Southeast Coastal Ocean Observing Regional Association Strategic Plan

2016-2021

INTEGRATED OCEAN OBSERVING SYSTEM

PURPOSE

SECOORA is one of 11 Regional Associations established nationwide through the NOAA led Integrated Ocean Observing System (IOOS). IOOS coordinates the multi-agency, cooperative effort to routinely collect real-time data and manage historical information based on a continuously operating network of buoys, ships, satellites, underwater vehicles, and other platforms. These data are needed for many purposes, including rapid detection and prediction of changes in our nation's ocean and coastal waters.

SECOORA participating members contribute to IOOS implementation. This region has long been active in ocean data management and communication (DMAC) activities, high frequency coastal current radar research, locally run buoy-based research systems, estuarine nutrient enrichment and harmful algal bloom research, high resolution coupled ocean-atmosphere modeling and wave research, and inundation models.

Many SECOORA member projects are being conducted on a small, or pilot, scale and need to be expanded region-wide. For instance, expanding the buoy network to meet the recommended spacing of 100 km intervals in the South Atlantic Bight would require 20 more buoys, which cost approximately $200,000 dollars each (U.S. Weather Research Program). This is $1.5 million more than SECOORA's entire FY16 IOOS funding. Similarly, tracking pathogens on our extensive beachfront is ongoing at a local scale, but needs regional expansion to improve the protection of public health.

SECOORA developed this strategic plan based on the needs of the region, the capabilities of the membership, and the ability to make significant progress in specific areas. It describes SECOORA's vision, mission, regional priorities, strategic goals, and core strategies.

The SECOORA Strategic Plan is directed to:

- SECOORA members, to articulate priorities and provide guideposts for future activities;
- Regional stakeholders and potential members, to demonstrate capabilities and describe connections to identified stakeholder needs;
- Decision-makers, including elected officials, to explain why funding is needed and what will be accomplished.

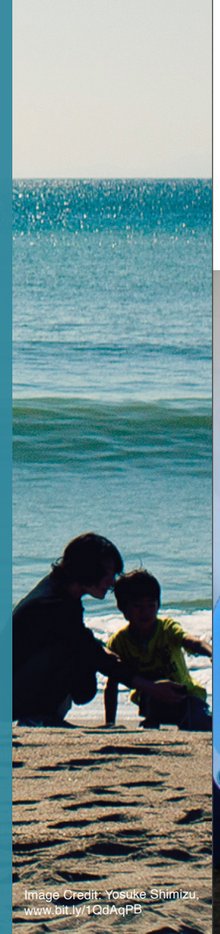
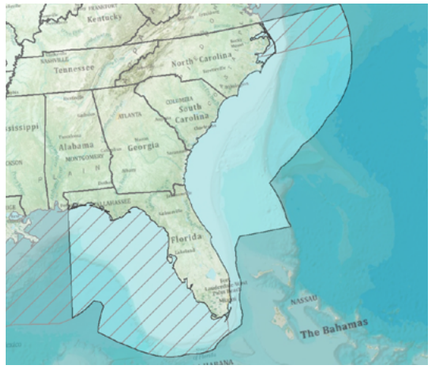


Image Credit: Yosuke Shimizu, www.bit.ly/1QdAqPB

INTRODUCTION

The ocean and coastal waters of the southeastern United States help drive local weather and regional climate conditions, support ecologically and economically significant ecosystems (which include important fisheries), and provide tourism, boating, and other recreational opportunities. In 2013 the ocean economy sectors contributed $31.8 billion to the southeastern region's gross domestic product, provided over 584,688 jobs, and over $14.9 billion in salaries. The main economic driver for the southeast region is coastal tourism and recreation wages (National Ocean Economic Program, 2016).



SECOORA works with stakeholders within the four southeastern states to observe North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida. Pictured is the SECOORA Region.

Many SECOORA members have been observing and sharing coastal and oceanographic data and information for over a decade. This information improves marine weather and harmful algae bloom forecasts, beach swimming advisories, understanding of rip currents, search and rescue operations, and inundation modeling. SECOORA integrates existing widely scattered ocean and coastal information and data over North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida. Currently 4000 datasets are accessible through the SECOORA data portal at http://portal.secoora.org and other outlets.

However, ocean observing in the southeast is at a critical juncture. Buoys and other platforms that provide necessary data are suffering from lack of maintenance and some are being completely removed from service. This loss of critical infrastructure, as well as skilled labor to maintain and operate the systems, erodes the region's ability to efficiently capitalize on past investments. With additional funding and leveraged resources, SECOORA can sustain and build upon existing regional assets to make a significantly greater contribution.

Goal 4 of the Strategic Plan is to engage and inform students and the public in ocean observing. SECOORA is investing in an fellowship to train the next generation. This is in addition to participating local science festivals. Pictured are young ocean experts at the Charleston STEM Festival in South Carolina.

Image Credit: Abbey Wakely, SECOORA

MEETING NATIONAL AND REGIONAL PRIORITIES

NATIONAL

The Integrated Coastal and Ocean Observing System Act was signed into law on March 30, 2009. Congress and the Administration recognize the importance of observing to accomplishing critical national objectives of national security, maritime safety, economic prosperity, and environmental sustainability. The Act provides a renewed impetus and a requirement to fully realize the vision of an integrated observing system. This system must be driven by the needs of stakeholders and be able to provide sustained real-time data and information. Benefits accrue to such diverse issues as climate change, coastal inundation, ocean acidification, renewable offshore energy, ecosystem-based management, marine transportation, and marine search and rescue.

| Pictured are the eleven IOOS Regional Associations.

SECOORA's priority themes align with those of the NOAA led U.S. IOOS. SECOORA will continue efforts to ensure a strong and sustained IOOS. In partnership with NOAA, the IOOS program office, and other federal programs and offices, SECOORA will address critical national priorities. Engagement will be fostered with additional national programs including the U.S. Coast Guard, U.S. Army Corp of Engineers, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Geological Survey, Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, Department of Homeland Security, and FEMA.

SECOORA is a member of the IOOS Association (IA), working with ten other Regional Associations (RAs) to assure the needs and positions of on-the-ground users in the regions are adequately reflected in national policy and priority setting. We actively engage with our neighboring RAs in the Gulf of Mexico, Caribbean, and on the East Coast. These collaborations across regions help ensure efficient pooling of expertise and resources, limit redundancy, and improve effective transfer of knowledge.

Ongoing work of IA articulates the regional response to the need for accurate and timely information for coastal areas in the United States. The 11 RAs are demonstrating how five years of sustained funding would be used to meet the nation's critical need for observing information to:

- adapt to climate change
- conserve ecosystems
- respond to coastal hazards
- ensure safe and efficient marine operations

REGIONAL

As part of this strategic planning process, SECOORA reviewed stakeholder needs assessments of the southeast region. Themes that regularly appear in these assessments include climate change and its impacts on habitats and sea level, marine weather and operations, and ecosystem management including fisheries and water quality.

SECOORA FOCUS AREAS

Connecting Stakeholders to Data

SECOORA's previous and ongoing regional observing efforts in the southeast focus on delivering information and products to inform harmful algae bloom predictions, inundation modeling, marine weather forecasts, and analysis of circulation and temperature anomalies. SECOORA works in the following four theme areas to address needs identified by regional stakeholders.

Marine Operations

Coastal Hazards and Climate Variability

Ecosystems, Water Quality, and Living Marine Resources

PRIORITIZING DECISIONS

SECOORA will continue to work in the southeast region to address stakeholder needs within our three focus areas. SECOORA will use the Strategic Plan to guide operations and prioritize decision.

The SECOORA mission, vision, strategic goals and core strategies were developed by the SECOORA Board of Directors and presented to the SECOORA membership on May 18, 2016. This strategy document will guide SECOORA through 2021 and will be updated as necessary.

December 2015 SECOORA Board Members worked together for two days to draft the Strategic Plan.

SECOORA STRATEGIC PLAN
2016 - 2021

SECOORA
Southeast Coastal Ocean Observing Regional Association

MISSION

SECOORA's mission is to observe, understand, and increase awareness of our coastal ocean; promoting knowledge, economic and environmental health through strong regional partnerships.

5 YEAR VISION

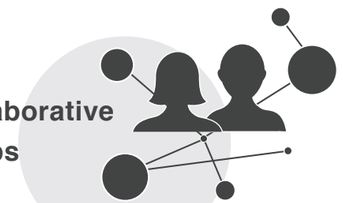
SECOORA is the recognized leader, valued partner, and go to source for coastal ocean information in the southeast.

CORE VALUES

We believe in...

Scientific integrity, technical excellence, and innovation

Active stewardship of coastal ocean ecosystems



Inclusive and **collaborative partnerships**

Leadership in coastal ocean science

Accessible useful information for addressing societal needs

Science based discovery and decision-making

Positive and supportive SECOORA working environments

STRATEGIC GOALS

1 Increase exposure and broaden usage of SECOORA's information and products

Strategies:

- Improve web-based information system and web presence.
- Provide state-of-the-art-tools, including phone apps, data analysis tools and decision support tools, and information on how to use the tools
- Implement an effective outreach strategy to reach priority user groups, such as mariners, fisheries managers, marine planners, etc.

2 Utilize a prioritized science-justified ocean observing system plan to guide and inform decision making and implementation

Strategies:

- Regularly review status of Coastal Ocean Observing System technologies and advancements
- Develop agreement on the Regional Coastal Ocean Observing System Plan utilizing existing proposal, plans and documents
- Utilize the RCOOS plan for funding opportunities

3 Expand partnerships – including membership and stakeholders

Strategies:

- Outreach to currently under-represented sectors to participate in SECOORA activities and initiatives
- Develop new services, and better market current services, including benefits for members
- Identify and promote opportunities for potential partners (non-members) to engage in SECOORA activities and initiatives

4 Engage and inform students and the public in ocean observing

Strategies:

- Support citizen-science opportunities
- Engage students in problem solving using ocean observing data
- Establish our researchers and program managers as resources for students and the general public
- Identify and pursue cooperative educational funding opportunities

5 Improve SECOORA's organization capabilities

Strategies:

- Expand and diversify funding that advances SECOORA's mission
- Ensure SECOORA's operational and governance structure enables us to achieve our vision
- Have an effective marketing and outreach strategy
- Ensure effective implementation of all grants, including the IOOS grant

SECOORA

www.secoora.org

SECOORA's website is dedicated to providing the information you need to increase your understanding of the southeast's coastal ocean.