

Atlantic Northeast Coastal Monitoring Summit December 10-12, 2002

Executive Summary

The *Atlantic Northeast Coastal Monitoring Summit* was held on December 10-12, 2002 in Durham, New Hampshire. The purpose of the Summit was to develop a coordinated regional monitoring network throughout the northeastern portion of the United States and southeastern portion of Canada (Nova Scotia/New Brunswick to Long Island Sound). The Summit focused on developing a strategy and framework for an ecologically driven regional program along with identifying new monitoring and research needs that correlate with the region's pressing management needs. Attendees included representatives from EPA, Environment Canada, U.S. and Canadian academic organizations, various state and local agencies from the region, as well as a broad base of regional resource and environmental managers.

A major focus of the Summit was to define the need for a coordinated monitoring network in the region. Discussions on regional issues such as nutrient over-enrichment; habitat loss, degradation, and restoration; and toxic contaminants were used as test cases throughout the Summit to determine whether a coordinated strategy could be developed. Participants were asked to consider how a monitoring network might be organized; what challenges and benefits could come from coordinated regional monitoring; how these efforts could be effective in assisting with solving regional environmental issues, and identifying unfulfilled monitoring needs and research necessary to solve regional environmental issues.

Participants in the Summit concluded that there is significant value in looking at environmental issues throughout the northeast region from a regional scale. An integrated monitoring network would give the region the ability to compare data on a regional basis with status assessment and early problem warnings being a future goal. The more information that can be supplied to managers and regulatory officials from a united approach with a common message, the more likely the message will be heard.

Summit participants felt that the organization of the coordinated effort would work the best if it was focused around specific questions to be answered and used currently active major monitoring programs. The initial step for coordination was to define the purpose and goals of the coordination. For example, the organization may assess the health of the overall region, characterize the status, assist managers in managing certain resources, or determine ecological functions and processes that operate throughout the region. Overall, participants felt that whatever the focus, major monitoring groups throughout the region (Gulf of Maine Council's Gulfwatch program, GoMOOS, EPA's National Coastal Assessment, Plum Island Sound LTER, National Estuary Programs, National Estuarine Research Reserves, the National Park Service, Mercury Deposition Network, aquaculture monitoring programs, Massachusetts Water Resources Authority, and industry) along with management and the public need to be involved. Attaining a critical mass and identity, including a name of its own, was considered essential to the coordinated regional monitoring.

Several challenges and benefits of a coordinated regional monitoring network were noted during the Summit. Challenges identified by participants were: participating organizations flexibility to change, costs of intercalibration, data rights, and some loss of autonomy for programs involved. Benefits of the program included a better understanding of the overall region, improved communication between scientists throughout the region, coordinated efforts with more accurate

regional data that can be compared, more interaction with managers and the public. Summit participants felt by creating adaptive management tools, the group could lead the region towards a constantly improving, better informed, smarter decision making process.

In addition to having the necessary monitoring program involvement, the group felt that publications from the entity should be environmental manager- and public-friendly to assist them in making more educated decisions. However, it was deemed important that the regional monitoring network not take on management responsibilities in any way, rather focus on educating managers and the public to environmental problems. Periodic assessments, maps, interpretation tools, vehicles for workshops, seminars, and opportunities to share knowledge were suggested as ways to include management and public participation.

The last issue addressed by the Summit Participants was identifying unfulfilled monitoring needs and research. Each group identified a list of priority and secondary monitoring needs based on the knowledge of participants and in some instances noted programs already in existence that would be useful to include in the coordinated monitoring effort. Efforts by the Gulf of Maine program are underway to develop an inventory of all monitoring programs throughout the area. Completion of the inventory was considered by participants to be foundational to the coordination effort and could be used to determine gaps in data collection for any parameters chosen for coordination.

Based on the positive response of Summit participants to a coordinated monitoring strategy, Summit organizers plan to convene an Oversight Committee to begin working on the following:

- Implementation plan for the regional monitoring strategy (0-6 months);
- Establish connections with large currently active monitoring programs throughout the region (0-6 months);
- Locate and acquire a fiscal agent to assist in developing the network (6-9 months);
- Identify short-term, intermediate, and long-term products critical to assess management issues and monitoring priorities (6-9 months);
- Hold a summit to determine appropriate regional indicators (12-18 months); and
- Develop a *State of the Environment Report* for the region (18-24 months)

The Steering Committee decided to establish an oversight group that includes environmental managers, state, Federal, and international agencies and environmental organizations (e.g., U.S. EPA, Environment Canada, GOM, NGO's, dischargers, researchers, and the public) to plan the initial stages of the program, obtain seed money, and establish critical involvement from key groups.

For additional information on this effort, please visit www.gulfofmaine.org for a link to the coordinated monitoring effort website. If you are interested in assisting with this effort, please contact David Keeley of the Maine State Planning Department at David.Keeley@state.me.us or Christian Krahforst of the Massachusetts Office of Coastal Zone Management at Christian.Krahforst@state.ma.us.