



**NOAA**  
**FISHERIES**

# Annual Guidance Memorandum

2023-2024





## OUR VISION

Exceptional science and service for a changing Atlantic.

## OUR MISSION

Provide the scientific information and tools necessary for productive, sustainable, and healthy marine ecosystems and coastal communities in our region.

## OUR VALUES

The NEFSC values people, science, and service as we carry out our mission.

### Photo Credits

Cover (center): Two photobioreactors used to grow large quantities of phytoplankton for the Northeast Oyster Breeding Center at our Milford Laboratory. Credit: NOAA Fisheries/George Sennefelder.

Cover (bottom, left to right): 1) Launching a drone for whale research. Credit: NOAA Fisheries/Danielle Cholewiak. 2) Two very young flatfish captured on our Fall Bottom Trawl Survey. Credit: NOAA Fisheries/Jessica Blaylock. 3) InFish interns at the James J. Howard Laboratory completing a required course. Credit: NOAA Fisheries.

Inside front cover: Sunset viewed off the stern of the NOAA Ship *Henry B. Bigelow*, during our Fall Bottom Trawl Survey. Credit: NOAA Fisheries/Jessica Blaylock.

Page 4: Beth Phelan and Jon Hare at the James J. Howard Laboratory transfer ceremony in July 2023. Credit: NOAA Fisheries/Kristen Jabanoski.

Page 5: Audy Peoples with Niskin bottles on our Ecosystem Monitoring Survey. Credit: NOAA Fisheries.

Page 6: Postdoctoral researcher Sam Gurr collects a sample during the three-year multigenerational ocean acidification experiment with bay scallops at our Milford Laboratory. Credit: NOAA Fisheries/Katie McFarland.

Page 7: (stacked, top to bottom) 1) Gray seal pupping survey, Muskeget Island, Massachusetts. Credit: NOAA Fisheries. 2) An autonomous underwater vehicle in development for use on our Sea Scallop Survey and for other research. Credit: NOAA Fisheries/Heather Soulen.

Page 8: David McElroy entertaining visitors at the 2023 Woods Hole Science Stroll. Credit: NOAA Fisheries/Heather Soulen.

Back cover: Feeding the harbor seal at the Woods Hole Science Aquarium. Credit: NOAA Fisheries/Heather Soulen.

Dear Northeast Fisheries Science Center,

We have developed 5-year strategic priorities for our science center that will inform this annual guidance memo and programming for fiscal year 2024 and beyond. Last year, as we developed our New England and Mid-Atlantic Geographic Strategic Plan for 2023–2026, we used the NOAA Fisheries 2022–2025 Strategic Plan to guide our AGM and annual programming. We accomplished a lot in fiscal year 2023. I hope you are as proud of our accomplishments as I am.

We allocated our center-wide \$121 million budget, and we funded and awarded \$860,000 for facilities maintenance and improvements. We navigated challenging survey logistics.

We are developing strategies to mitigate the effect of offshore

wind energy development on our surveys. Science center leadership regularly visited each lab throughout the year. We committed to a long-term presence in the mid-Atlantic by taking full ownership of our James J. Howard Laboratory at Sandy Hook, New Jersey. This transfer of ownership was years in the making.

Some of our scientific accomplishments from FY23 include:

- Completing a three-year multigenerational ocean acidification experiment with bay scallops and establishing the Northeast Oyster Breeding Center.
- Developing tools to estimate how offshore wind energy development will affect fisheries operations and our ability to maintain our long-term data time series on marine ecosystems.
- Maintaining secure access to our data, with excellent Information Technology Division support, to complete our scientific mission.
- Conducting 26 management-track and three research-track stock assessments to help inform fishery management decisions.
- Establishing the Catch Accounting and Monitoring System, a single comprehensive source for all Northeast U.S. commercial fisheries catch.
- Establishing the Protected Species Division, which will enhance our capacity on protected species issues.
- Expanding our Inclusive NOAA Fisheries Internship Program across more regions.

Next year we will summarize our accomplishments from FY24 in the FY25 AGM, to track progress, share our diverse portfolio, and showcase the impacts we have in the region. We hope you can see yourself and your important work in our strategic priorities and the FY24 AGM.

Our values form the foundation of our long-term strategic priorities: people, science, and service. Under each value, you will find specific goals for FY24. The goals listed are not all-inclusive—much of our work continues or builds upon past efforts—this memo instead provides focal points.

We will strive to embody our cultural norms to serve our staff, stakeholders, and partners. In FY24 we are focused on the communication and collaboration cultural norms, which are consistent themes throughout this AGM. I hope you will join me in continuing to improve our workforce, fostering sustainable fisheries while protecting at-risk marine species, better understanding their habitat and how the marine ecosystem functions, supporting domestic aquaculture production, and using technology and our partnerships to their fullest potential.

You should be proud of the important science, service, and stewardship our network of laboratories has provided to NOAA and the nation.



Jon Hare  
Science and Research Director  
Northeast Fisheries Science Center

**Aspiration:** Create and maintain a workplace culture that exemplifies our science center’s cultural norms.

**Environment/Support Needed:** Consistently emphasize the cultural norms and our focus on people.

**Priorities:**

- Support diversity, equity, and inclusion.
- Improve our hiring, welcoming, and professional development procedures.
- Strategically communicate our successes internally and externally.
- Provide guidance, resources, and assistance to cultivate and foster our cultural norms.

## PEOPLE

People achieve our science center’s mission. Supporting our staff is key to our success as a scientific public service organization. Here are our crosscutting division goals focused on people for FY24.

**Development and Learning:** We will cultivate staff learning and growth with the support of our Learning Implementation Team. Specific objectives include improving psychological safety, using modern technologies, and improving project management skills.

**Collaboration:** We will promote and reward collaboration and communication within divisions and across our center, develop and implement tools, structure and incentives to facilitate enhanced collaboration, and build a collaborative team focused on efficiency and innovation.

**Communication:** Our center will develop a communication plan and accomplish quarterly goals, focus on internal communication between branches and divisions, actively engage with the fishing industry in setting behavioral standards, and ensure fisheries observers have the resources they need for safety and accountability.

**Team Building:** We will celebrate and recognize staff, identify and fill staffing needs, improve teamwork across our center, and develop an organizational excellence team.

**Cultural Norms:** We will conduct staff surveys and use feedback to determine which cultural norms need improvement, and provide opportunities and the environment for positive interactions among staff. Division leadership will support social events and community building throughout the center.

**Environment:** We will embrace a new paradigm for the workplace, including hybrid work schedules and prioritizing facility projects, and respond to work-space challenges.



**Aspiration:** Provide the scientific information and tools necessary to support productive, sustainable, and healthy marine ecosystems and coastal communities.

**Environment/Support Needed:** Champion scientific development and leadership in a changing environment.

**Priorities:**

- Use an ecosystem-based approach to provide scientific advice to support our mission.
- Conduct science collaboratively and adaptively.
- Actively communicate scientific results through presentations and publications.

## SCIENCE

Science is the heart of our mission. We provide the scientific information and tools necessary for productive, sustainable, and healthy marine ecosystems and coastal communities in our region. Here are our crosscutting division goals focused on science for FY24.

### Collaboration

- We will continue to expand and strengthen center-wide scientific support for developing the annual State of Ecosystem reports.
- Our Resource Evaluation and Assessment Division will develop a framework for engagement with our new Offshore Wind Ecology Branch, and lead our work under the NOAA Climate, Ecosystems, and Fisheries Initiative.
- Our new Protected Species Division will hold regular strategy meetings with the leadership team to identify and review emerging topics.
- To better support scientific programming, we will increase collaboration between the Ecosystems and Aquaculture Division and our Operations, Management, and Information Division.
- To improve our science and service through knowledge and data exchange, we will continue to engage with international science partners.

### Surveys

- The Population and Ecosystems Monitoring and Analysis Division will complete our long-standing resource surveys (bottom trawl, sea scallop, surfclam/ocean quahog, shark) with their associated lab research.
- We will complete two large projects intended to address current challenges we face in how we conduct our surveys.
- Offshore wind energy development is fundamentally changing how we can survey inside wind lease areas. To ensure that our valuable long-term data collection continues, we will complete our plan to mitigate these effects.
- As the ocean warms, fish distributions change in response. We will also evaluate if and how our Bottom Trawl Survey stratification should change to account for this effect.
- We will continue to transition the sea scallop survey onto new platforms using both dredges and next-generation optical survey methods.



- We will continue to expand our marine mammal and sea turtle monitoring capabilities with a focus on North Atlantic right whales
- We will continue to conduct the Ecosystem Monitoring survey, the longest continuous program at our center.
- We will continue to collect data on hydrography, ocean chemistry, and plankton in the region.

### Assessments

- We will continue to conduct stock assessments for federally managed and protected species in our region.
- We will continue the development of decision support tools for resource management.
- We will conduct scientific reviews of the agency’s regulatory documents in the region.

### Data Infrastructure

- We will expand and build on using virtualization, clustering, cloud, and containers to reduce our physical IT footprint.
- We will expand wireless access throughout all of our facilities.
- We will implement a cloud roadmap—a plan that outlines the key steps and activities we’ll follow when implementing a cloud solution—to address current and anticipated needs.
- We will establish a data governance lead and identify data stewards in every division.
- We will implement an integrated observer data-collection system for data entry, debriefing, auditing, and reporting.
- We will scope modernization of the Study Fleet Management System, and data collection systems for the Gulf of Maine Bottom Longline Survey and the Hook and Line Survey.

### Leadership Support

- We will review all funding sources that support science and align our support divisions’ prioritization processes accordingly.
- We will enhance safe working environments on land and at sea by reporting and documenting safety issues, and tracking how they are resolved.
- We will advance and adapt our strategic priorities as needed, accomplish annual action plans, and have regular status update meetings to identify and review emerging topics.
- We will develop a strategy for key engagements

with external partners and effectively use public webspace and social media platforms.

### Data Collection and Reporting

- We will work with partners to achieve data collection goals and meet data delivery timelines for the Fishery Monitoring and Research Division’s monitoring and research programs.
- We will share Ecosystems and Aquaculture Division findings with colleagues and constituents at the local, regional, and national levels.

### Science Innovation

- Our research track assessment process will evolve to include oversight and broaden engagement across the science center.
- Branches will hold internal meetings focused on emergent programmatic needs.
- We will advance the use of emerging technologies (autonomous underwater vehicles, uncrewed aircraft and marine systems, optics, acoustics, genomics, monitoring with satellites).



**Aspiration:** Provide excellent, responsive, timely, collaborative, and proactive service to our staff and partners.

**Environment/Support Needed:** Recognize and reward excellent service.

**Priorities:**

- Develop and leverage partnerships and external collaborations to advance our strategic priorities.
- Support our staff with a nimble, service-oriented approach.
- Provide excellent service to our partners and stakeholders.

## SERVICE

As a scientific public service organization, service is deeply embedded in all of our work. Our science serves the public, decision-makers, the fishing and aquaculture industries, and our academic partners. We are always working to better serve communities in our region and to become a more diverse and inclusive workforce reflecting the demographics of the nation. Here are our cross cutting division goals focused on service for FY24.

**Internal Support:** We will establish formal project prioritization processes for the Operations, Management, and Information and Information Technology Divisions to support our scientific programming. We will identify additional funding and collaboration opportunities to optimize support resources and maintain a safe working environment, virtually and in-person. We will also celebrate positive collaboration with awards for staff.

**External Support:** We will communicate about our scientific products and foster collaboration with stakeholders and partners throughout the region. We will continue to support collaboration between the fishing and science communities by meeting with stakeholders to align ideas for data needs and programmatic goals. We will continue existing and initiate new routine communication with key partners, including crisis communications. We will seek out opportunities for informal and formal collaborations, within and beyond our science center.

**Outreach and Education:** We will support academic collaborations and internships to meet our needs for science and outreach support. We will execute seasonal gear trials in collaboration with ecosystem managers and gear developers. We will develop a communications plan that is aligned with our strategic prioritization process.







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OFFICIAL BUSINESS

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