

FISCAL YEAR 2023

ANNUAL ACCOMPLISHMENTS REPORT



NOAA Regional
Collaboration
NETWORK



Members of the Regional Collaboration Network gathered on the Big Island of Hawai'i to engage with local partners and inform NOAA services through local examples and connections. Building relationships with the communities that we serve is an integral part of effective contribution to the NOAA's strategic priorities.



On the Cover: Hawai'i's legendary voyaging canoe, Hōkūle'a, being welcomed to Aanchgaltsóow (Auke Bay, Alaska) in the ancestral lands of the Áak'w K̓wáan.

INTRODUCTION

DEAR READERS,

It gives me great pleasure to share with you some of the most inspiring accomplishments of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Regional Collaboration Network (RCN) in Fiscal Year 2023.

The RCN comprises over 175 NOAA employees and core partners, serving on eight regional teams both at Headquarters and across the United States and its Territories. These teams, featuring individuals from each NOAA Line Office, foster diversity that enables cross-connectivity across NOAA's multitude of projects and activities. This synergy brings together the agency's diverse capabilities nationwide to enhance our service to the communities we engage with. I am proud to support the outstanding work accomplished by this dedicated group, who go above and beyond to improve NOAA's service to the Nation.

I am thankful for the RCN's continuous efforts this year to disseminate NOAA's tools and services to our partners and the public. The 2023 RCN Annual Workshop took place in Hawai'i, where RCN members met with numerous NOAA partners, learned about the importance of traditional practices, and engaged in community-led work to learn more about the people we serve. The RCN also expanded its [regional climate and equity pilot projects](#), aiding vulnerable communities in understanding, preparing for, and responding to climate change. Each team's activities were aligned with NOAA's strategic goals and priorities, effectively connecting NOAA's experts and resources within the regions. Moreover, each team cultivated connections with congressional staff and represented NOAA in various outreach events, enhancing awareness of NOAA resources.

I invite you to join me in expressing gratitude to the RCN for its successful work and encourage you to delve into the achievements presented in this Accomplishments Report.

Sincerely,

Ben Friedman

NOAA Deputy Under Secretary for Operations



ABOUT US

Many of the complex challenges that drive NOAA's mission are place-based, and require interdisciplinary approaches and regionally tailored solutions. The Regional Collaboration Network addresses regional challenges by engaging and connecting people and resources within the regions and with headquarters, in ways that are rich in regional insight and inform action.

Vision

A unified and regionally integrated NOAA

Mission

To identify, communicate, and respond to regional needs; catalyze collaboration; and connect people and capabilities to advance NOAA's mission and priorities



UPDATE ON CLIMATE AND EQUITY PILOTS IN THE REGIONS

NOAA's Regional Collaboration Network is supporting the agency's commitment to sustained engagement with underserved communities through [seven Climate and Equity Pilot Projects](#). Each regional pilot is responding directly to feedback received from partners during discussions that occurred at the [Climate and Equity Roundtables](#). In 2023, these pilot projects developed and expanded in scope, each taking a unique, place-based approach and contributing to relationship-building with local communities and also having significant potential for broader impact.



ALASKA REGIONAL COLLABORATION TEAM

Pilot partnership between NOAA and the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium (ANTHC)

The Alaska Regional Collaboration Team's pilot project partnered with the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium (ANTHC) to strengthen the relationship between NOAA and ANTHC. Through collaboration, the project aimed to create a framework that better connects NOAA climate-related resources to Tribal needs through the existing Tribal Health System in Alaska and center Tribal voices in climate change discussions and actions. This effort achieved multiple objectives in fiscal year 2023. The ANTHC established a new Climate Initiatives Program bringing together their Center for Environmentally Threatened Communities and Center for Climate and Health. With Jacqueline Qataliña Schaeffer serving as the Director and additional staff hires, ANTHC's capacity to support

Tribes is growing. One of the major accomplishments of this project includes ANTHC's publication of the Unmet Needs of Alaska's Environmentally Threatened Communities Assessment and Recommendations Report that outlines funding needs, priorities, and recommendations "to help improve the effectiveness of federal and state government support for Alaska communities to address climate and environmental threats". ANTHC will continue advancing the development of a "Risk Assessment Program" as a strategic way of providing technical assistance to communities facing flood, erosion, and permafrost hazards.



NOAA and the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium (ANTHC) gathered together for a partnership meeting on May 24, 2023 at the ANTHC Campus in Anchorage, Alaska.



NORTH ATLANTIC REGIONAL COLLABORATION TEAM

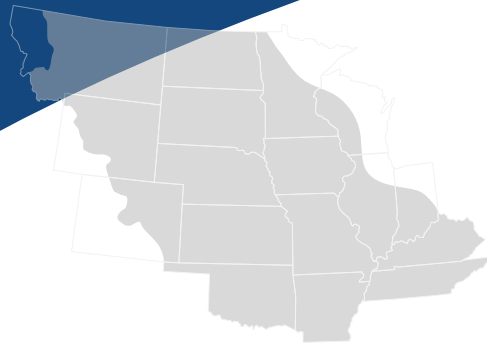
Connecticut Community Participation & Risk Communication Pilot

The North Atlantic Regional Collaboration Team's pilot project explored innovative ways to engage communities and improved risk communication. The team worked with Connecticut Sea Grant, which led pilot activities in Bridgeport, New Haven, New London, and Norwich, Connecticut that focused on building relationships with community organizations and leaders in these historically underserved communities. A key partner, [Connecticut Institute for Resilience and Climate Adaptation](#), held five additional community meetings to obtain feedback on their equity and justice tool, and provided catering and gift cards as incentives to join. The team expanded

this pilot in 2023 to support [Climate Health Equity Fellowships](#) in collaboration with the [Medical Society Consortium on Climate and Health](#). The project engaged multiple NOAA offices and provided resources to the 2023 fellows, who included thirteen physicians of color who are becoming leaders in climate and health equity education, advocacy, and policy solutions while completing capstone projects designed to address climate change impacts in underserved communities. This pilot will continue to identify ways to better engage communities in climate planning and risk communication and advance climate equity.



NOAA Administrator, Dr. Rick Spinrad, joined Virginia Sea Grant Director, Troy Hartley, NOAA OneHealth Lead, Julie Trtanj (not pictured), and Tom DiLiberto of NOAA's Office of Public and Constituent Affairs to share NOAA's work at the intersection of climate and health at the March 2023 Climate Health Equity Fellowships orientation in Washington, DC.



CENTRAL REGIONAL COLLABORATION TEAM

Building Knowledge to Support Equitable Climate Resilience

NOAA's Central Region Collaboration Team partnered with the Cooperative Institute for Research to Operations in Hydrology through the University of Minnesota on their pilot project. The project focused on improving the understanding, interpretation, and use of forecasts and hydrological data products and services and enhancing preparedness and resilience of Upper Mississippi River communities. The project team included both climate experts and social science experts, who completed identification of climate data

to use and created synthetic modeling simulations. The model created by this pilot is expected to be a huge advancement for river forecasting. The community engagement team completed an expansive identification of stakeholders and review of existing mapping efforts to help understand communities impacted by floods and droughts. The team will work on identifying communities for targeted engagement and completing a communications strategy to support regional engagement around the hydrologic models.



Below-normal rainfall and above-average temperatures intensified drought conditions of the Mississippi River leading to lowest water levels in a decade.

PACIFIC ISLANDS REGIONAL COLLABORATION TEAM

Poly-Forestry Climate Pilot with a Native Hawaiian Homestead Community



The goal of the Pacific Islands Regional Collaboration Team's pilot project was to blend traditional knowledge associated with agroforestry and planting with western science. NOAA and its partners worked with the community to co-develop knowledge and to understand: 1) how the climate is affecting the Pana'ewa area and thus the long-term viability of traditionally reliable "canoe-plant" food sources for the community; and 2) how climate variability affects relative abundance of food sources over the short-term. NOAA's partner, [Keaukaha-Pana'ewa Farmers Association](#), prepared a pilot site, clearing it of invasive species and installing fencing and irrigation systems. The team was also an active participant in community workdays at the pilot site organized by the partner.

In order to determine what type of products the community is interested in co-producing, the team is planning a workshop with various experts throughout the Pacific region who specialize in agroforestry, which combines agriculture and forestry to create sustainable land use practices. The project will continue to build knowledge about the effects of changing weather and climate patterns, foster community engagement, and increase agricultural resilience to climate change impacts in the Pana'ewa Hawaiian homestead.



The Pacific Islands Regional Collaboration Team's pilot project aims to establish a food forest of "canoe-plants" — a species-rich, multilayered poly-forestry system that contains useful food and medicinal plants and extends up, down and out.



GULF OF MEXICO REGIONAL COLLABORATION TEAM

Building Relationships and Community Resilience with the Pointe-au-Chien Indian Tribe of Southeast Louisiana

The Gulf of Mexico Regional Collaboration Team's pilot project continues to enhance NOAA's relationships with the Pointe-au-Chien Indian Tribe (PACIT) in Southeast Louisiana. NOAA and Louisiana Sea Grant staff and representatives of the PACIT had several engagements to address resilience challenges of this community. The pilot prioritized active listening and building relationships to strengthen trust. These connections were supported by joint work with community members to co-produce solutions that addressed community needs. The team sponsored NOAA staff to participate in a workshop with external partners for the Tribal Coastal Resilience Index pilot, which is a self assessment tool used by communities to better understand their strengths and needs, and connects with how NOAA tools and data can enhance Tribal community resilience and adaptation efforts. NOAA's [Center for Operational Oceanographic Products and Services](#) continued

to finalize tide predictions located near the PACIT, providing useful information for fishers in the community. The team spread awareness of these efforts through presentations to a variety of audiences, such as the People's Justice Council, the participants of the NOAA Florida Diversity and Inclusion Workshop, and the Gulf of Mexico Climate and Resilience Community of Practice. The team also mentored a [NOAA Experiential Research and Training Opportunities](#) graduate student working to identify feasible locations to farm oysters in alternative ways where PACIT members already harvest oysters, or in other areas important to the community. The pilot will continue to demonstrate how NOAA partners to build connections between resilience, traditional knowledge, culture, and language, and will inform how NOAA interacts with similar communities.



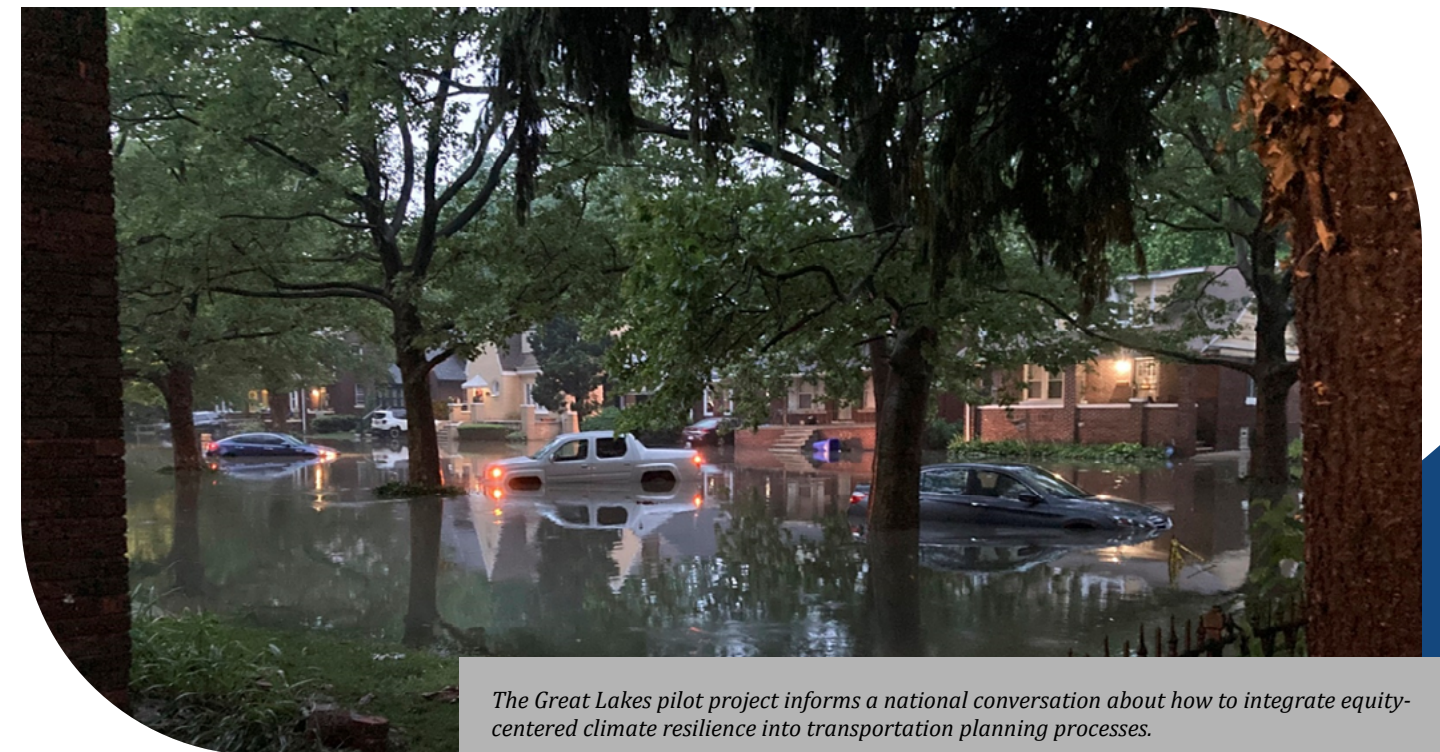
The Pointe-au-Chien Indian Tribe faces ongoing climate-related hazards, such as acute impacts from hurricanes, coastal erosion, rising water levels, and saltwater intrusion, that affect their ways of life and threaten culturally sensitive areas in their communities.

GREAT LAKES REGIONAL COLLABORATION TEAM

Climate and Equity Centered Transportation Planning for Southeast Michigan

NOAA's Great Lakes Regional Collaboration Team partnered with the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments (SEMCOG) to develop methods for integrating equity into planning decisions and to make transportation systems in southeast Michigan more resilient to flooding impacts from climate change. A summary of national and state equity policies in transportation planning was created to highlight key transportation related equity factors and the current tools available to facilitate equity analyses. This pilot project was incorporated into a cooperative agreement between NOAA and the U.S. Department of

Transportation (USDOT) with the goal of expanding the findings across the country. In partnership with USDOT, NOAA also coordinated efforts with the Detroit Thriving Communities Initiative, which prepares communities to better access federal funding for projects, to integrate the team's approaches. Currently, connections are being developed with research partners who can represent community perspectives and priorities. This will help create the analysis of access to core services in a 7-county region from the community perspective.



The Great Lakes pilot project informs a national conversation about how to integrate equity-centered climate resilience into transportation planning processes.

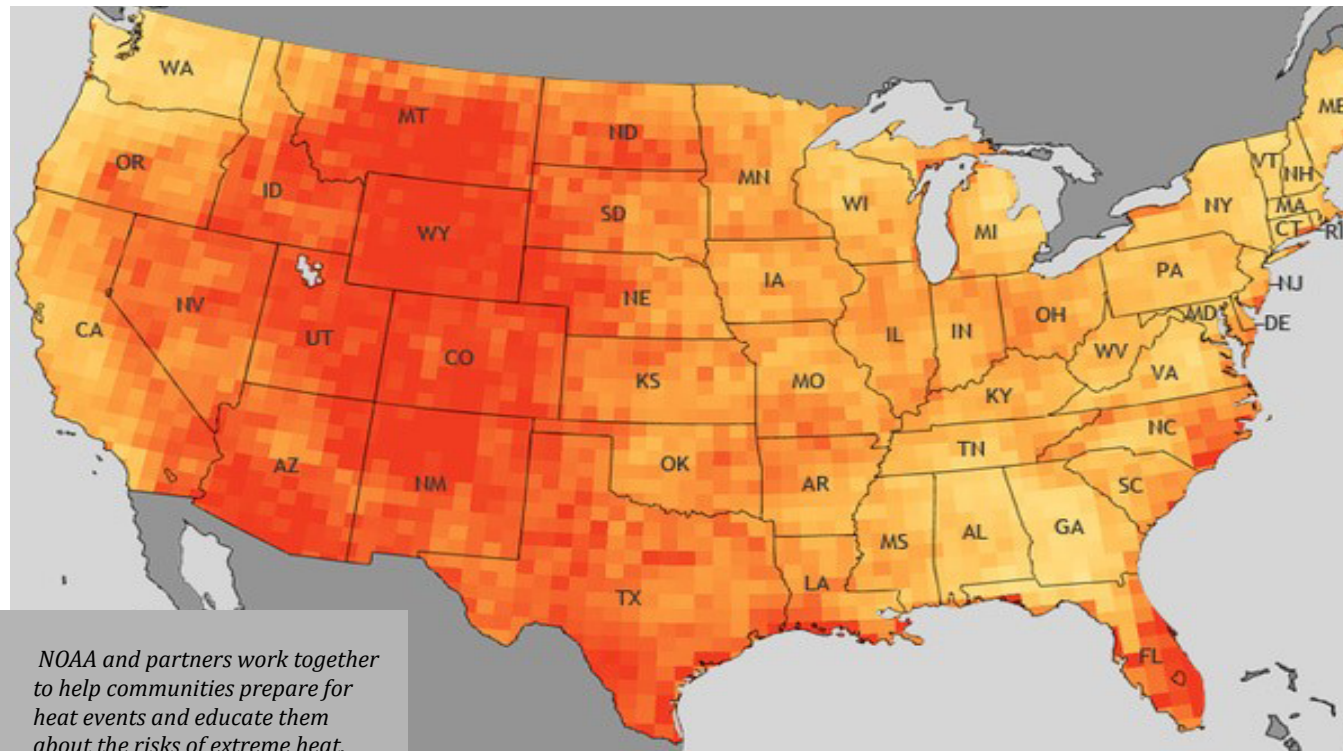


SOUTHEAST & CARIBBEAN AND WEST REGIONAL COLLABORATION TEAMS

Building Capacity for Heat Resilience through Community Monitoring, Planning, and Intervention

The heat resilience pilot project sought to enhance understanding of local-scale extreme heat impacts and improve heat awareness communication and intervention across agencies and organizations in four municipalities: Charleston, South Carolina; Miami, Florida; Las Vegas, Nevada; and Phoenix, Arizona. The Southeast and Caribbean and West Regional Collaboration Teams engaged local communities to collect heat data in some localities using sensors, and leveraged data from [National Integrated Heat Health Information System Urban Heat Mapping Campaign](#).

The teams then convened with federal, state, municipal, and non-governmental partners in each community to complete realistic extreme heat scenario planning exercises based on the sensor and mapping data. NOAA and partners combined their recommendations for improved communications and interventions to reduce heat risk for vulnerable populations in After Action Summaries for all localities. The teams will continue cross-locality collaboration and work closely with partners on implementation of these recommendations.



NOAA and partners work together to help communities prepare for heat events and educate them about the risks of extreme heat.

NETWORK - WIDE INITIATIVES

NOAA ONE HEALTH WEBINARS



The Regional Collaboration Network worked with the [NOAA One Health Initiative](#) on a series of webinars to highlight NOAA's work on health related issues in each region. This webinar series featured a variety of topics such as climate induced ecological shifts, Alaska Native Tribal Health, harmful algal blooms, seafood safety, air quality, extreme heat, and marine mammal health.

- [West Region Webinar](#) explored how invasive species, disease vectors, and microorganisms that cause disease are experiencing changes in their geographic ranges and/or seasonal activity in the US West due to climate variability and climate change.
- [Alaska Region Webinar](#) featured a discussion with the Alaska Climate and Equity Pilot partner, Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium, as well as an associated program called the Local Environmental Observation Network.
- [Gulf of Mexico Region](#) invited speakers to talk about NOAA's role in seafood safety and inspection.
- [Great Lakes Region](#) provided a review of NOAA's current predictive capabilities and research in Great Lakes Harmful Algal Blooms.
- [North Atlantic Region](#) hosted a partner organization called Climate Adaptation Partners, a Southeast and Caribbean Regional Collaboration Team's Climate and Equity Pilot partner.
- [Southeast and Caribbean Region](#) showcased current work in marine mammal health observation, including fascinating explorations of microplastics in marine mammals.

- Pacific Islands Region produced two webinars:
 1. Featuring discussion on the [importance of the land/sea interface to supporting food security for Native Hawaiians](#), Keaukaha-Pana'ewa Farmers Association, Pacific Islands Climate and Equity Pilot Partner Organization, as an invited speaker.
 2. Featuring presentations on [Toxoplasmosis, monk seals, and responsible cat ownership](#).
- [Central Region](#) shared information on air quality, including smoke from Canadian wildfires that affected communities in New York City, volcanic ash, dust plumes, and NOAA forecasting capabilities.

These webinars set the stage for the inaugural NOAA One Health Summit, which convened in Washington, District of Columbia, on August 15-16th, 2023. This event brought together scientists and practitioners across the agency and featured keynote speakers, panel discussions with federal partner agencies, and networking opportunities.

“PICTURE CLIMATE CHANGE” PHOTO CONTEST

To understand the diverse climate experiences as seen through the perspective of America's youth, the Regional Collaboration Network (RCN) organized a [“Picture Climate Change” Photo Contest](#) and challenged students around the country to tell their climate impact stories and see how their life has changed due to climate shifts. One of the goals of this project was to help NOAA understand how climate change has impacted students, their families, schools, and communities, and provide information to participants about NOAA's work to address these climate change impacts.

Students in grades 5-12 from around the country submitted over 550 unique entries that told stories of drought, flood, fire, pollution, extreme heat or cold, and smoke. To review these photos, RCN assembled a diverse panel of NOAA judges, with representation from across the nation and across NOAA areas of expertise. The NOAA judging panel selected winners from grades 5-8 and 9-12 from each of the five categories (water, weather, resilience, society and nature) and from each of the eight regions (Alaska, Pacific Islands, West, Central, Gulf, Southeast and Caribbean, and the North Atlantic). Finally, NOAA selected 10 photos that resonated the most with the NOAA judging panel, both through the imagery and the students' written descriptions.



National Winners

Seeing climate change impacts through the lens of the younger generation demonstrates the need for NOAA's tools and service like never before.

2023 REGIONAL COLLABORATION NETWORK NATIONAL WORKSHOP

To efficiently coordinate and effectively implement NOAA's mission in the regions across the country, Regional Collaboration Network (RCN) members gather at an Annual Workshop. This year's workshop was held in Hawai'i, one of the most biologically diverse regions on the planet with over 25,000 unique species. Hawai'i is at the forefront of the climate change challenge, and it is critical to understand this unique environment and its resources as well as the threats the community faces.

To prepare NOAA staff participating in the RCN Annual Workshop and raise awareness of important Tribal and Indigenous protocols, attendees participated in a three-day training

run by the [Haskell Indian Nations University](#) and [Haskell Foundation](#). Workshop attendees received invaluable information on engagement with Indigenous communities and expanded their understanding of Indigenous culture and history.

The RCN met with numerous NOAA staff and partners in the region, including those at the Mokupāpapa Discovery Center, Hawai'i Bay Watershed Education and Training, Keaukaha-Pana'ewa Farmers Association, the Nature Conservancy, and Akaka Foundation for Tropical Forests.

The RCN was honored to welcome Nainoa Thompson, the President and CEO of the [Polynesian Voyaging Society \(PVS\)](#) and a Pwo navigator, as the special guest speaker. Thompson shared about his values of voyaging, perspective on climate change, and how NOAA products and services are critical to his crew.

The Regional Collaboration Network met with Keaukaha-Pana'ewa Farmers Association at the Pacific Islands Pilot Project Site, Kea'ahuli o Pana'ewa, and participated in hana, or work, activities by clearing tī leaf plants, filling lā'au planter boxes with mulch and soil, and weeding.



With NOAA's visit to West Hawai'i Habitat Focus Area at Kīholo Bay, workshop participants learned about traditional Hawaiian Fishponds as an ancient form of aquaculture helped gather rocks from the ponds. These rocks are used to rebuild and secure pond walls that were destroyed during a recent tsunami.



The RCN discussed points of collaboration between NOAA and PVS during the Moananuiākea Voyage, the four year circumnavigation of the Pacific by traditional Polynesian voyaging canoes Hōkūle'a and Hikianalia.

NOAA's Pacific Islands, West, and Alaska Regional Collaboration Teams supported the Polynesian Voyaging Society at the Hōkūle'a Welcoming Ceremony and during Moananuiākea Launch Week, bringing communities together to celebrate the start of the voyage.

NOAA continues to provide weather support to the Hōkūle'a Crew, and explore ways on how to stimulate educational collaboration around tides and currents information, observational systems, information on protected species on the educational platform, [Wa'a Honua](#).

The RCN valued working with trusted leaders and organizations in the community and conveying the value of those partnerships across NOAA. To create more opportunities for NOAA to be in service to the communities the agency works and gathers in, the RCN engaged with local partners by giving back and learning about the community's needs.



NOAA team visited the Hawai'i BWET Project: Pu'u wa'awa'a Community-Based Subsistence Forestry Area and helped with invasive species removal on site during the tour.



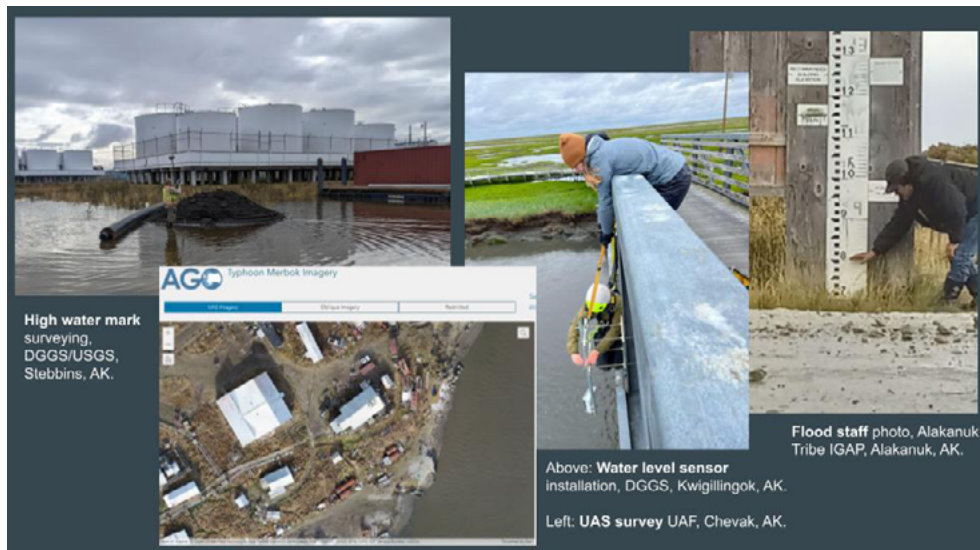
REGIONAL UPDATES

During 2023 RCN Workshop, RCN team members participated in the canoeing activity which signified the importance of working in harmony and collaboration. All participants have a role to play, and everyone is important in the journey.

ALASKA REGIONAL COLLABORATION TEAM

ENSURING DISASTER RESPONSE EQUITY IN ALASKA

NOAA's Alaska Regional Collaboration Team members played leading roles in the coordination of response and recovery efforts to Typhoon Merbok and following storms that ravaged communities along 1,000 miles of Alaska coastline from Bristol Bay to the North Slope in September 2022. Collaborating with the State of Alaska, Federal Emergency Management Agency, U.S. Geological Survey, and the U.S. Coast Guard, the team's rapid post-storm response and recovery activities provided considerable benefits to residents on multiple timescales. From directly assisting the response and recovery process and valuing the loss of subsistence infrastructure, to enhancing models and data that, in turn, improved the quality of future weather watches, warnings, and advisories.



NOAA pulled together national, state, and academic experts and coordinated imagery and high water level data collection to maximize documentation of flooding and erosion and minimize impacts on the affected communities.

NOAA ALASKA CONTRIBUTES TO THE U.S. NATIONAL ARCTIC STRATEGY

The [National Strategy for the Arctic Region](#) (NSAR) lays out the United States' policy and intent in the Arctic. NOAA's Alaska Regional Collaboration Team members played a key role in developing the input to the [NSAR Implementation Plan](#) by identifying regional NOAA equities in the four pillars of the Strategy (Security, Climate Change and Environmental Protection, Sustainable Economic Development, and International Cooperation and Governance), incorporating relevant NOAA elements of the [Interagency Arctic Research Policy Committee's](#) Implementation plan, and leading input on Pillar 1 (Security: Develop Capabilities for Expanded Arctic Activity). This section sets forth the methodology, process, and approach for executing the NSAR 2022.



Russian vessel participating in military exercises on the Bering Sea steams past the pollock trawler Vesteraalen in August 2020. (Photo Credit: Steve Elliott)

CENTRAL REGIONAL COLLABORATION TEAM

NORMALIZING CRITICAL CONVERSATIONS WITHIN NOAA ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH



This effort is designed to help normalize conversation about mental health and that "it's okay to not be okay."

The NOAA Central Region Collaboration Team developed a new priority for fiscal year 2023 called "Cultivate a Culture that Values and Supports the Mental Well-being of NOAA Staff." To support raising awareness of mental health and well-being, the team created a StoryMap titled, "We're All in This Together: Real Stories of Well-being," which is an internal resource that highlights NOAA employees' experiences through short interviews and stories focused on mental health and well-being. The resource was well-received, and the team will continue highlighting stories from across NOAA by creating an on-going series.

“So amazing!!! I'm so proud of the Central Regional Team for highlighting our colleagues' stories with mental health. I so appreciate their vulnerability and authenticity (and connected with some of the stories as well). These are the most inspiring and important I've seen in my entire career. Thank you!”
 — Nicole A. Fernandes, National Ocean Service, Silver Spring, Maryland

COLLABORATIVE REVIEW OF NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE PROCESS OF APPROVING NEW INITIATIVES



The review team held a hybrid meeting in La Jolla, California and Silver Spring, Maryland to evaluate and formulate recommendations for a report to National Weather Service leadership.

The Central Region Collaboration Team conducted an analysis of the National Weather Service (NWS) internal Capabilities and Requirements Decision Support (CaRDS) process, which validates requirements for NWS products and services. The team combined the efforts of several NOAA offices, gathered feedback from multiple users, and recommended strategies to NOAA leadership to make this process more streamlined and transparent.



The Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement provides a framework for identifying binational priorities and implementing actions that improve water quality.

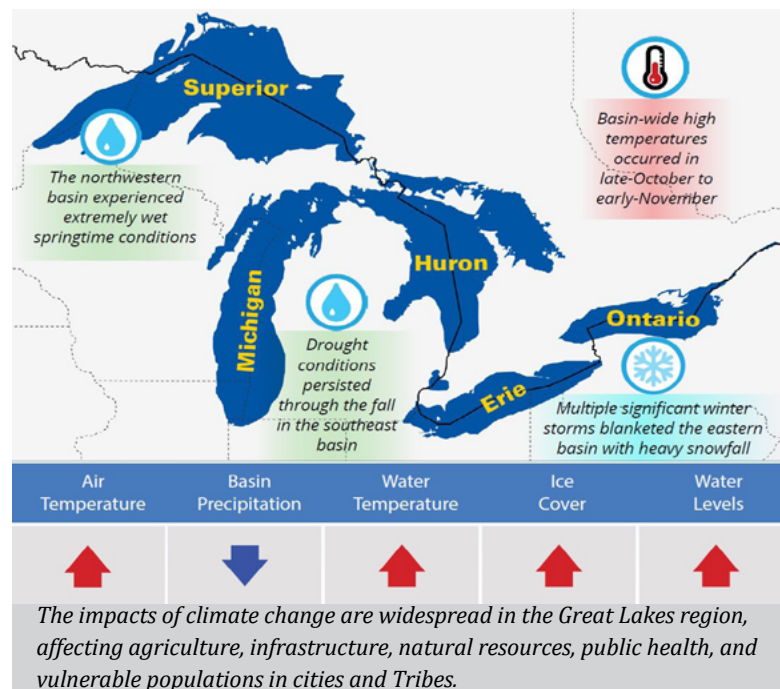
GREAT LAKES REGIONAL COLLABORATION TEAM

THE GREAT LAKES PROJECT RECEIVED THE UNITED NATIONS ENDORSEMENT

NOAA's Great Lakes Regional Collaboration Team's project entitled "Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement" has been endorsed by the [Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission](#) Executive Secretary as part of the [United Nations Ocean Decade](#) and will form a part of the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development 2021-2030. The Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement serves as a commitment between the United States and Canada to restore and protect the waters of the Great Lakes. While implementing this project, the team will engage decision and policy makers, and practice open and accessible data management.

PROMOTING CLIMATE INITIATIVES IN THE GREAT LAKES REGION

NOAA's Great Lakes Regional Collaboration Team has been leading the coordination of climate work in the region. In partnership with Environment Canada, The team coordinated publication of the [2022 Great Lakes Annual Climate Summary](#), which is a report summarizing the previous years' climate trends, events, new research, and related activities in the Great Lakes region. In addition, the team shared [quarterly climate summaries](#) to provide important resources on climate data and hosted internal quarterly webinars in support of the [Water Quality Agreement Annex 9 Climate Impacts](#) bringing together experts in the region. As the Chair and sponsor for the Great Lakes Committee, Jennifer Day provided the team with an indispensable outlet for sharing climate tools and data useful for the Great Lakes region.



GULF OF MEXICO REGIONAL COLLABORATION TEAM

NOAA's Gulf of Mexico Regional Collaboration Team organized a virtual NOAA and Partners 101 session for Texas Congressional Staff based in district or field offices and staff from Capitol Hill. This engagement provided a broad introduction to key NOAA and partner efforts relevant for Texas. Building on the overall theme of "Science-Informed Blue Economy," this session drew a thread from coastal to inland issues with topic areas including fisheries and their connections with other sectors, the value of NOAA information for ports and navigation, and inland climate and weather impacts.

CONNECTING CONGRESSIONAL STAFF IN TEXAS WITH NOAA



The Regional Collaboration Network puts a priority on Congressional engagement to raise awareness of NOAA's capabilities and the importance of partnerships in addressing local issues.

BRINGING NOAA AND PARTNERS TOGETHER TO ESTABLISH A NEW HABITAT FOCUS AREA IN THE REGION

NOAA's Gulf of Mexico Regional Collaboration Team leads a group to propose the establishment of a new Habitat Focus Area (HFA) in the Gulf of Mexico region. The NOAA HFAs are targeted places where NOAA focuses investments to address a high priority habitat issue by working with partners and communities. The team hosted a workshop to introduce the HFA concept to partners and identify elements for developing an HFA in the Mississippi Sound. The objectives discussed for this potential HFA were: improved understanding of the Mississippi Sound ecosystem, including human dimensions; better tools and information to improve management decisions; and increased effective protection and restoration of key habitats and species. Participants heard a series of relevant presentations and engaged in prioritization exercises to identify management needs, data and information needs, and indicators useful for assessing the condition of the Mississippi Sound.



The new proposed Habitat Focus Area would encompass the Mississippi Sound and Bight, extending from Lake Pontchartrain to Breton Sound in the west, to the mouth of Mobile Bay and southward to the east.

NORTH ATLANTIC REGIONAL COLLABORATION TEAM

CONNECTING NOAA TO HISTORICALLY MARGINALIZED COMMUNITIES



Staff from the Mystic River Watershed Association and Greenroots Chelsea visited the Bronx/Harlem Urban Waters Federal Partnerships location in August, which included an environmental justice boat tour of the Harlem River.

To increase engagement with [Urban Waters Federal Partnership](#) (UWFP), the North Atlantic Regional Collaboration Team (NART) connected and supported NOAA efforts in three UWFP regional locations: Mystic River (Massachusetts); Bronx/Harlem Rivers (New York); and Delaware River (New Jersey/Delaware/Pennsylvania). NART's effort increased NOAA's awareness of historically marginalized communities in the North Atlantic and better connected NOAA's expertise and capacity to stakeholder needs in these communities. As part of the engagement with this partnership, members of the NART [attended a site visit](#) led by the [Mystic River Watershed Association](#) to four locations within

the Mystic River watershed to learn about planned efforts that promote community economic, environmental and social well-being. The NART also provided travel support for community members from the Mystic River watershed to attend an environmental justice tour of the Harlem River led by Representative Adriano Espaillat (New York 16th District), and an exchange of project ideas and best practices between these two UWFP locations.

BUILDING STRONGER PARTNERSHIPS WITH TRIBAL NATIONS IN THE NORTH ATLANTIC

Following up on the Tribal situational assessment completed in fiscal year 2022, NOAA's North Atlantic Regional Collaboration Team (NART) supported investments that grew Tribal capacity, and strengthened connections and knowledge about Tribal nations at NOAA's headquarters in Silver Spring, Maryland. The team raised awareness of regional Tribal priorities, developed resource guides for several North Atlantic Tribal nations, and [supported leadership visits](#) to the region, including Dr. Spinrad's first visit to a Tribal nation as the NOAA Administrator. Moving forward, the NART is developing a regional Tribal engagement community of practice to connect and coordinate NOAA engagement efforts in the North Atlantic, and reduce burden on Tribal nations.

Tribal Chairman, Brian Weeden, with NOAA Administrator, Dr. Rick Spinrad, in the Hall of Elders at the Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe Community & Government Center.



PACIFIC ISLANDS REGIONAL COLLABORATION TEAM

NOAA Administrator, Dr. Rick Spinrad, met with the [Polynesian Voyaging Society](#) (PVS) leadership and discussed how NOAA could collaborate with them on the Moananuiākea voyage, the four year circumnavigation of the Pacific by traditional Polynesian voyaging canoes Hōkūle'a and Hikianalia. Weather and educational content were the two of the main topics of this partnership, and the Pacific Islands Regional Collaboration Team led the development of a Memorandum of Understanding to formalize these connections. As a continuation of the partnership between NOAA and PVS, the Pacific Islands and Alaska Regional Collaboration Teams supported them at the Hōkūle'a Welcoming Ceremony and during Moananuiākea Launch Week in Aanchgaltsóow, Áak'w K̄wáan (Auke Bay, Alaska). This very special event between the Indigenous peoples of Alaska and the Pacific Islands was open to the public and a [recording](#) of the day was published online by KTOO, a non-commercial radio station that serves Juneau, Alaska.

SUPPORTING CONNECTIONS BETWEEN NOAA AND THE POLYNESIAN VOYAGING SOCIETY



Through voyaging, the Polynesian Voyaging Society hopes to inspire humanity to care for the earth by highlighting the vital importance of oceans, Indigenous knowledge, communities, education and sustainability.

NOAA'S PACIFIC ISLANDS REGIONAL COLLABORATION TEAM GATHERS CLIMATE EXPERTS FOR A CLIMATE STRATEGY WORKSHOP

To improve understanding of the current work on climate change being done by NOAA offices and partners in the region, the Pacific Islands Regional Collaboration Team conducted a survey on current and proposed future climate projects. This data was analyzed, allowing the team to identify gaps and potential areas of work. As a result of this workshop the Pacific Islands Region Climate Team was established to coordinate, collaborate, and connect resources in this region. This team is planning to work together to develop a Pacific Islands Climate Strategy to help move towards a Climate Ready Nation.



Increased ocean temperatures, rising sea levels, increased ocean acidity, and changes in ocean productivity and the severity of extreme weather are some of the climate impacts the Pacific Islands are encountering.

SOUTHEAST & CARIBBEAN REGIONAL COLLABORATION TEAM



Out at sea, Sargassum is a critical habitat for marine organisms, but when it comes to land, it can negatively impact coastal communities causing health issues and affecting the tourism industry.

RESPONDING TO TO SARGASSUM BLOOM EVENTS

In the spring of 2023, reports of a Sargassum blob, a type of large brown seaweed that can harm human health and the environment when it accumulates, started to appear in the media and forecasted to make landfall on beaches in Florida and the Caribbean. In an effort to share resources and exchange knowledge about Sargassum and the “blob”, the Southeast and Caribbean Regional Team (SECART) brought together experts from across the agency to discuss roles and responsibilities of NOAA offices and programs. Seeing the need to sponsor a student assistant who could compile resources on Sargassum, SECART welcomed Victoria Vital, a Master of Professional Science student with the [University of Miami Cooperative Institute for Marine and Atmospheric Studies](#). Vital focused on gathering NOAA contacts and resources on Sargassum, updating the [Southeast and Caribbean Disaster Guide](#) with information on responding to Sargassum bloom events, and writing a guide focused on current Sargassum policy with recommendations.



PLANNING FOR EARTHQUAKE DISASTER IN CHARLESTON, SOUTH CAROLINA

The Southeast and Caribbean frequently experience significant weather and climate-related events, and the capabilities of NOAA have been at the forefront of planning, predicting, assessing, responding, and mitigating such disasters. For a community to be disaster-resilient, planning and partnerships must include all sectors of society to develop comprehensive approaches to disaster preparedness and recovery. In April of 2023, the Southeast and Caribbean Regional Collaboration Team (SECART) partnered with the [Office of Response and Restoration’s Disaster Preparedness Program](#) to conduct a [tabletop exercise](#) focusing on the threat of a major earthquake impacting Charleston, South Carolina. An [After Action Report and Improvement Plan](#) were produced to assist the city in preparing for an earthquake disaster.

On August 31, 1886, Charleston experienced the most damaging earthquake in the eastern United States. Charleston lies in one of the most seismically active areas in the Eastern United States known as the Middleton Place - Summerville Seismic Zone.

WEST REGIONAL COLLABORATION TEAM

SECOND COHORT OF NOAA WEST LEADERSHIP PROGRAM IS UNDERWAY

The West Regional Collaboration Team launched the second cohort of the NOAA West Leadership Program. The leadership program offers geographic and cost accessibility to western region NOAA staff, a focus on NOAA culture, regional networking and learning opportunities, and support for new and emerging NOAA leaders. Eighteen participants across NOAA in the West geographic area were selected to participate. About 25 senior NOAA leaders volunteered to teach the curriculum, drawing on lived professional experience at the agency to convey leadership concepts. This second cohort will be implementing their capstone projects, including: 1) a climate action plan for NOAA’s Western Regional Center in Seattle; 2) creating resources on offshore wind development in the west; and 3) a platform to connect the diversity, equity, and inclusion groups from all line offices in the west.



Eighteen NOAA staff from the west region were selected to participate in the second cohort of NOAA West Regional Leadership Program.

SHARING CLIMATE INFORMATION IN THE WEST

In partnership with the Western Regional Climate Center and with contributions from the three West Coast Integrated Ocean Observing System Regional Associations, the NOAA West Regional Collaboration Team hosted a series of NOAA West Watch webinars. These webinars brought together NOAA staff and partners from across the region to share information about regional scale environmental observations and impacts on human systems. They also facilitated interdisciplinary connections among agency staff and partners on regional climatic and oceanic conditions, particularly departures from normal.



NOAA’s West Regional Collaboration Team plays a critical role in increasing awareness of NOAA climate tools and services by building connections with other agencies and organizations in the region.



Pū'u Huluhulu Native Tree Sanctuary, Hawai'i

REGIONAL PROJECTS

ALASKA

- Assisted the National Weather Service in developing a communications and engagement plan following the termination of Alaska TV Weather to ensure that communities continued to receive timely critical weather information.
- Worked with the NOAA Arctic Executive Committee to successfully build a \$16.5M package of Arctic funding through the [Inflation Reduction Act](#), including extension of NOAA's partnership with the [Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium](#).
- Led collaboration efforts across NOAA and Indigenous partners to support [NOAA Ship Okeanos Explorer's Seascape Alaska Expedition](#), which helped improve knowledge about unexplored and poorly understood deepwater areas offshore Alaska.

GREAT LAKES

- Hosted Harmful Algal Blooms Workshops connecting experts in the region.
- Sponsored a group of graduate students from the University of Michigan working on a project in partnership with Canada and NOAA to develop a binational plan for marine protected areas across the Great Lakes.
- Participated in the Annual Great Lakes Day on the Hill, which brought community members, stakeholders, and others from across the region to Capitol Hill to educate and advocate for the Great Lakes.
- Assisted in securing more than \$32 million in [Great Lakes Restoration Initiative](#) funds, which will support 34 projects across multiple NOAA offices and state Sea Grant programs.
- Sponsored a University of Michigan Summer Fellow, Karen Weldon, to research how carbon is captured and stored in coastal habitats in the Great Lakes as part of the larger and ongoing [New Blue Economy](#) efforts.
- Released internal websites providing resources on NOAA Great Lakes emergency response and planning as well as products and services on Great Lakes water levels.

CENTRAL

- Shared valuable climate resources and opportunities throughout NOAA via the NOAA Central Region Snapshot, a region-wide e-newsletter.
- Initiated an internal coordination effort of NOAA staff in the Mississippi River Basin and fostered connections with an emerging federal agency task force.
- Continued the [Three Minute Thesis Webinar](#) series on important topics such as Winter Weather and Air Quality.
- Hosted a joint annual meeting with the NOAA West Regional Collaboration Team in La Jolla, California and incorporated a NOAA in Service Opportunity with the [Ocean Discovery Institute](#).
- Created an [informational handout](#) to better communicate the connection between climate change and tornadoes with communities.

NORTH ATLANTIC

- Regional Coordinator, Nicole Bartlett, led a community need-finding workshop at the first NOAA and North American Association for Environmental Education [Young Changemakers Fellowship Summit](#) in partnership with Dr. Shakila Merchant, Deputy Director at the [City University of New York Remote Sensing Earth Systems Institute](#).
- Sponsored continued development of a storminess index that examined long-term climate trends in marine weather events in the Northwest Atlantic.
- Funded six students through the City College of New York to demonstrate a community-based approach to monitoring living shorelines in New York City.
- Connected satellite experts with local stakeholders to facilitate product co-development in Virginia's Middle Peninsula Habitat Focus Area.
- Organized a visit to a Cape Cod public high school for the NOAA Administrator, Dr. Rick Spinrad, where he led a roundtable discussion with students on climate issues.

GULF OF MEXICO

- Participated in the [Pointe-au-Chien Indian Tribe's Cultural Camp](#) and shared information about NOAA with campers ranging in age from 8-14.
- Promoted connections and awareness of regional issues by hosting the [Gulf of Mexico Forum webinars](#) on a variety of topics, such as fire weather and tracking microplastic marine debris.
- Facilitated and connected by the Gulf of Mexico Regional Collaboration Team, NOAA employees and the [NOAA Ship Thomas Jefferson](#) participated in the Tall Ships Festival in Galveston, Texas.

SOUTHEAST & CARIBBEAN

- Held a Community of Practice Workshop for Geographic Information Systems Specialists in the Southeast U.S. for managing shellfish resources.
- Provided funding to support the implementation of the objectives in [NOAA's Implementation Plan for Stony Coral Tissue Loss Disease Response and Prevention](#). In partnership with Florida Sea Grant Stony Coral Tissue Loss Disease Coordinator and the Coral Reef Conservation Program, an intern was hired to facilitate information exchange on coral disease response efforts in Florida, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands.
- Held four webinars as part of the [2023 Hurricane Awareness Webinar series](#) in May 2023 leading up to the start of the hurricane season to inform communities on how the National Weather Service issues forecasts and what it takes to fly one of NOAA's Hurricane Hunter aircrafts.
- Sponsored the [Southeast and Caribbean Disaster Resilience Partnership](#) as a sustaining partner and provided input as an Advisory Board member.
- Supported [NOAA in the Caribbean](#) community group through development, translation, and delivery of four issues of the NOAA in the Caribbean Newsletter, planning and execution of the 2023 NOAA Partners Meeting, and continued participation on the Executive Committee.

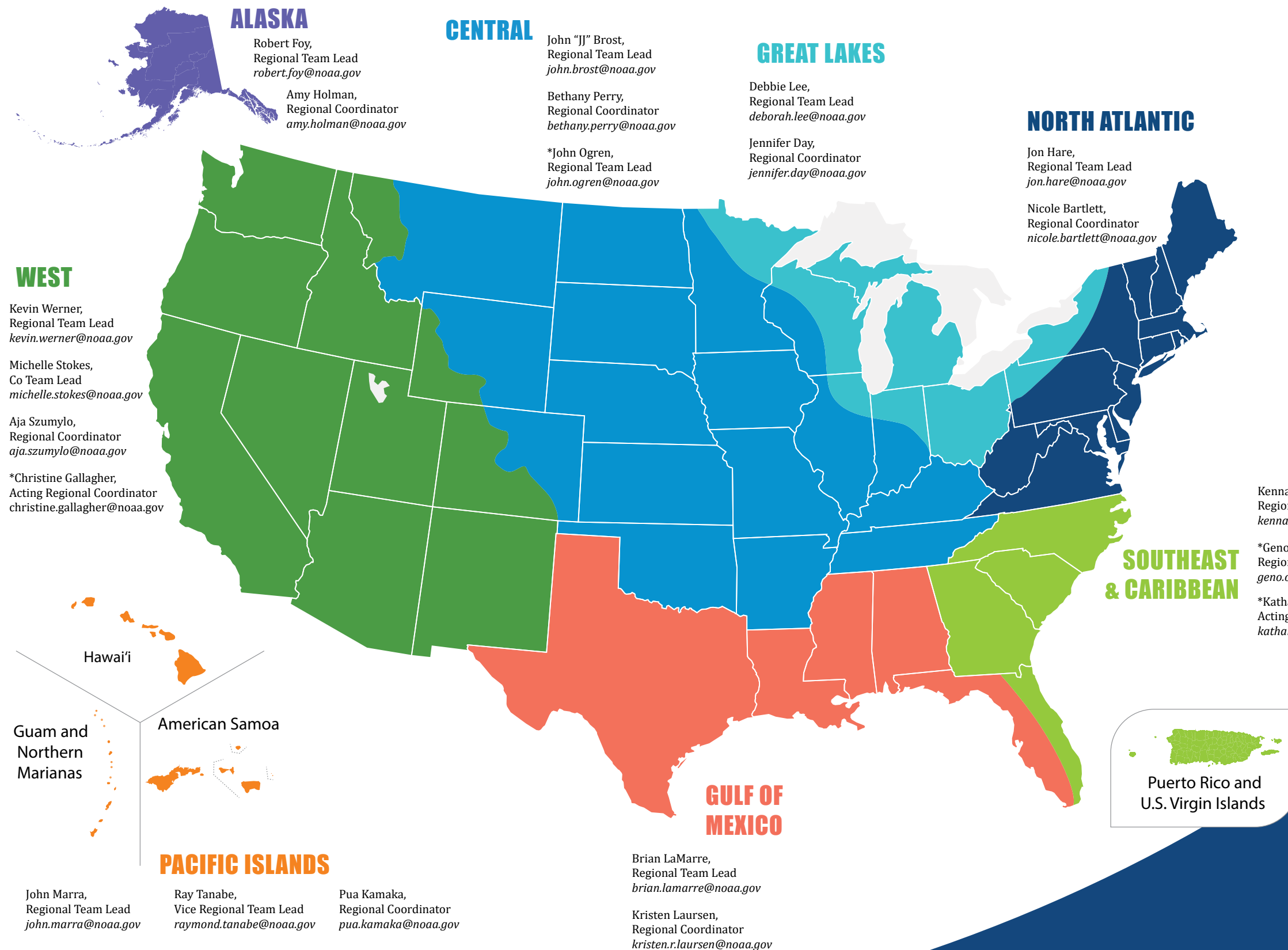
WEST

PACIFIC ISLANDS

- Supported with the [Pacific Risk Management 'Ohana](#) annual conference and organized partner site visits.
- In partnership with [Bishop Museum](#), the Pacific Islands Regional Collaboration Team brought community partners together at the Science and Sustainability Festival 2023 to highlight the ongoing work needed to protect biodiversity and build a sustainable future in Hawai'i.
- As a co-lead for White House Initiative on Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders (WHIAANHPI) Region 9, the Pacific Islands Regional Collaboration Team planned, coordinated, and moderated sessions at 2023 WHIAANHPI Economic Summit.
- Coordinated a NOAA Round Table and helped plan a visit to the NOAA Daniel K. Inouye Regional Center for Marie Damour, the current Ambassador to Fiji and serving concurrently as the Ambassador to Kiribati, Nauru, Tonga, and Tuvalu.
- Partnered with Employee Resource Groups (ERG), including Latinos@NOAA and the Women of NOAA ERG, to host several webinars such as [Women of the NOAA Corps](#).
- For their contribution to creating and enhancing diversity, equity, belonging, and inclusion efforts in the regional NOAA workforce, the Diversity, Equity, Belonging, and Inclusion (DEBI) Coordination Group announced three DEBI Award winners from the NOAA West Regional Collaboration Team: Alicia Keefe, Rosemary Kosaka, and Tracy Boze.
- Facilitated communication between the weather forecast office and the [Hökūle'a](#) crew, part of the [Polynesian Voyaging Society](#), to ensure their safety as they traveled from Seattle, Washington to San Diego, California during their [Moananuiākea Voyage](#).

JOINT REGIONAL COLLABORATION TEAM EFFORTS

- The Gulf of Mexico and Central Regional Collaboration Teams led the Mississippi River Basin Nutrient Runoff Working Group to connect partners and produced [quarterly bulletins](#) to inform those interested in nutrient runoff issues and impacts.
- The West and Central Regional Collaboration Teams visited the [Ocean Discovery Institute](#) (ODI) and assisted with several projects around their facility by assembling mini remotely operated vehicle pools for ODI's robotics summer camp, inventoried supplies to prepare for their school-year programs, and assembled welcome folders for students.



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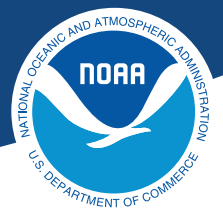
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