federal Investments in the Gulf of Maine

The Gulf of Maine and its abundant biological diversity are vital to human health and the region's economy. Millions of people depend on the Gulf of Maine for food, recreation, and transportation. It is a unique ecosystem, whose beauty and bounty enrich the lives of all who live, work and visit there. Yet each day, the waters of the Gulf of Maine watershed — its streams, lakes, bays, and beaches — are damaged by untreated sewage, toxic pollution, invasive species, and loss of wildlife habitat. Many diverse initiatives are underway addressing some of the problems, but until now there has been no unified and comprehensive plan, and the pace of restoration and conservation efforts has been hampered by a lack of federal investment in the region. There are manageable solutions, but if we wait the problems only get worse and the solutions more expensive.

Since 2008 state and federal agencies in the three Gulf of Maine states (ME, NH, & MA) have been working together with non-governmental organizations and other stakeholders to create the *Gulf of Maine Restoration and Conservation Plan*. The *Plan* was officially released at a press conference on December 8 at the Gulf of Maine Research Institute in Portland. It outlines over \$3 Billion in restoration and conservation program work that needs to be implemented over the next five years, with sustained investment for up to 20 years (\$12 billion) to ensure a vibrant ecosystem and strong economy for future generations.



The new *Plan* focuses on five key “issue areas”:

1. Protect and Restore Fish and Wildlife Habitats and Populations

Remove barriers in wetlands, rivers and streams; restore degraded coastal habitats; protect key parcels of shoreland habitat; clean up “ghost” fishing gear; map seafloor habitats; monitor fish and wildlife populations.

Estimated Investment Needed in first five years: \$267,513,000

2. Provide Clean, Healthy Coastal Waters

Upgrade outdated sewage treatment systems; reduce pollution from stormwater and other non-point sources; support reduction of pollution discharges from vessels; remediate contaminated sediment; implement state-of-the-art testing of coastal water quality.

Estimated Investment Needed in first five years: \$2,689,626,000

3. Conduct Science, Planning, and Communication Required for Regional Ocean Management, Marine Spatial Planning, and Ecosystem-Based Management

Conduct regional planning and integration; analyze socioeconomic and ecological changes; establish regional science-based communication program; provide data and decision support for ecosystem-based management and marine spatial planning; oversee implementation of the *Plan*'s Priority Actions.

Estimated Investment Needed in first five years: \$29,700,000

4. Promote Resilience to Climate Change

Monitor and assess climate change impacts on habitats; facilitate regional climate-smart planning; mitigate erosion of shoreline habitats; mitigate sea level rise impacts on salt marshes.

Estimated Investment Needed in first five years: \$33,800,000

5. Prevent and Detect Invasive Species, and Restore Affected Habitats

Conduct monitoring to detect invasive species; establish rapid-response teams to remove invasive

species; restore habitats degraded by invasive species.
Estimated Investment Needed in first five years: \$8,870,000

Total Estimated Investment Needed in first five years: \$ 3,029,509,000

It should be noted that these figures are quite conservative. In some cases, such as non-point source pollution for stormwater runoff for which reliable estimates were not available, the actual cost of mitigation is likely to be many times higher than indicated. Further, five-year estimates for programs administered by federal agencies without state involvement were simply not available and were not included at all. It is expected that when a detailed implementation plan is developed, many of these unaccounted costs will be determined and included.

Critical Steps for the Gulf of Maine

The Gulf of Maine is a latecomer among the ecosystems that have been getting the attention of Congress in recent years. The Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, authorized by Congress last year, received \$475 million in implementation funding for 2010 and is on track to receive \$322 million for 2011. Chesapeake Bay, Puget Sound, and others are also far ahead with federally authorized programs and \$10's of millions in appropriations each year for implementation. Now that we have a Gulf of Maine Restoration and Conservation Plan we are in a position to "catch up", but it will require action by the US Congress.

Several steps are anticipated:

- 1) Congress could begin by directing federal agencies to develop an implementation plan for the Gulf of Maine.
- 2) Congress will need to authorize the “Gulf of Maine Restoration Program” (or equivalent), as well as a “Gulf of Maine Restoration Program Office” of some kind, placing lead authority for coordination of the implementation effort with a single federal agency (probably EPA or NOAA)
- 3) Federal agencies will need to account for costs of implementation by including those costs in their annual budgets
- 4) Congress will need to appropriate adequate funds for implementation over a sustained period.

The Economy Will Benefit

The benefits of implementing the US Gulf of Maine Restoration and Conservation Plan go far beyond fixing some environmental problems. Implementation will have an enormous positive impact on the region's economy. A Brookings Institution report on the economic impacts of implementing a similar plan for the Great Lakes showed a return on investment in the form of jobs, economic growth, tourism, recreation, property values, and other economic activity of at least 2:1 in the short term, and up to 3:1 over a number of years.

Teaming up with Rhode Island

In the fall of 2010 as the US Gulf of Maine plan was nearing completion, state agencies in Rhode Island used the Gulf of Maine plan as a template to create a plan identical in format and in the issue areas considered. Since the two bodies of water are contiguous, this sets the stage for a more regional approach to restoration and conservation of all the coastal ecosystems of the northeast states. Agencies and conservation groups from the four states (Rhode Island, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Maine) have begun working together to this end.

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