



NOAA Regional  
Collaboration  
**NETWORK**

# 2019

## Annual Accomplishments Report

*Improving NOAA's service to the Nation through collaboration*

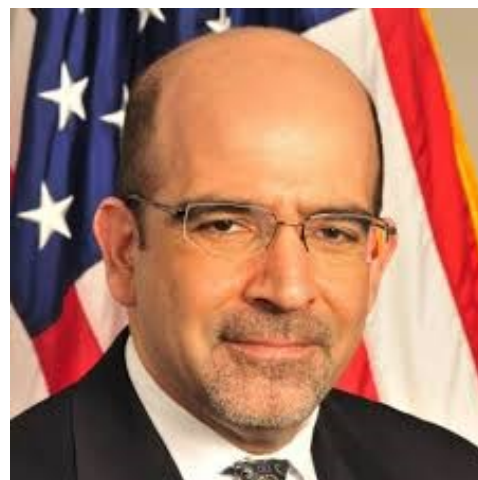
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## Letter from the Deputy Under Secretary for Operations

Dear Readers,

This year we celebrate the 10th anniversary of the Regional Collaboration Network. For the past decade, the Network has catalyzed collaboration across NOAA and with core partners, identified and responded to important regional challenges, and connected people and capabilities to advance NOAA's mission and priorities. Today, over 165 employees and partners serve on eight Regional Teams and at Headquarters, where they are championing significant, cross-cutting projects and initiatives on a daily basis.

This report highlights some of the Network's most inspiring accomplishments of Fiscal Year 2019, including hosting multiple Congressional Roundtables to educate Congressional Staff on issues affecting their districts and the capabilities and services NOAA brings to the table, taking key steps to improve NOAA's emergency preparedness to better protect employees and serve communities during natural disasters, and collaborating to establish an end-to-end approach to mitigating environmental hazards that connect the Mississippi River watershed with fisheries and habit challenges in the Gulf of Mexico.



The Regional Collaboration Network continues to improve NOAA's service to the Nation through collaboration, and I am proud to support them in their endeavors. Please join me in congratulating the Network on a successful first decade, and celebrating the dynamic work and achievements showcased in this 2019 Annual Accomplishments Report.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ben Friedman", followed by a horizontal line.

Ben Friedman  
Deputy Under Secretary for Operations  
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

# Featured Accomplishments

## Enhancing Economic Gains Through Restoration of the Great Lakes

Since 2010, NOAA has restored more than 4,500 acres of habitat and opened almost 500 miles of stream tributary to the Great Lakes as part of the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI). In 2019, the team secured \$27 million for projects involving five Line Offices and won the national 2019 American Public Works Association Project of the Year for the Stoney Island habitat restoration project on the Detroit River. To date, the GLRI has produced a 5:1 ratio of economic gains for dollars invested, with ratios exceeding 12:1 in some areas.

## Reducing the Risks of Shellfish Poisoning in the Arctic

With harmful algal species becoming more prevalent in a warming Arctic, rapid diagnosis and treatment of shellfish poisoning are keys to saving lives. By providing funding, travel, and coordination among a network of close partners, the Alaska Regional Team expanded understanding of algal toxin signs and symptoms and provided best practices for reducing illness. Healthcare workers across the Bering Strait are now trained to rapidly diagnose and treat cases of paralytic shellfish poisoning and amnesic shellfish poisoning.

*Marine mammals are a large part of the diet in rural Alaska. This graphic shows how this food source is becoming contaminated.*



## Improving Species Distribution Models and Fisheries Management

Marine habitats in the Northeast U.S. are rapidly changing, so it is important to understand where animals are moving and how their movements impact fisheries. The North Atlantic Regional Team collaborated with three Line Offices and close partners to host an applied modeling workshop that built off a multiyear initiative to improve habitat and species distribution models. Fisheries management councils can use this information to help habitat conservation and convey the importance of essential fish habitat.

## Greater Efficiency and Coverage in Seafloor Habitat Mapping

Seafloor habitats in the Southeast, from the upper estuary to the outer continental shelf, support living marine resources and coastal economies. Complete and accurate maps of these areas are essential, yet communication barriers among the agencies and organizations that map these resources lead to knowledge gaps, missed opportunities, and costly duplication of effort. Begun as a multi-agency, multi-partner collaboration in 2014, the Southeast & Caribbean Regional Team's seafloor mapping initiative has expanded coverage and saved NOAA almost \$1M in survey costs. The team released a report in 2019 identifying shared priorities for ecosystem-based mapping and best practices, including inclusion in a common inventory.

***"Initiatives such as these are perfect examples of Regional Collaboration working the way it is supposed to and ensuring NOAA is exercising the highest level of collaboration while mitigating redundancy and potential duplication of effort."***

*-RADM Timothy Gallaudet, NOAA Asst. Secretary for Oceans and Atmosphere*



*Minnesota Sea Grant and partners created a watershed game that teaches participants the challenges of resource management.*

## Improving Water Quality in the Mississippi River Watershed

Agricultural runoff of nitrogen and phosphorus contributes significantly to water quality degradation and, among other things, leads to hypoxia and harmful algal blooms in lakes, rivers, and the Gulf of Mexico. Because these nutrients are often applied late winter and early spring, the riskiest times of year for runoff, limiting runoff is beneficial to farmers, ecosystems, and fisheries alike. NOAA's Central and Gulf of Mexico Regional Teams established an expanding network that connects partners up and down the Mississippi River Watershed and increases awareness and use of runoff risk decision support tools. One result of these efforts is a growing number of facilitators who are teaching students and local leaders about the impacts of land use decisions on water quality.

## Toward Faster FEMA Claims Adjustments at Lower Cost after Tropical Cyclones

After a cyclone, both NOAA and U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) collect high-water mark data to support the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) damage assessments. Because high-water marks are perishable, the data needs to be quickly collected post-storm. Leveraging work by the NOAA Southeast & Caribbean Regional Team, the Gulf of Mexico Regional Team collaborated with USGS counterparts to share each agency's requirements, coordinate decisions about data collection, and reduce duplication of effort. The initiative led to better forecasting and water level sensor placement during Hurricane Dorian. In the longer term, FEMA will have better data to determine where water vs. wind damage occurred and be able to handle claims more quickly.

*Measuring high water marks, as seen here in Mexico Beach, FL after Hurricane Michael, is vital for accurate damage assessments. The Team improved collaboration between NOAA and USGS during Hurricane Dorian leading to better information on where to place water sensors.*



## Connecting Native Communities Directly with NOAA Science

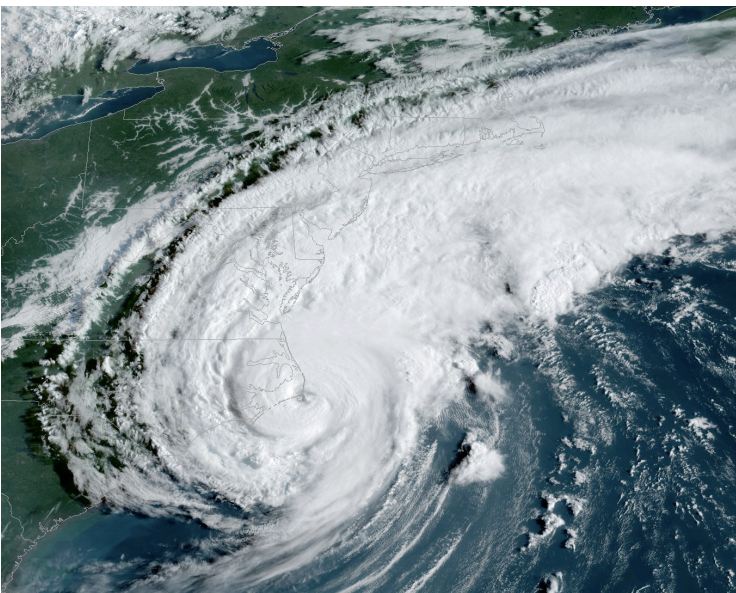
Following 2018, a season of unprecedented ecosystem changes due to sea ice loss in the Bering Sea, the Alaska Regional Team initiated a practice of delivering preliminary results of various Bering Sea science missions to subsistence-level stakeholders as soon as the field season ended. The project involved collaboration with the Alaska Federation of Natives and a live town hall discussion for the public at the American Geophysical Union. These actions inspired the Interagency Arctic Research Policy Committee to form a Bering Sea Action Team to answer questions for resource managers. These collaborations are connecting researchers directly with the stakeholders most impacted by change.

# Improving Emergency Management

The Regional Collaboration Network plays a pivotal role in coordinating ongoing efforts to help NOAA and other responsible parties prepare for and respond more effectively to natural disasters. In 2019, Regional Teams achieved significant results.

## Testing Internal Emergency Response and Coordination in the West

With 1,370 employees representing five Line Offices and multiple staff offices, the Seattle metro area is home to the most diverse concentration of NOAA staff outside of Silver Spring. No crossline agent has responsibility for coordinating internal emergency planning or disaster response. To improve coordination, the Western Regional Team organized a two-day exercise involving a massive simulated earthquake and tsunami scenario. The exercise included the immediate aftermath and recovery over an eighteen-month timeframe. The after-action report identifies a number of important gaps and opportunities for improvement.



*Hurricane Dorian was a major threat in 2019 to the U.S. coast and territories, bringing intense storm surge and multiple tornadoes.*

## Better Disaster Coordination with Partners in the Southeast and Caribbean

Effective hurricane response requires preparation by and coordination among a variety of federal, state, local, and private sector organizations. Members of the Southeast & Caribbean Regional Team advanced NOAA's coordination in several ways. A webinar series hosted in English and Spanish reached almost six hundred members of the emergency management and broadcast meteorological communities. Collaboration with the NOAA Office of Coastal Management improved coordination with federal, state, and territorial partners in the Caribbean islands. And, multi-level collaborations also focused on using natural and nature-based infrastructure to improve shoreline resilience throughout the region.

## Improving Emergency Response in Hawai'i

In 2016, the Pacific Islands Regional Team developed an emergency response plan for the most remote island chain in the world. In 2019, using the FEMA Incident Command Structure (ICS), the team identified roles and responsibilities, assigned leads and back-up personnel to each, and acquired satellite phones for key individuals to maintain communications during cyclone, tsunami, earthquakes, and other events. These measures will improve the security of NOAA personnel and enhance the agency's capacity to respond to local needs.

*2018 saw unprecedented rainfall to parts of Hawaii that damaged buildings, roads, crops, and disrupted daily life for thousands of people. Events like these contribute to the push for cross Line Office emergency management training in the region.*

*Photo credit: Kauai Emergency Management Agency*



## Improving Disaster Resilience in the Southeast and Caribbean

In a region that is subject to intense cyclones, the Southeast & Caribbean Regional Team works in an ongoing way with Line and Staff Offices to enhance emergency management capabilities. In 2019, the Team collaborated with the NOS Disaster Preparedness program to deliver Incident Command System (ICS) level 300 training, and the Team organized its third annual disaster resilience workshop, this time focusing on the recovery phase of the disaster cycle. The Team also tested a draft of its Information Guide to NOAA Disaster Resilience, which will be a central resource for NOAA's assets, capabilities, and responsibilities in the region.

**“The information was not only relevant for disaster responders but contained some very useful points on how to use the info you provide.”**

-Dolph Holmes, Florida Community Emergency Response Team

## Engaging Congressional Staff

Since 2013, various Regional Teams engaged with Congressional Staff to help them better understand regional issues and NOAA's capabilities. Teams have engaged with almost 150 staffers in 20 states with the participation of over 250 partners. Two Regional Teams conducted Congressional Roundtables in 2019.

### Engaging Wisconsin's Representatives with NOAA's Great Lakes Mission

NOAA's mission in the Great Lakes is not widely known among Congressional Staff. In 2019 the Great Lakes Team focused on outreach to congressional staff from Wisconsin, engaging with the Offices of Representatives Grothman (R-WI-6), Gallagher (R-WI-8), Kind (D-WI-3), Pocan (D-WI-2), and Duffy (R-WI-7); Senators Baldwin (D-WI) and Johnson (R-WI); and Governor Evers. Of particular note was a showcase on how NOAA has partnered with the State of Wisconsin to help farmers reduce costs and keep harmful nutrients out of waterways by providing runoff risk forecasts.



*Super Storm Sandy was a major event for NYC. Since then NOAA and other partners have worked to improve flooding and forecasting capabilities in the region.*

### Building Resilient Communities through Congressional Roundtables

NOAA's capabilities in and around urban areas are not always apparent to new Members of Congress and their staff. The North Atlantic Regional Team worked in partnership with staff of Rep. Serrano (D-NY-15) to host an event in the Bronx that also included staff for Rep. Velazquez (D-NY-7), freshman Rep. Ocasio-Cortez (D-NY-14), the NYC Mayor's Office, and other agencies. Discussions focused on building partnerships for resilient local communities including restoration of natural resource and the application of NOAA's climate weather information to mitigate hazards and plan for impacts.

# Our Vision

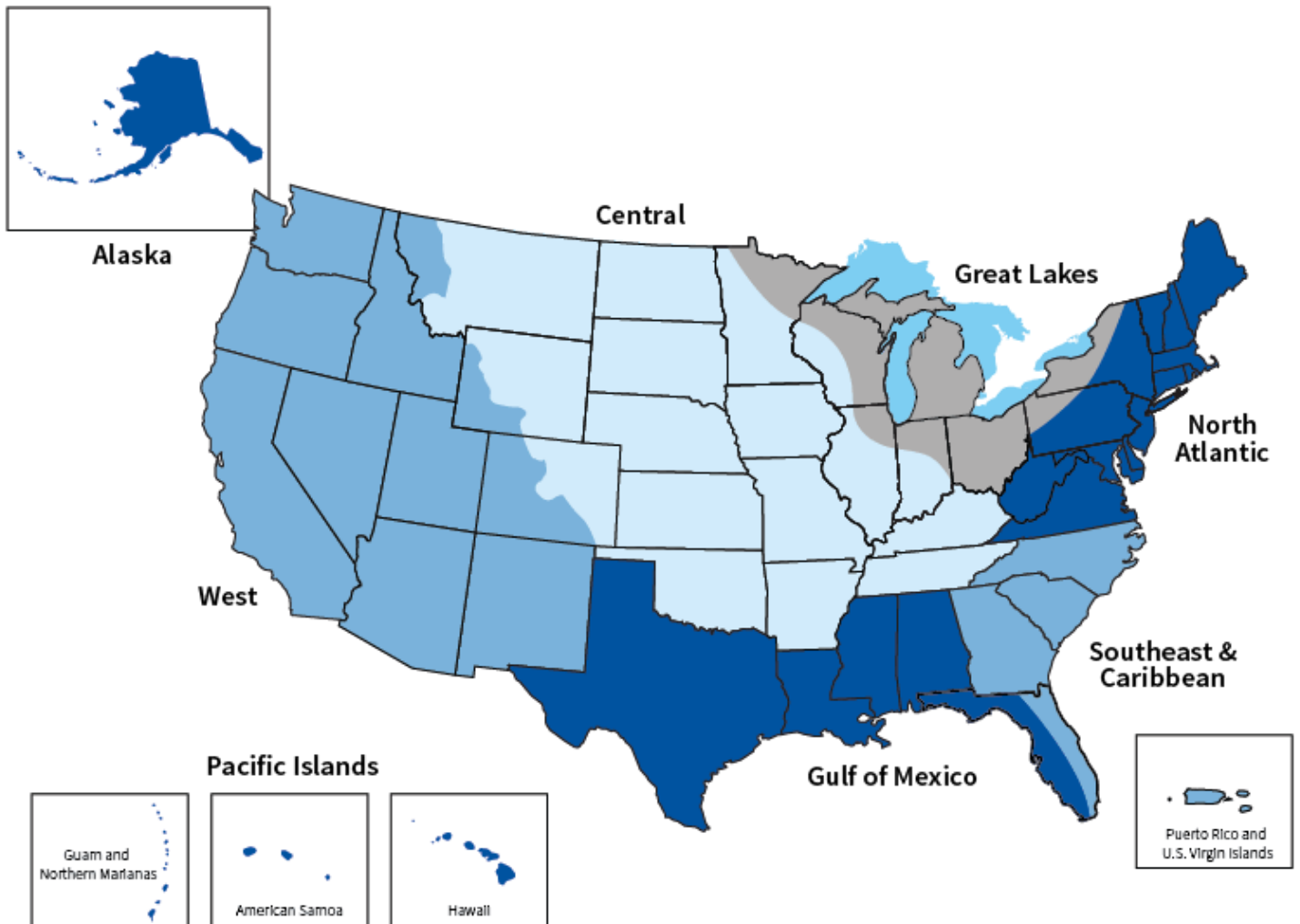
A unified and regionally integrated NOAA

# Our Mission

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

# Our Regions

During Fiscal Year 2019, the Network updated our regional boundaries to better reflect areas of work. This refresh also included making the map 508 compliant and more accessible.







## Our Network

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# 2019 Accomplishments

## GULF OF MEXICO REGION

### **Improving Water Quality Throughout the Mississippi River Watershed**

Cross-regional working groups help NOAA tackle challenges that span the watershed.

### **Toward Faster FEMA Claims Adjustments at Lower Cost after Tropical Cyclones**

Together, NOAA & USGS improve high-water forecasting, data collection, and efficiency.

### **Peer-to-Peer Interactions Around Gulf of Mexico Challenges**

NOAA's regular Gulf of Mexico Forums support grassroots sharing across the Line Offices.

## ALASKA REGION

### **Reducing the Risks of Shellfish Poisoning in the Arctic**

Training health workers to understand and rapidly diagnose algal toxin poisoning is saving lives.

### **Connecting Native Communities Directly with NOAA Science**

New procedures deliver science quickly to the people most impacted by rapid change.

### **Collaborative, Multidisciplinary Environmental Data Management and Problem Solving**

Experts from three regions shared insights to improve collaborative problem-solving.

## WESTERN REGION

### **Testing Internal Emergency Response and Coordination**

A disaster response exercise identified internal coordination challenges for NOAA's diverse, Seattle-based workforce.

### **Building Crossline Leadership Development Opportunities in the Field**

A regional pilot is being developed in response to analysis of options in the West.

## GREAT LAKES REGION

### **Leading NOAA's Management of Great Lakes Restoration**

The Great Lakes Regional Team co-chairs the bi-national Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement.

### **Engaging Wisconsin's Representatives with NOAA's Fresh-Water Mission**

Congressional roundtables demonstrate the agency's support for farmers and water quality.

### **Connecting Stakeholders with the Climate Information They Need**

NOAA's Climate Networking Team in the Great Lakes Region help researchers and users share knowledge.

### **Enhancing Economic Gains Through Restoration of the Great Lakes**

NOAA's funded projects are returning at least 5:1 in economic gains per dollar invested.

## CENTRAL REGION

### **Improving Water Quality in the Mississippi River Watershed**

NOAA's watershed-wide strategy connects stakeholders with runoff risk decision support tools.

### **Integrating Climate Data and Partners into Decision Support Services**

The Central and Great Lakes Regions improve Weather Forecast Office regional climate services support and forge stronger relationships with critical climate partners.

### **Increasing Internal Connectivity through Peer-to-Peer Sharing**

NOAA's Central Region workforce share information across their disciplines.

## SOUTHEAST & CARIBBEAN REGION

### **Greater Efficiency and Coverage in Seafloor Habitat Mapping in the Southeast**

A NOAA report codified best practices and identifies mapping priorities.

### **Improving Disaster Resilience in the Southeast and Caribbean**

Advancing a multi-year collaboration for training, coordination, and clarification of responsibilities.

### **Tracking Epidemic Coral Disease in the Caribbean**

A NOAA-led collaboration helps researchers and reef managers identify and monitor disease.

### **Better Disaster Coordination with Partners in the Southeast and Caribbean**

A variety of collaborative initiatives clarified roles among the range of critical partners.

## NORTH ATLANTIC REGION

### **Building Resilient Communities through Congressional Roundtables**

NOAA leadership builds partnerships with congressional district staffers and local partners to enhance resiliency.

### **Elevating the Value of Citizen Science for Research and Management**

NOAA-sponsored data collection in the Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary yields exceptional data and educational value.

### **Improving Species Distribution Models and Fisheries Management**

Collaboration among Line Offices and partners improved understanding of changing habitats.

### **Collaborative, Multidisciplinary Environmental Data Management and Problem Solving**

Experts from three regions shared insights to improve collaborative problem-solving.

## PACIFIC ISLANDS REGION

### **Outreach on Monitoring Environmental Change in West Hawai'i**

Multi-Line collaboration helps communities and researchers monitor and respond.

### **Improving Emergency Response in Hawai'i**

An all-Line Office effort codified responsibilities and equipped key personnel to improve preparedness and response capabilities.

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*Cover Photo: Changing ocean conditions has had a big impact on Alaska's fisheries. The Alaska Team has been working to understand these impacts and inform decisions across NOAA.*



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