



RECREATION



Coastal and marine recreation in New England is ingrained in the region's economic and social fabric. Recreation on the ocean and coast includes many of New Englanders' most time-honored and beloved activities, including boating, swimming, surfing, diving, fishing, bird-watching and whale watching. Cumulatively, recreation and tourism directly contributed nearly \$10 billion to the coastal economy of New England in 2013 (in GDP).¹

Residents of and visitors to the Northeast US spend approximately 100 million person-days (Massachusetts alone is about 30 million person-days) at over 1,000 ocean beaches, representing about 10 percent of total beach visits for the United States.² Most of this beach activity is concentrated in the summer months, and more than half of beach visits include swimming. In addition to beaches, many NPS properties are located along the coast, including Cape Cod National Seashore and Acadia National Park, which had almost 7 million visitors between them in 2014.³ There are also countless state, municipal, and private conservation lands and parks along the coast that support a range of recreational activities and provide access to the ocean. The top five recreational activities among individuals participating in a survey conducted for ocean planning were going to the beach, scenic enjoyment, swimming and body surfing, biking and hiking, and wildlife viewing.⁴

While the most highly used recreational areas are onshore or within a mile or two of the coast, recreational activities are widespread and can be found throughout the planning area. Scuba diving, fishing, whale watching, boating, and sailing can occur well offshore. Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary is entirely within federal waters, 25 miles east of Boston, and is a destination for each of these recreational activities. In addition, recreational events, such as sailing races, regattas, fishing derbies, and others, result in a high concentration of activity, often over a short period of time, in specific nearshore and offshore areas.

There is an abundance of anecdotal and experiential knowledge of recreational use of the ocean. However, traditionally, information actually documenting the spatial extent and economic impacts of some of these activities has been limited. As a result, the RPB engaged in a number of initiatives to better understand the extent and economic importance of recreational activities in the region:

- In 2012, the Northeast Recreational Boater Survey was conducted by a partnership of organizations including SeaPlan, NROC, representatives of the boating industry, the New England states, the state of New York, and the USCG. The survey characterizes when, where, and how New Englanders and New Yorkers motor and sail for fun,⁵ based on input from boaters themselves. The more than 12,000 boaters participating in the study provided important information about the economic output of recreational boating and boaters' perspectives on coastal issues. The survey identified nearly 374,000 marine boaters with boats registered between Maine and New York, with survey results suggesting that they collectively undertake more than 900,000 boating trips on the ocean each year. Such activity contributes approximately \$3.5 billion per year and the equivalent of nearly 27,000 year-round jobs to the



Northeast US economy.⁶ Most boating occurs within about 20 miles of the coast with an increasingly higher density of activity closer to shore. Certain whale-watching, other types of wildlife-viewing, sailing, and recreational fishing trips can extend farther offshore. Much of this boating is supported by hundreds of boat launches and 600 marinas, which employ more than 5,000 people and generate about \$400 million annually in regional GDP.⁷

- In 2015, the RPB conducted a study in partnership with Point 97, Surfrider, and SeaPlan to characterize other recreational activities in the Northeast.⁸ With input from industry

representatives, stakeholder groups, and an RPB steering committee, the study collected information, including the spatial footprint, on commercial whale-watching, scuba diving, and marine events through participatory workshops with industry representatives and using online mapping tools. Employing a different methodology, the study collected information on individual recreational uses, including sea kayaking, surfing, and other shore-based, surface water, diving, and wildlife and sight-seeing activities. Many of these activities have a seasonal focus (whale watching and diving occurring predominantly during the summer,



better-weather months), although activities such as scuba diving do occur year-round. Whale watching is one of the larger commercial components of the recreational sector operating offshore, with over 30 businesses throughout New England and New York. Companies operate vessels ranging from small charters with six passengers to large charters out of hubs such as Boston and Bar Harbor, Maine, that may accommodate up to 400 passengers and serve thousands of patrons daily.⁹

REGULATION AND MANAGEMENT

As with other marine-dependent uses, federal regulatory agencies are required by existing law to assess the potential impacts of proposed offshore activities to recreation through, for example, the environmental review process under NEPA and the requirements of specific permitting and leasing authorities such as RHA and OCSLA. The USCG has the responsibility of assessing and dealing with a wide variety of potential navigational risks to all vessel traffic in US ports and navigable waterways (see the Marine Transportation section). These assessments may inform the regulatory and environmental review processes identified above. Depending on the results of the assessment, these agencies may decide to develop impact avoidance, minimization, or mitigation measures.

State agencies are usually involved in reviewing the effects of proposed actions on recreational activities because they have extensive knowledge of different recreational uses. State coastal zone management programs help promote and protect public access to the coast. Other state agencies manage beaches, boat launches, coastal parks and trails, boat registrations, and saltwater fishing licenses and permits. State marine patrols or environmental police monitor commercial and recreational activities, support search and rescue operations, mediate disputes, enforce boat registration requirements, and generally have extensive knowledge of recreational uses in different locations.

Even with all these agencies monitoring recreational activity, however, assessing the potential impacts of new proposals to recreational activities can be challenging. Every stretch of the coastline provides recreational opportunities, and almost everyone who visits or lives near the coast participates in some form of coastal recreation. Also, because recreational use is so widespread, representation of the recreational users and sectors in permitting and regulatory processes is often diffuse and dependent on the specific areas and activities that are potentially affected. In addition, proposals for offshore projects often include several phases of activity,

each with its own unique spatial and temporal characteristics, which may or may not intersect with each particular form of recreation occurring in a given area. Therefore, local knowledge of the recreational activity is often necessary to fully understand how an area is used. Finally, as with other human uses, many recreational activities rely on a healthy ecosystem and can thus be impacted by activities throughout the system, not just at a given area.

Even with all of these considerations, impacts and conflicts with new activities are more likely to occur nearest to shore owing to the prevalence and variability of recreational activities in coastal areas. Recreational activity, both the intensity of use and the range of different recreational pursuits, tends to decrease farther offshore. In some cases, however, offshore activities present different types of conflicts and permitting considerations.

MAPS AND DATA

The Portal includes the following map products characterizing recreational activities.

Boating

The Boating theme features two maps from the *2012 Recreational Boater Survey*, including a map of actual boating routes provided during the 2012 boating season, and a map showing the relative density of those routes over that time. It also includes a map of long-distance sailing races from the *2015 Characterization of Coastal and Marine Recreational Activity in the US Northeast*.

Whale watching

The Whale Watching theme includes a series of maps depicting information obtained through participatory geographic information system (PGIS) workshops with approximately 20 whale-watching companies from New York through Maine during the *2015 Characterization of Coastal and Marine Recreational Activity in the US Northeast*. The maps show “general use areas,” reflecting the extent of whale watching in the past three to five years, and “dominant use areas,” indicating areas routinely used by most whale-watch operators, most of the time. It also includes “transit areas” from homeports to general or dominant use areas.

Scuba

The Scuba theme includes a single map of scuba diving areas derived from information provided by the scuba diving community and individual recreationalists during the *2015 Characterization of Coastal and Marine Recreational Activity in the US Northeast*.

Recreational areas

The Recreation Areas theme contains a series of map layers primarily depicting onshore and nearshore recreation areas and facilities. These areas and facilities include water trails, boat launches, national parks, state-managed and municipally managed properties, national wildlife refuges and wildlife management areas, and other preserves and sanctuaries. These maps were developed by the Portal Working Group, with input from recreational industry representatives and state agencies.

Coastal use surveys

The Coastal Use Surveys theme includes a series of maps with recreational activity points and board and paddle events. These data were provided by individual recreational users through the *2012 Recreational Boater Survey* and the *2015 Characterization of Coastal and Marine Recreational Activity in the US Northeast*.



OVERVIEW

ACTIONS

- Rec-1 Maintain existing maps and data on the Portal
- Rec-2 Develop and incorporate additional data about recreational activities when available
- Rec-3 Inform regulatory and environmental reviews of agency actions for their potential impacts to recreational activities
- Rec-4 Identify potentially affected recreational stakeholders



ACTIONS: MAINTAIN AND UPDATE DATA

Rec-1. Maintain existing maps and data on the Portal:

The RPB will consider methods and opportunities to update the boating, whale-watching, scuba, and other maps derived from online surveys and participatory workshops. The intent of any new methodology will be to ensure the updated maps are informed by recreational stakeholders. However, different methodologies may be more suitable for budget conditions or new technologies, or for partnering with stakeholder groups and leveraging other efforts. The map of coastal recreation areas will be updated by the Portal Working Group annually using existing authoritative sources.

Rec-2. Develop and incorporate additional data about recreational activities when available:

RPB agencies will continue to seek additional ways to fill information gaps on recreational activities by leveraging other projects, incorporating information from state-based planning and management activities, and reviewing the results of government and industry-based surveys. Chapter 5 includes science and research priorities related to better understanding human activities and their connection to coastal communities. Maps and data will be added to the Portal when these priorities are addressed.

ACTIONS: INFORM REGULATORY AND MANAGEMENT DECISIONS

Rec-3. Inform regulatory and environmental reviews of agency actions for their potential impacts to recreational activities:

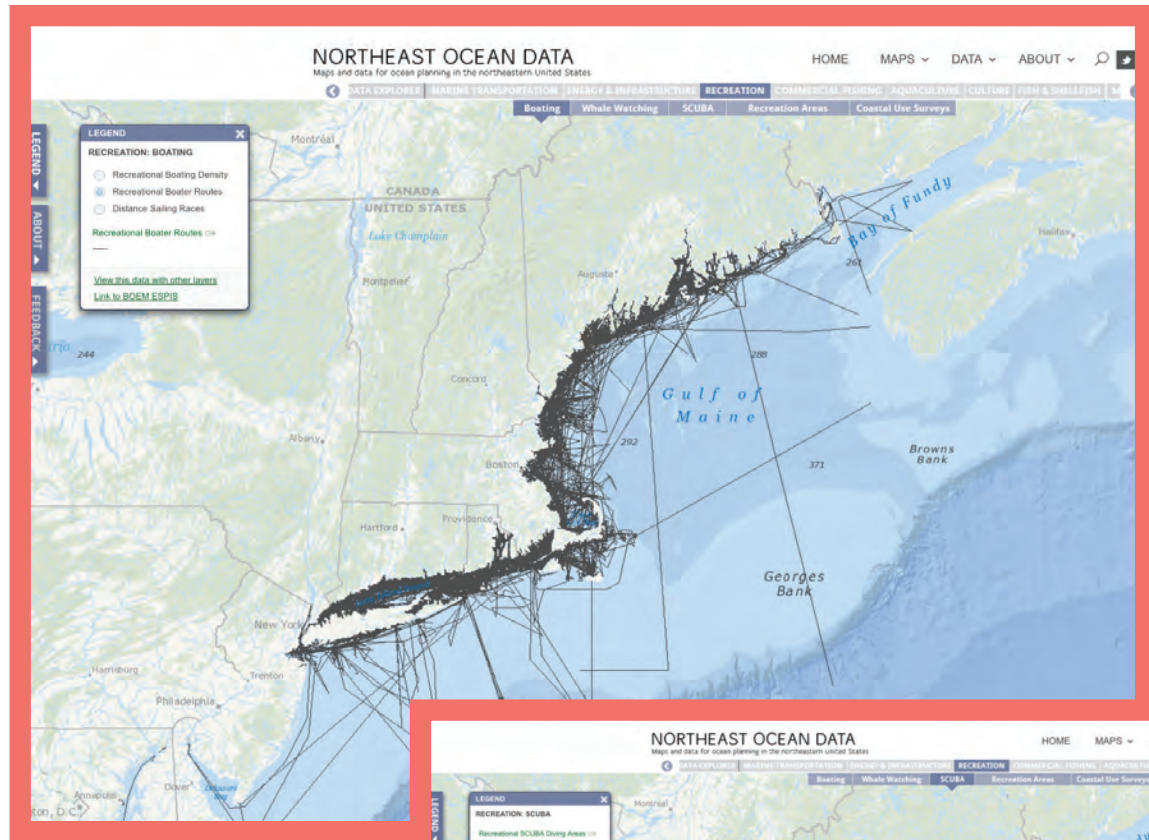
RPB agencies, to the extent practicable, will use the maps and data described in this section when considering whether new offshore projects or management activities may affect existing recreational activities. Conflicts with recreational activities are more likely to occur in nearshore areas because the majority of these activities have the highest concentration of use within the first several miles of the coast. For example, newly proposed aquaculture facilities, cables and pipelines making onshore connections, dredging and navigation projects, and nearshore energy

installations are more likely to intersect with recreational activities in the coastal zone. Farther offshore, conflicts and impacts may still occur to important boating, fishing, whale-watching, and diving areas, but the frequency and intensity of recreational activities generally diminishes away from the coast. However, the nature of all these interactions will be unique, according to the specific spatial and temporal characteristics of both the newly proposed activity and the form of existing recreation. These maps and the Plan will help identify additional information needs for determining whether a proposed agency action conflicts with or impacts recreational uses. Specifically:

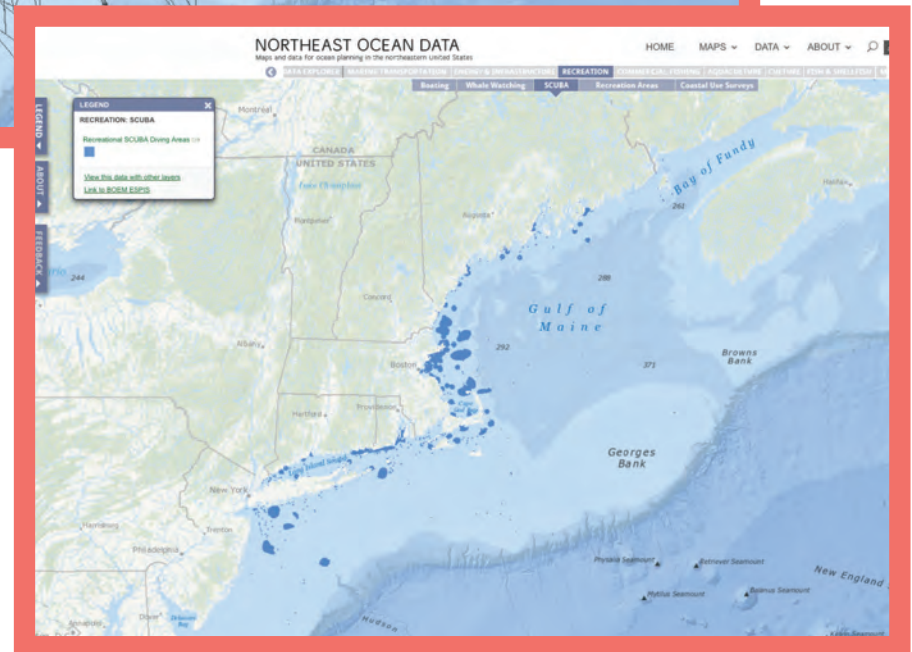
- USACE and BOEM, through RHA and OCSLA, are required to consider the potential impacts to existing ocean uses when making a permitting or leasing decision for new activities. The information and the data resources described within the Plan will provide an important beginning step in identifying recreational uses that may be affected by these new activities.
- The USCG and other agencies will use Plan data to help inform the regulatory and environmental review processes that affect recreational activities.



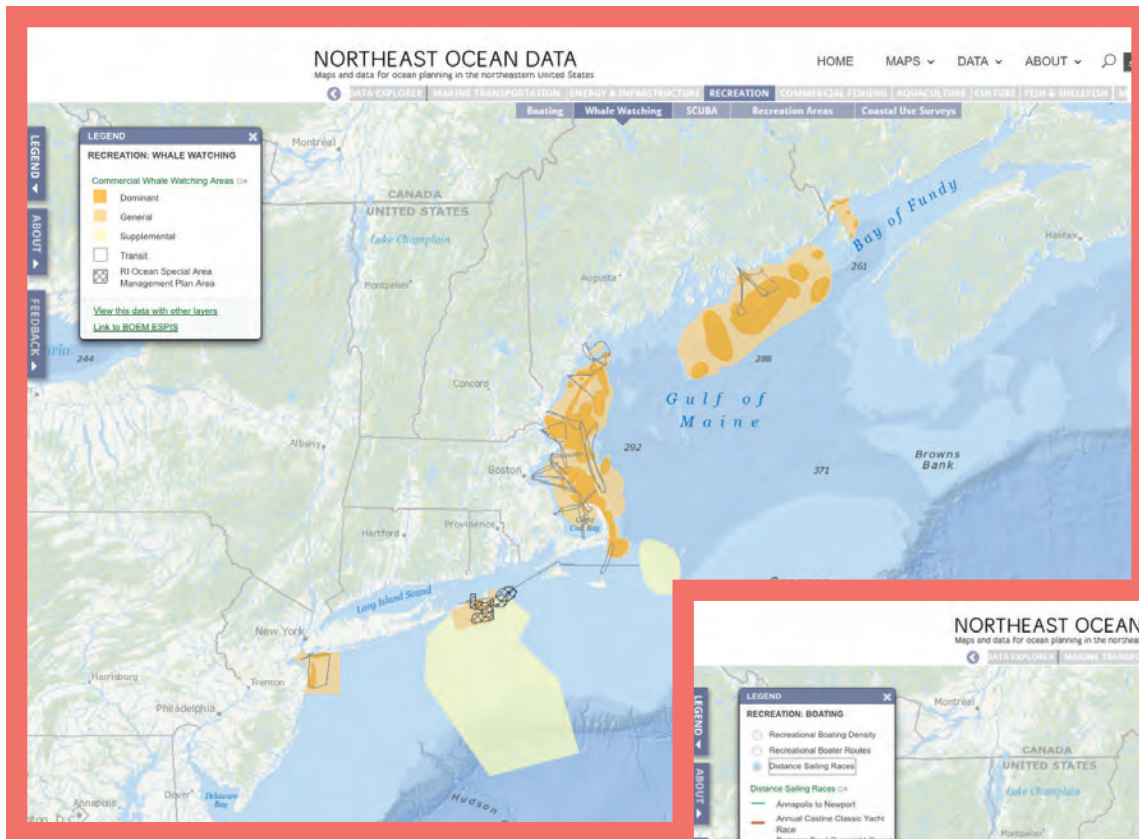
Rec-4. Identify potentially affected recreational stakeholders: RPB agencies will use the Portal to help identify recreational stakeholders potentially affected by a proposed agency action. There are countless opportunities to recreate on the ocean in New England, and recreational activities are widespread and important for tourism, spiritual enjoyment, and sporting and competitive events. Appropriately, the Portal contains information on a wide range of recreational activities, which will enable regulatory agencies to hone in on those activities or events that are most likely to be impacted and to identify the appropriate stakeholders to engage for additional information. In many cases, regulatory agencies can see obvious linkages in the maps between offshore recreational areas and onshore ports and communities, thereby focusing stakeholder engagement efforts on the most likely ports, communities, industries, and even parks and marinas to be affected. This action also relates to the best practices described in Chapter 4 regarding coordination with stakeholders, given that available data may not completely characterize all aspects of recreation in New England marine waters.



Recreational boating



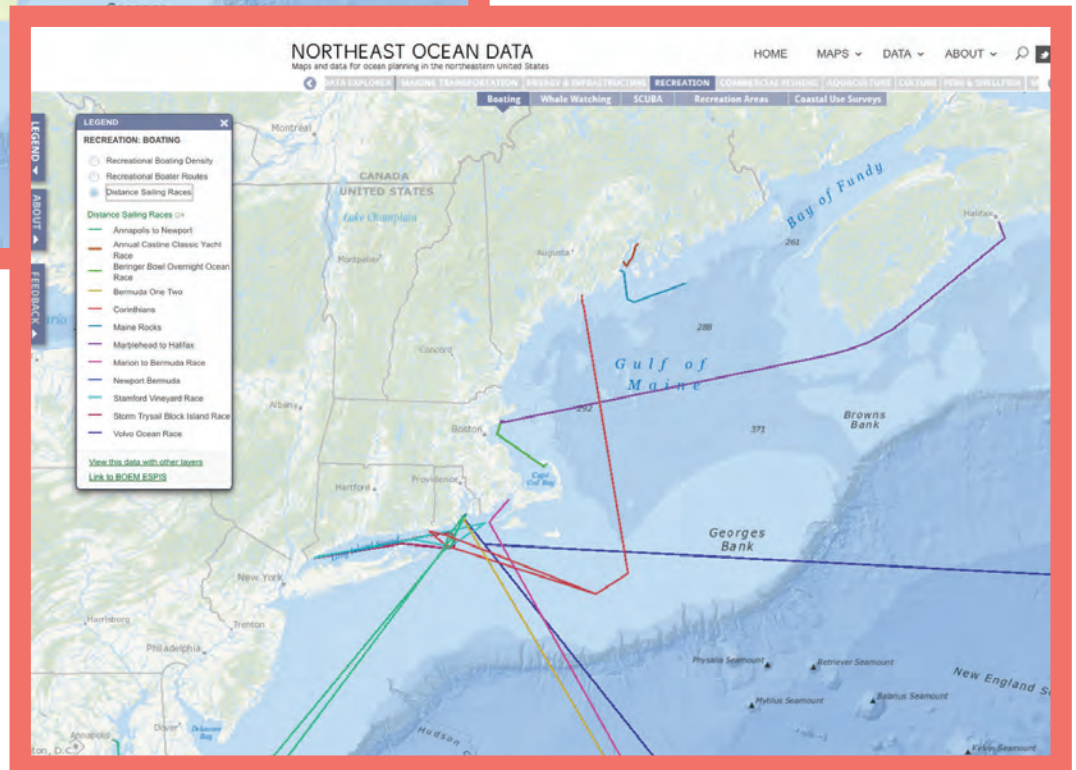
Scuba diving



Commercial whale watching

The highest density of recreational activity occurs within the first few miles of the coast. Therefore, nearshore projects, such as aquaculture facilities, cables and pipelines making onshore connections, dredging and navigation projects, and smaller energy installations are more likely to intersect with recreational activities.

There are also important whale-watching, diving, fishing, and recreational events occurring farther offshore. Although recreational activity farther offshore is comparatively less dense, the areas used for whale watching, diving, fishing, and for recreational events are important for them and sometimes to specific ports. These activities may intersect with larger energy and aquaculture installations proposed in those areas.



Recreational events: Distance sailing races