

Gulf of Maine Marine Debris Action Plan

2022 Mid-Plan Update



A plastic bottle found during a beach cleanup in Gloucester, Massachusetts (Photo credit: NOAA).

Gulf of Maine Marine Debris Action Plan

UPDATED ACTIONS: JUNE 2022

The Gulf of Maine Marine Debris Action Plan, originally published in November 2019, establishes a comprehensive framework for strategic action to ensure the Gulf of Maine and its coasts, people, and wildlife are free from the impacts of marine debris. This Action Plan encompasses work that is and will be undertaken over five years (2019 - 2024). From February - May 2022, Action Plan partners met to assess actions and progress on completion and adjust the Action Plan accordingly. Listed below are the updated actions.

The Gulf of Maine Marine Debris Action Plan is one of several being implemented in coastal regions across the country. Due to the complexity of marine debris issues, many stakeholders can play a role in the Action Plan's implementation, including private citizens, federal, state, and local governments, private businesses and industry, and nongovernmental and academic organizations. All are welcome to participate in these efforts, and can engage directly by emailing the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Marine Debris Program Northeast Regional Coordinator, Demi Fox, at demi.fox@noaa.gov.



Consumer Debris

Chip bags and other food packaging removed from beaches in Northern Massachusetts (Photo credit: NOAA).

Goal 1. Reduce consumer debris in the Gulf of Maine region

Objective 1. Reduce the quantity of single-use plastics in the environment

Strategy 1.1: Identify tools to prevent single-use plastics from entering the watershed

Actions	Partner(s)
1. Generate and maintain an inventory of existing intervention products (e.g., Surfrider’s Hold onto your Butts, etc.), current projects/uses, and successes/barriers	Maine Coastal Program, Salem Sound Coastwatch, Ocean Conservancy, Seaside Sustainability, Urban Harbors Institute, Surfrider Foundation
2. Implement five existing intervention projects listed in the inventory	Harborkeepers

Objective 2. Reduce barriers to sustainable consumer choices

Strategy 2.1: Reduce single-use plastic products in public institutions (e.g., universities, event conference centers, hotels, municipalities)

Actions	Partner(s)
1. Identify, adapt, and share initiatives related to reducing single-use plastic products in public institutions	NOAA Marine Debris Program, Surfrider Foundation, Huntsman Marine Science Centre, Seaside Sustainability

Strategy 2.1: Reduce single-use plastic products in public institutions (e.g., universities, event conference centers, hotels, municipalities)

Actions	Partner(s)
2. Maintain a regional guide of actions that institutions can initiate related to single-use plastic products and a cost/benefit analysis of those actions	CARE for the Cape and Islands, Surfrider Foundation
3. Engage businesses that have adopted sustainable alternatives to single-use plastics to help generate case studies for integration into the Northeast Marine Debris Collaboration Portal ; share best practices	Seaside Sustainability, Surfrider Foundation, Salem Sound Coastwatch
4. Develop and distribute a guidance document for alternatives to single-use plastic service ware (e.g., bag law toolkit , straw toolkit)	Surfrider Foundation
5. Share resources on reducing single-use plastics with restaurants, hotels, shops, and tourist attractions	Center for Coastal Studies, CARE for the Cape and Islands

Strategy 2.2: Encourage reductions in plastic foam and other single-use plastic packaging in restaurants

Action	Partner(s)
1. Develop and implement messaging highlighting certification programs for restaurants, including takeout	Surfrider Foundation, Ocean Conservancy

Objective 3. Assist businesses in making sustainable choices

Strategy 3.1: Research and educate about compostable and biodegradable plastics in the context of the ocean environment

Action	Partner(s)
1. Create effective messaging for businesses (e.g., Surfrider Foundation's Bioplastics Toolkit) to communicate the benefits and disadvantages of single-use alternatives to plastic products (e.g., products marketed as biodegradable or compostable)	Center for Coastal Studies, Salem Sound Coastwatch, Surfrider Foundation

Objective 4. Motivate behavior change away from single-use products

Strategy 4.1: Identify/inventory effective messengers (key influencers) such as community leaders, teen mentors, churches, schools, offices, doctors, nongovernmental organizations, celebrity chefs, youth (diversity, equity, and inclusion)

Actions	Partner(s)
1. Create, maintain, and promote a repository of champions	Blue Ocean Society, Gulf of Maine Association, Surfrider Foundation, Seaside Sustainability
2. Add the repository to the Northeast Marine Debris Collaboration Portal	NOAA Marine Debris Program
3. Create a one-pager for guidance in reaching out and recognizing the identified champions	Blue Ocean Society

Strategy 4.2: Provide information about better quality, more accessible, reusable products

Actions	Partner(s)
1. Assemble a list of existing products and opportunities for households/ individuals and restaurants/establishments	Ocean Conservancy, Surfrider Foundation, Salem Sound Coastwatch, Harborkeepers
2. Provide education about products and opportunities from the existing list, including modeling the use of reusable products at events	Ocean Conservancy, Surfrider Foundation, Harborkeepers, CARE for the Cape and Islands, Center for Coastal Studies

Strategy 4.3: Highlight and engage organizations in campaigns targeting cigarette butt disposal

Actions	Partner(s)
1. Support the installation and proper use of cigarette disposal receptacles in collaboration with businesses and other partners, or through smoke-free beaches resolutions to limit butts on the beach	Salem Sound Coastwatch, Harborkeepers, CARE for the Cape and Islands
2. Execute public outreach regarding cigarette butt pollution	Blue Ocean Society



Fishing Gear

Abandoned, lost, or otherwise discarded fishing gear on Old Orchard Beach, Maine (Photo credit: NOAA).

Goal 1: Collaborate with industry to reduce impacts of derelict fishing gear in the Gulf of Maine

Objective 1. Understand and communicate the rates, quantities, and varieties of fishing gear loss

Strategy 1.1: Understand reasons for gear loss

Actions	Partner(s)
1. Analyze at-sea and shoreline debris data and share with industry to better understand and prevent gear loss	Center for Coastal Studies, Urban Harbors Institute, Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries
2. Conduct outreach with fishermen about why gear is lost	Center for Coastal Studies, Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries, Gulf of Maine Lobster Foundation

Strategy 1.2: Assess environmental/economic costs of fishing gear

Action	Partner(s)
1. Provide reporting mechanism for gear loss in Massachusetts and assess results	Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries

Objective 2. Investigate alternative options for disposal of fishing gear, plastics, and vessel waste

Strategy 2.1: Expand convenient shoreside/onboard disposal, recycling, reuse options

Actions	Partner(s)
1. Continue to pursue programs to provide shoreside fishing gear recycling, repurposing, and disposal	Center for Coastal Studies, Gulf of Maine Lobster Foundation, OceansWide
2. Research successful fishing gear recycling, repurposing, and disposal programs and evaluate for adaptation in the region	Center for Coastal Studies, Huntsman Marine Science Centre
3. Coordinate directed fishing gear disposal events	Center for Coastal Studies, OceansWide, Gulf of Maine Lobster Foundation
4. Develop drop-off infrastructure for gear	OceansWide, Gulf of Maine Lobster Foundation, NOAA Marine Debris Program, NOAA Fisheries, Blue Ocean Society

Strategy 2.2: Expand plastics reduction programs for fishing and aquaculture industries

Action	Partner(s)
1. Inventory existing best management practices and consider modifications for the Northeast region in collaboration with fishing and aquaculture industries	Center for Coastal Studies

Strategy 2.3: Promote responsible practices and inspire industry action

Actions	Partner(s)
1. Provide a platform through which harvesters and others can report underwater gear accumulations	Gulf of Maine Lobster Foundation, Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries
2. Engage industry in underwater cleanups of abandoned, lost, or otherwise discarded fishing gear and gear remaining during closures	Center for Coastal Studies, Gulf of Maine Lobster Foundation, OceansWide, Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries
3. Acquire trash bags for fishing vessels and distribute free best management practice trash handling flyers to commercial fishing vessels	Lobster Foundation of Massachusetts, Ocean Conservancy, Center for Coastal Studies, New Hampshire Sea Grant
4. Work with industry to identify gear loss hotspots on the shorelines or at-sea	Center for Coastal Studies, Gulf of Maine Lobster Foundation

Strategy 2.3: Promote responsible practices and inspire industry action

Actions	Partner(s)
5. Design shoreline cleanups that facilitate industry participation	Center for Coastal Studies, Gulf of Maine Lobster Foundation, Lobster Foundation of Massachusetts, Urban Harbors Institute
6. Develop educational outreach for end-of-life gear disposal, recycling, and reuse	OceansWide, Blue Ocean Society

Strategy 2.4: Engage management entities in methods to handle fishing gear

Actions	Partner(s)
1. Engage appropriate management entities to allow for partnerships for removal efforts	Center for Coastal Studies, OceansWide, Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries
2. Assemble law enforcement and regulatory agencies to discuss how fishing gear can be legally recovered by persons other than the gear owner	Center for Coastal Studies, Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries, Blue Ocean Society, Blue Planet Strategies

Objective 3. Research sustainable funding sources to address abandoned, lost, or otherwise discarded fishing gear and end of life fishing gear

Strategy 3.1: Research abandoned, lost, or otherwise discarded fishing gear prevention/removal funding options

Actions	Partner(s)
1. Research abandoned, lost, or otherwise discarded fishing gear prevention/removal funding options	Gulf of Maine Lobster Foundation, Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries
2. Research corporate sponsorship opportunities	Center for Coastal Studies, OceansWide
3. Participate in discussions about the industry financially supporting end of life gear cleanup and disposal	Center for Coastal Studies, OceansWide, Gulf of Maine Lobster Foundation

Strategy 3.2: Research stakeholder benefits of supporting abandoned, lost, or otherwise discarded fishing gear prevention programs

Action	Partner(s)
1. Develop a campaign to identify and engage new partners in abandoned, lost, or otherwise discarded fishing gear prevention programs	OceansWide, Gulf of Maine Lobster Foundation

Objective 4. Assess gear innovation studies and the potential for updated gear innovations

Strategy 4.1: Analyze previous gear innovation studies

Action	Partner(s)
1. Compile the results of past gear innovation projects	NOAA Marine Debris Program

Strategy 4.2: Assess potential for future gear innovations

Actions	Partner(s)
1. Promote gear innovation funding opportunities	NOAA Marine Debris Program
2. Promote the advancement of successful gear innovations	NOAA Marine Debris Program
3. Support gear marking programs so that lost gear can be identified to its owner	Blue Planet Strategies
4. Attend fishery management meetings to discuss marine debris issues	Center for Coastal Studies, Gulf of Maine Lobster Foundation
5. Attend meetings with the lobster industry, aquaculture industry, individual artists, and others to seek input and discuss issues	Center for Coastal Studies, Gulf of Maine Lobster Foundation

Goal 2: Expand collaboration with recreational fisheries

Objective 1. Increase awareness of the role of recreational fisheries in marine debris issues

Strategy 1.1: Support and expand relevant marine debris components in education and outreach to recreational fishers

Actions	Partner(s)
1. Incorporate gear avoidance into existing boater education courses	Ocean Conservancy, Urban Harbors Institute
2. Develop educational outreach for end-of-life recreational gear disposal, recycling, and reuse	Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries
3. Integrate marine debris issues into recreational fisheries action plans	NOAA Marine Debris Program

Strategy 1.2: Investigate and adjust existing recreational fisheries regulations to prevent, mitigate or intercept abandoned, lost, or otherwise discarded fishing gear and marine debris

Actions	Partner(s)
1. Convey the results of abandoned, lost, or otherwise discarded fishing gear recovery programs to state and regional fisheries managers to highlight the role of recreational fishing (e.g., lobster, rod-and-reel) in generating abandoned, lost, or otherwise discarded fishing gear	Center for Coastal Studies
2. Identify possible measures to reduce abandoned, lost, or otherwise discarded fishing gear, including limitations on traps and/or permits, disposal options, enforcement actions	Center for Coastal Studies



Microplastics

Microplastics on a beach (Photo credit: NOAA).

Goal 1: Reduce microplastic debris in the Gulf of Maine

Objective 1. Compile the latest scientific studies on microplastics and create a tool for broad access

Strategy 1.1: Share peer-reviewed microplastics literature

Actions	Partner(s)
1. Research the Gulf of Maine Marine Debris Action Plan community's interest in microplastics literature updates, the topics of most relevance, the frequency of updates, and interest in/potential use of a platform or reference manager to store/share literature	Sea Education Association, New Hampshire Sea Grant, NOAA Marine Debris Program
2. Assemble peer-reviewed microplastics literature from listservs and databases	Abt Associates
3. Compile and send regular updates to the Gulf of Maine Marine Debris Action Plan community	NOAA Marine Debris Program, Abt Associates

Objective 2. Increase public awareness of marine microplastics pollution through citizen science

Strategy 2.1: Compile, harmonize, and share protocols and equipment list for citizen science microplastics sampling and processing/analyzing

Actions	Partner(s)
1. Collect, compile, assess, and share existing microplastic citizen science methodologies (including best management practices and quality assurance/control considerations), equipment lists, and other resources with interested community members	New Hampshire Sea Grant, Rozalia, Abt Associates
2. House the microplastics citizen science resources and engagement opportunities on a publicly accessible website(s)	NOAA Marine Debris Program, Harborkeepers
3. Share microplastics citizen science resources with educators	Boothbay Sea and Science Center, Blue Ocean Society

Strategy 2.2: Use microplastics citizen science data to inform and promote future efforts

Actions	Partner(s)
1. Share microplastic citizen science updates via the Northeast Regional Marine Debris Collaboration Portal and/or Northeast Newsletter	NOAA Marine Debris Program
2. Design, promote, and recruit volunteers for microplastics citizen science efforts and increase participation through a regional effort	Abt Associates, Boothbay Sea and Science Center, Harborkeepers, Rozalia, New Hampshire Sea Grant, Blue Ocean Society

Objective 3. Build awareness of marine microplastics pollution in aquaculture and fishing industries

Strategy 3.1: Identify available research and research opportunities for fishing and aquaculture gear as potential sources of microplastic pollution

Actions	Partner(s)
1. Perform a gap analysis of existing efforts and develop a prioritized research question list	Abt Associates, Boothbay Sea and Science Center
2. Share current partner research and analysis of fishing and aquaculture gear as potential sources of microplastic pollution	New Hampshire Sea Grant, Abt Associates

Strategy 3.2: Inform fisheries and aquaculture industry of the potential impacts of microplastics on target resources, products, and bottom lines

Actions	Partner(s)
1. Develop at least two digital and print outreach materials for fishing and aquaculture industry, including a microplastics fact sheet or infographic	New Hampshire Sea Grant

Strategy 3.2: Inform fisheries and aquaculture industry of the potential impacts of microplastics on target resources, products, and bottom lines

Actions	Partner(s)
2. Distribute microplastic outreach materials (e.g., blog, newsletter, fact sheet, etc.), targeted to fisheries and aquaculture industries, at least twice per year	New Hampshire Sea Grant, Gulf of Maine Lobster Foundation
3. Partner with regional and state fisheries managers to identify contacts for microplastics information sharing	Abt Associates

Objective 4. Inform marine educators about marine microplastic pollution and its impact on wildlife

Strategy 4.1: Identify targeted marine educator audiences and provide resources for incorporating microplastics lessons into curricula

Actions	Partner(s)
1. Compile a list of regional education contacts, including Action Plan partners and resources using the Northeast Marine Debris Collaboration Portal	NOAA Marine Debris Program
2. By the end of 2020, modify existing microplastics fact sheets for educator use	Boothbay Sea and Science Center
3. Develop a microplastics workshop for educators	Boothbay Sea and Science Center, Blue Ocean Society, Rozalia Project
4. Provide information and open-ocean microplastics samples to education networks for incorporation of microplastics pollution lessons into curricula	NOAA Marine Debris Program



Research, Information, and Risk Assessment for Wildlife and Habitat

North Atlantic right whales in Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary (Photo credit: NOAA).

Goal 1: Identify, prevent and reduce marine debris impacts to wildlife and habitat

Objective 1. Study the impact of various types of marine debris on various habitats and wildlife

Strategy 1.1: Assess marine debris risks to wildlife and habitat

Action	Partner(s)
1. Compile a literature review on marine debris impacts ranked by threat to wildlife and/or habitat and determine gaps in information	United States Fish and Wildlife Service in partnership with University of Rhode Island graduate students

Strategy 1.2: Collect and share marine debris/wildlife interaction data from stakeholders in the Gulf of Maine region

Actions	Partner(s)
1. Develop and share a standardized form(s) for collecting data on marine debris/wildlife interactions with collaborative input applicable to multiple stakeholders, the ability to collect comparable data, and that is easy to use for cleanup volunteers	Blue Ocean Society, United States Fish and Wildlife Service, Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries

Strategy 1.2: Collect and share marine debris/wildlife interaction data from stakeholders in the Gulf of Maine region

Actions	Partner(s)
2. Collect, analyze, and share anecdotal marine debris/wildlife interaction data	Blue Ocean Society, Seacoast Science Center, Boston Harbor City Cruises, Center for Coastal Studies, Center for Wildlife, Gulf of Maine Council, Huntsman Marine Science Centre, Urban Harbors Institute, Surfrider Foundation, United States Fish and Wildlife Service
3. Share a list of applicable marine debris, wildlife, and habitat listservs, social media handles, and stranding response partners	NOAA Marine Debris Program

Objective 2. Increase awareness of the impacts of marine debris on wildlife and habitat

Strategy 2.1: Develop standardized, effective messaging regarding the impacts of marine debris that can be tailored to different audiences

Actions	Partner(s)
1. Identify the most pressing need(s) for messaging regarding marine debris impacts on wildlife and/or habitat and the appropriate audience(s) for those messages	Center for Coastal Studies, United States Fish and Wildlife Service
2. Increase messaging on the impacts of debris on wildlife and/or habitat in existing debris outreach efforts	Blue Ocean Society, United States Fish and Wildlife Service
3. Develop a uniform message that can be tailored for different audiences and reiterated throughout the region	United States Fish and Wildlife Service, Gulf of Maine Council

Strategy 2.2: Research, assess, and affect legislation, regulations, or policies that may protect wildlife and habitat from the impacts of marine debris

Actions	Partner(s)
1. Research existing legislation and assess the effectiveness of legislation meant to protect wildlife and habitat from the impacts of marine debris	Surfrider Foundation, Seaside Sustainability
2. Educate elected officials, state and federal land managers, and community leaders on the impacts of marine debris; build trust	Seacoast Science Center, Blue Ocean Society, Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries, Surfrider Foundation, Center for Coastal Studies, Seaside Sustainability, United States Fish and Wildlife Service
3. Build relationships and support enforcement of existing consumer debris regulations/legislation by collaborating with environmental law enforcement agencies	Seacoast Science Center, Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries, United States Fish and Wildlife Service, Center for Coastal Studies

Strategy 2.2: Research, assess, and affect legislation, regulations, or policies that may protect wildlife and habitat from the impacts of marine debris

Actions	Partner(s)
4. Support the modification of fishing gear regulations/legislation by collaborating with environmental law enforcement agencies	Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries

Strategy 2.3: Influence community behavior by increasing awareness of marine debris impacts on wildlife and habitat

Actions	Partner(s)
1. Develop an effective social media campaign on the impacts of marine debris on wildlife and habitat using common language, include hashtags for information sharing across multiple groups in the region	United States Fish and Wildlife Service, Gulf of Maine Council
2. Draft a beachcombers guide to marine debris depicting typical types of debris found on the region's beaches	OceansWide, Center for Coastal Studies, Urban Harbors Institute, Blue Ocean Society
3. Share resources and links, including the beachcombers guide to marine debris, as well as templates and tools to empower communities to affect change	NOAA Marine Debris Program, Blue Ocean Society

Objective 3. Reduce risks posed by marine debris to wildlife and habitat

Strategy 3.1: Clean up existing marine debris

Actions	Partner(s)
1. Remove debris from seabird nesting and staging areas and other habitat critically important to wildlife	Center for Coastal Studies, United States Fish and Wildlife Service, Blue Ocean Society
2. Conduct coastal habitat cleanups, including areas surrounding rivers, lakes, etc.	Seacoast Science Center, Blue Ocean Society, Gulf of Maine Lobster Foundation, Center for Coastal Studies, Rozalia Project, Surfrider Foundation, Urban Harbors Institute, United States Fish and Wildlife Service, Huntsman Marine Science Centre
3. Create a network of contacts and organizations to coordinate volunteer efforts for regular cleanups	Gulf of Maine Council, Blue Ocean Society, Center for Coastal Studies, Huntsman Marine Science Centre, Urban Harbors Institute, Surfrider Foundation

Goal 2: Prepare to effectively respond to marine life and habitat impacted by marine debris

Objective 1. Determine best practices for responding to marine life impacted by marine debris

Strategy 1.1: Coordinate response to marine life impacted by marine debris

Actions	Partner(s)
1. Disseminate existing protocols regarding marine debris interactions to stranding networks	NOAA Fisheries
2. Summarize information from marine debris interaction strandings for use by education organizations, including follow-up on stranding reports and events	Blue Ocean Society, NOAA Fisheries

Objective 2. Determine best practices for responding to marine habitat impacted by marine debris

Strategy 2.1: Develop infrastructure for responding to marine habitat impacted by marine debris

Actions	Partner(s)
1. Create a volunteer network to respond to storm events or other acute threats from marine debris	Blue Ocean Society, Center for Coastal Studies, Surfrider Foundation
2. Share funding opportunities and resources to support habitat cleanup efforts	NOAA Marine Debris Program, United States Fish and Wildlife Service



Cross-Collaboration

Volunteers cleaning up abandoned aquaculture gear in Provincetown, Massachusetts (Photo credit: NOAA).

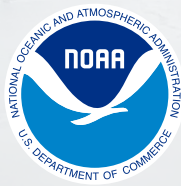
Goal 1: Enhance collaboration between partners working on Consumer Debris, Fishing Gear, Microplastics, and Research, Information, and Risk Assessment for Wildlife and Habitat

Actions	Partner(s)
1. Convene partners throughout the Gulf of Maine on a regular basis to promote regional collaboration in implementing the Gulf of Maine Marine Debris Action Plan	NOAA Marine Debris Program
2. Coordinate efforts across the Gulf of Maine to conduct beach cleanups	Gulf of Maine Council, Blue Ocean Society, Center for Coastal Studies, NOAA Marine Debris Program, Huntsman Marine Science Centre, Maine Coastal Program, Ocean Conservancy, Urban Harbors Institute, Surfrider Foundation, Harborkeepers
3. Collect consistent data on the extent of debris on managed or cleaned coastlines and wildlife interactions with debris (both fishing gear and consumer debris interactions)	United States Fish and Wildlife Service
4. Provide information on the extent of debris-wildlife interactions to stakeholders (e.g., public, partners conducting cleanups, legislators, regulators, etc.) to focus cleanup efforts where they can most benefit wildlife, influence new cleanup and prevention efforts, and highlight debris impacts to the general public	United States Fish and Wildlife Service

Actions	Partner(s)
5. Develop and promote consistent messaging and a social media campaign across the Gulf of Maine region	Gulf of Maine Council, United States Fish and Wildlife Service
6. Create a one-pager of best practices and use it to create social marketing messages to share with the public	Gulf of Maine Council, Blue Ocean Society, Center for Coastal Studies, Huntsman Marine Science Centre, Urban Harbors Institute, Surfrider Foundation
7. Investigate the potential to require foam docks to be encased in hard plastics	Rozalia Project, Blue Ocean Society, Center for Coastal Studies
8. Use the Northeast Marine Debris Collaboration Portal to enhance regional collaboration and sharing of resources. The tool could be utilized to: 1) coordinate cleanup efforts such as connecting fishermen who are willing to provide boats or artists interested in using collected debris in installations; 2) post resources and products related to outreach, research and education; 3) host a regional calendar of upcoming marine debris related events of interest to the Gulf of Maine, including legislative opportunities (e.g., hearings, testimonies, etc.); and 4) share funding opportunities.	NOAA Marine Debris Program, United States Fish and Wildlife Service

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Photo Credit: NOAA

