Fact Sheet #1
February 2003

Atlantic Northeast Coastal Monitoring Summit
Creating a Coordinated Regional Monitoring Network

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.

Focus

A major focus of the Summit was to **define the need for a coordinated monitoring network** in the region. Participants considered 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
- Identify unfulfilled monitoring needs and research necessary to solve regional environmental issues.

Results

Participants in the Summit concluded **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.

Figure 1. Coordinated Monitoring Network Area

Summit participants felt that the organization of the coordinated effort would **work best if it was focused around specific questions and used currently active major monitoring programs.** Initial steps for coordination are:

- Defining the purpose and goals,
- Assess the health of the overall region,
- Characterize the status,
- Assist managers in managing certain resources, and
- Determine ecological functions and processes that operate throughout the region.

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) need to be involved along with management and the public. **Attaining a critical mass and identity** was considered essential to the success of the coordinated regional monitoring. Several **challenges and benefits** of a coordinated regional monitoring network were noted during the Summit.

Challenges

- Participating organizations flexibility to change,
- Costs of intercalibration,
- Data rights, and
- Some loss of autonomy for programs involved.

Benefits

- Better understanding of the overall region,
- Improved communication between scientists throughout the region,
- Coordinated efforts with more accurate regional data that can be compared, and
- 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.

The workshop recommended environmental manager- and public-friendly publications to assist 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 of 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.

Next Steps

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 Oversight Group will include 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).

The Steering Committee is currently pursuing funding through various grant opportunities to:

- Develop translation tools of regional contamination including a regionally integrated baseline of contaminants in marine and estuarine ecosystems.
- Develop metrics and indices to describe the status and trends of nutrient related water quality.
- Build upon existing entities data quality and data accessibility through the improvement of the flow of higher quality environmental data , the production and data products such as maps, databases, on-line data access, the development of predictive tools/modeling, training exercises, and environmental assessments.

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 being an active participant in this program, 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.