

# NOMECE 2023 PROGRESS

In 2023, the NOMECE Council continued coordinating across U.S. Government agencies and non-governmental partners. We are happy to report that a new member agency, the Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement (BSEE) joined the Council this year. Over the last year, we also published NOMECE content in several forms that represented substantial progress on several objectives, continued to support critically important regional campaigns that greatly contribute to national efforts, and conducted outreach and engagement at key events to engage multi-sectoral partners and these regional mapping and exploration initiatives.

## Reports

### 1. Progress Report on Unmapped U.S. Waters

The Interagency Working Group on Ocean and Coastal Mapping (IWG-OCM) released the fifth annual [Progress Report on Unmapped U.S. Waters](#) in March 2024. At the end of 2023, 53,100 square nautical miles of new bathymetric data coverage were added to public archives since the last report, which moved the U.S. from 50% of waters unmapped at this time last year to 48% unmapped. Progress was made on a number of fronts, but most notably in areas where regional campaigns are established to facilitate collaborative data acquisition activities and increase data sharing, in accordance with the NOMECE Strategy goals. With 2030 fast approaching, there needs to be a significant ramp up in efforts – on the order of 3-fold our current rate – to reach NOMECE mapping goals. For the latest report and to track progress, visit <https://iocm.noaa.gov/seabed-2030-status.html>.

### 2. Published a NOMECE Article in ECO Magazine Special Issue on Deep-Sea Exploration

The NOMECE Council Co-Chairs and staff authored an [article](#) on the NOMECE Strategy, its goals, and how the work of the Council connects to regional mapping and exploration campaigns around the country, including Seascape Alaska, Lakebed 2030, Expanding Pacific Research and Exploration of Submerged Systems (EXPRESS), and Florida Coastal Mapping Program (FCMaP). You can read more about the efforts and progress made by each campaign during the last year below.

### 3. Published Ocean Exploration and Characterization Article in Frontiers in Marine Science

The Interagency Working Group on Ocean Exploration and Characterization (IWG-OEC) published an [article](#) in Frontiers in Marine Science as the beginning of the NOMECE Strategy Objective 3.2: to establish exploration and characterization standards and protocols. Developing consensus and adopting useful standards and protocols will help to improve data interoperability and our ability to track completed work.

### 4. Completed the Standard Ocean Mapping Protocol (SOMP) Public Engagement Effort

The [Standard Ocean Mapping Protocol \(SOMP\)](#) writing team incorporated all received public comments after an open public comment period in 2023. The SOMP is now one step closer to its completion in 2024, when it will be used to inform NOMECE mapping priorities and activities. Once published, this will contribute to NOMECE Strategy Objective 2.1: establish a Standard Ocean Mapping Protocol (SOMP), which will lead to piloting the SOMP on upcoming projects.

### 5. Issued First Ever NOMECE Council Newsletter

The NOMECE Team authored its first-ever [newsletter in the summer of 2023](#). This newsletter is an attempt to engage with a broader group of stakeholders and provide timely updates, including public engagement opportunities, relevant news from Congress, current NOMECE priorities, and regional campaign updates. Email [nomece.staff@noaa.gov](mailto:nomece.staff@noaa.gov) if you would like to be added to our distribution list!

## Regional Campaigns

### 1. Seascape Alaska

Entering its second year of existence, the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of the United States Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization recently endorsed the [Seascape Alaska](#) campaign as part of the [UN Decade of Ocean Science](#) for Sustainable Development 2021-2030. This was largely in part due to its contributions to The Nippon Foundation-GEBCO Seabed 2030 Project. The campaign had an exciting field season, including a Seascape Alaska-branded, [multipart expedition series led by NOAA Ocean Exploration](#) and a [USGS/NOAA cooperative project](#). Additionally, there were [five NOAA Office of Coast Survey hydrographic survey missions](#) using both NOAA ships and contractors with uncrewed systems. Lastly, this campaign also conducted a number of outreach activities, including co-organizing and presenting at the inaugural [Seward Marine Science Symposium](#) in September and conducting an [IARPC-hosted webinar](#) and presenting at the [Alaska GeoSummit](#) in October.

## 2. Lakebed 2030

Led by the [Great Lakes Observing System](#), the [Lakebed 2030](#) campaign has also been designated a [UN Ocean Decaded activity](#) in its support of the Seabed 2030 Project. In 2023, NOMECE and IWG-OCM members were involved with hosting, participating in, and spearheading presentations at the [annual Lakebed 2030 in-person conference](#). Throughout the year, the Council continued its ongoing educational collaboration with the [Northwestern Michigan College's \(NMC\) Marine Technology capstone project](#), which greatly contributes to increases in bathymetric data collection for the Great Lakes. This effort led to the first multibeam sonar dataset in the Great Lakes being archived at the NOAA [National Centers for Environmental Information \(NCEI\)](#).

## 3. Expanding Pacific Research and Exploration of Submerged Systems (EXPRESS)

For the seventh straight year, NOAA's Office of Coast Survey and Integrated Ocean and Coastal Mapping team managed and supported the [Expanding Pacific Research and Exploration of Submerged Systems \(EXPRESS\)](#) campaign mapping project on the NOAA Ship Fairweather. This project consists of a large and diverse team of federal and non-federal partners working together to map deepwater priority areas off of the U.S. Pacific Coast. The 2023 project [focused on multiple areas offshore of northern California and southern Oregon](#) covering roughly 750 sq nmi's. The primary objective of this multi-year project is to collect bathymetric, acoustic backscatter, and water column data for surficial geology, benthic habitats, sub-bottom faults, geologic hazards and sedimentary processes. Data from this project supports a variety of disciplines including offshore energy projects and infrastructure, marine spatial planning, ecosystem assessments, and marine geohazards. Bathymetric data from this project will be further used to update NOAA's [nautical charting products](#) and improve maritime safety, as well as support the [Bureau of Ocean Energy Management \(BOEM\) Offshore Wind Energy Program](#), which was created to support the White House administration's goal to [deploy 30 gigawatts of offshore wind energy by 2030](#).

## 4. Florida Coastal Mapping Program (FCMaP)

The [Florida Coastal Mapping Program \(FCMaP\)](#) is a partnership between Federal and Florida state agencies with the goal of acquiring and making Florida coastal seafloor data available. During 2023, the [second FCMaP prioritization study](#) was completed, specifically focusing on deepwater (20-200m) areas. The results of this study will be presented at the [Gulf of Mexico Conference \(GOMCON\)](#) in 2024 and were used to identify high priority areas for the first round of bathymetric data collection conducted by the [Florida Seafloor Mapping Initiative \(FSMI\)](#).

## 5. NOMECE Council Engagement

The NOMECE Council took advantage of having in-person staff in the DC/National Capital Region to hold our first ever in-person full Council meeting in November 2023 at the Eisenhower Executive Office Building (EEOB). Thank you to EEOB and the Office of Science Technology Policy for supporting this hybrid meeting format. The Council is planning on holding another hybrid meeting in July 2024.

## Outreach and Engagement

### 1. Participated in the Lakebed 2030 conference (September 2023)

IWG-OCM and NOMECE presented a talk at Lakebed 2030 exploring NOMECE in practice in the Great Lakes region. The talk highlighted current progress, relevant work, and needed next steps to meet national goals through the Lakebed 2030 campaign.

### 2. Co-hosted a town hall at the Oceans 2023 conference (September 2023)

In coordination with the National Oceanographic Partnership Program (NOPP), NOMECE co-hosted a town hall at the Marine Technology Society (MTS) OCEANS conference in Gulfport, MS. The content was geared toward engaging the ocean industry partners because their support is critical to accomplishing the ambitious goals of the NOMECE Strategy.

### 3. Presented at the Alaska GeoSummit (October 2023)

Seascope Alaska Campaign members highlighted NOMECE and presented relevant content during sessions on tracking regional campaign progress and filling bathymetry gaps in Alaska.

## For More Information