



Completed and ongoing marine ecoregional assessments. © The Nature Conservancy

Setting Priorities for Marine Conservation

A global effort to help establish regional visions for the conservation and management of ocean and coastal resources.

Ocean and coastal ecosystems, from estuaries to coral reefs, are some of the most productive, yet threatened natural communities in the world. As the world's population and dependence on marine resources grows, increased efforts in conservation and effective management are needed to restore and maintain healthy oceans and coasts.

To support these efforts, The Nature Conservancy is working with stakeholders around the world, including communities and national governments, to develop marine ecoregional assessments that guide decisions and identify efficient actions for marine conservation and management. By using an ecoregional planning process, we can collaborate with our partners to conserve whole ecosystems rather than a collection of independent sites. Across the tropical, temperate and polar seas, we are working to conserve the full range of ocean and coastal habitats in ways that benefit marine life, local communities and coastal economies.

Components of an ecoregional assessment

The Nature Conservancy and partners have developed a comprehensive ecoregional planning process that is widely used around the world. The resulting ecoregional assessments provide the vision for better conservation and management of marine ecosystems. The ecoregional planning process includes:

Identifying targets

In each region, data is used to identify targets, or the species and ecosystems that fully represent the region's biological diversity.

Analyzing threats

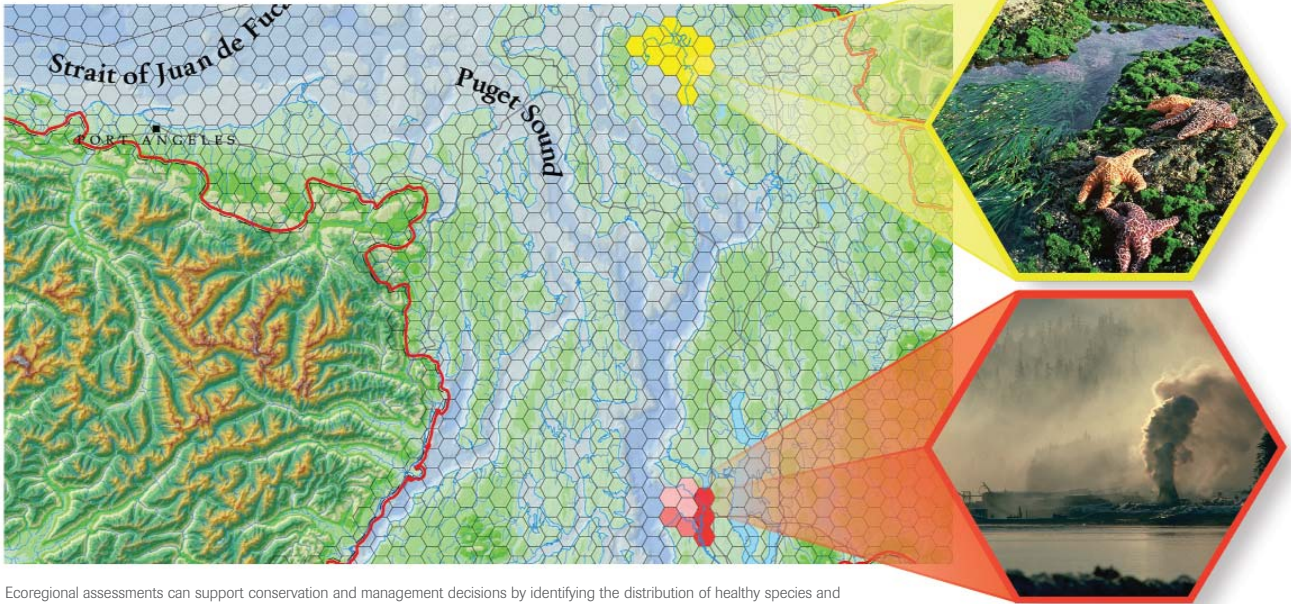
Information on threats to species and ecosystems is examined to identify where actions are urgently needed and where threats can be abated.

Establishing goals

For each target, goals are set to ensure that conservation and management protect a full representation of the marine environment.

Setting priorities

Marine ecoregional assessments identify networks of priority sites for marine conservation. The information and process can be tailored to evaluate alternate sites to balance socio-economic concerns from multiple stakeholders.



Ecoregional assessments can support conservation and management decisions by identifying the distribution of healthy species and systems (like intertidal communities, shown in yellow) as well as threats to those species and systems (like pollution, shown in red).

© The Nature Conservancy

© Charlie Ott

Charting a course for the future

Marine conservation and management involves many stakeholders, organizations and agencies often working independently and at different scales. The Conservancy's approach to regional marine planning aims to unify these independent efforts through flexible, adaptive approaches. By jointly meeting the needs of many partners, we develop region-wide visions that support an ecosystem-based management approach.

The Conservancy's marine ecoregional planning process synthesizes the relevant scientific knowledge about species and habitats by collecting data from public agencies, research organizations and other sources. Once compiled, this integrated information supports a greater understanding of each region's marine environment. Stakeholders have a clearer picture of the state of their natural areas and resources as well as insight into the challenges to their continued survival.

Delivering tools for decisions and management

Regional, ecosystem-based management is gaining support around the world as the best approach for conserving and sustainably managing declining marine resources. The Conservancy's ecoregional planning process provides a comprehensive set of data and decision support tools as a foundation for partners to develop better ecosystem-based management. The process also identifies an array of priority sites for natural resource management. No assumptions are made about the type of actions necessary for conservation and management at these sites. Rather, a full range of conservation strategies, such as habitat restoration, submerged lands acquisition, and management of extractive activities are considered based on the ecological, social, economic and political needs of each individual site.

Innovations in planning

The Nature Conservancy works to continually advance innovative techniques and applications for the conservation of near shore and offshore habitats. We are developing new scientific methods for integrating planning and action across land and sea. We take land-based activities into consideration, such as the cutting of coastal forests, which can impact the health of near shore environments. Conservancy scientists and partners are also developing new models to identify habitats on the deep ocean floor and to ensure that these ecosystems and their species are better represented, conserved and managed.

A common vision and lasting results

Around the world, partners are using the Conservancy's marine ecoregional assessments to guide their decision-making and improve management approaches. Meaningful, lasting implementation depends on the continued participation, action and support of partners and stakeholders at many levels. By engaging partners, marine ecoregional assessments provide the foundation for a common vision and course of action for marine conservation around the world.

For additional information:

The Nature Conservancy

Global Marine Initiative
marine@tnc.org
nature.org/marine

The Global Marine Initiative works across the Conservancy and with partners to protect and restore the most resilient examples of ocean and coastal ecosystems in ways that benefit marine life, local communities and economies.