

Marine Policy Seminar
College of Earth, Ocean and Environment

Marine Spatial Planning for the Mid-Atlantic and Beyond

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Planning and management for America's ocean spaces has been stymied by a fragmented approach. The authority and responsibility for stewardship of ocean resources has long been divided into sector-specific "silos"—energy, fisheries, military, transportation, recreation and other marine resource uses. Add in the need to coordinate these federal authorities with those of the states', and the level of complexity grows exponentially.

Energy facilities, diverse recreational uses, offshore drilling, shipping superhighways, commercial fishing, and aquaculture facilities are competing for finite ocean space. New demands on ocean resources are particularly apparent in the Mid-Atlantic region as states seek to develop offshore wind power capacity to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and dependence on foreign oil.

The theory and practice of marine spatial planning (MSP) is rapidly emerging as a potentially effective response to the challenges noted above. MSP is a process that can identify optimal areas and time frames for current and future uses to achieve ecological, economic, and social objectives. It is based on the philosophy that we must take into consideration whole ecosystems, including people, to maintain or restore healthy, productive, and resilient conditions necessary for the services society requires.

In this presentation I will provide an overview of current MSP policy and data development initiatives at national, regional and state scales. The presentation will also include a preview of The Nature Conservancy's Marine Ecoregional Assessment, a new geospatial database that integrates over 800 spatial data files on marine ecosystems, habitats, species and human uses for North America's Atlantic coast (from North Carolina to Canada).