

PRESSRELEASE

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Mid-Atlantic Ocean Data Portal Launches New Collaboration Tools, Ocean Stories New features expand pathways for participation and collaboration

WASHINGTON, D.C. — (June 18, 2015) — This week, the Mid-Atlantic Regional Council on the Ocean (MARCO) and partners launched new features on the Mid-Atlantic Ocean Data Portal (<http://portal.midatlanticocean.org>) – an online toolkit and resource center that helps stakeholders find and visualize ocean use data through mapping.

First launched in 2010 to prepare for the regional ocean planning process, the new features of the Mid-Atlantic Ocean Data Portal include:

- Highlighted ocean use stories that draw correlations between real life experiences on the ocean and the best available data, visualized dynamically as each story unfolds. The new feature allows users to navigate directly from ocean stories to associated data layers and back again, deepening their engagement with the mapping tool.
- An all new Map Groups function allows Portal users who are logged in to work with peers and across sectors or regions, publicly or privately, to co-develop and design ocean-use maps.
- Enhanced organization and access to tools for exploring, designing, sharing, and comparing potential solutions to ocean planning challenges.
- Expansion of the *How Tuesday* monthly webinar series featuring special guests and topics. *How Tuesday* helps users of all experience levels stay on top of Portal enhancements, new data, and best practices. The next *How Tuesday* webinar is scheduled for July 7th at 2pm and will provide a guided tour of the features and functions of the newly redesigned Mid-Atlantic Ocean Data Portal. Sign up at <http://portal.midatlanticocean.org/calendar/>

“At the heart of the portal’s new features are the integration of the data, maps, and real world stories of the Mid-Atlantic,” said Tony MacDonald, Director of the Portal Project and the Urban Coast Institute at Monmouth University. “Whether working or playing – everyone here has a connection to the ocean and the many services it provides. People need to see themselves in the data, to see themselves in these maps. With the redesign, we’ve created more pathways for sharing their ocean stories and perspectives.”

Through the Portal’s new features users first experience data and maps in the context of an Ocean Story. With the help of data, maps, interviews, videos, and photos, these real world stories hosted on the Portal explore ocean uses and illustrate how mapping and collaboration helps to clarify potential interactions amongst ocean users, thus enhancing the vitality of our Mid-Atlantic ocean economy and ecosystem.

Current stories available for exploration include:

- How new recreational data gathered by Surfrider and hosted on the Portal illustrate the economic importance of the places where we play.

- One party boat captain's work to build the Mid-Atlantic reef system and his hopes for collaboration and recognition in a future powered by wind farms off the coast of Maryland.
- A partnership between the Portal team and the Coast Guard that brings new light to shipping lane data.

Successful ocean planning will rely on strong partnerships and easy collaboration. With that in mind, the Portal team is excited to introduce Map Groups. Through Map Groups, Portal users can connect with a growing network of ocean stakeholders and collaborate around common themes. They will also be able to find, join, or create ocean use groups as well as organize, modify and share map views. Group members will be able to upload their own shapefiles to use on the Portal and export shape files that they've created using Marine Planner's design tools. Any work can be shared privately within individual groups or publicly with the Portal community.

"We made the Map Groups a key new feature because our most active Portal users told us they wanted to collaborate remotely and learn from their peers," says Jay Odell, Portal Technical Team Lead and Mid-Atlantic Marine Program Director for The Nature Conservancy. "Now the stakeholders we've been working with can do some of the same collaboration they do at in-person meetings online."

The backbone of the Portal is Marine Planner, a mapping and data visualization tool that powers the dynamic Ocean Stories and the Map Groups feature. Marine Planner takes the best available data and offers it up to in a user-friendly format: Even with zero GIS experience, Portal users can easily create a map that illustrates their own ocean interests and how those intersect with other uses. After logging in, users can save linked map layers with the bookmarks tool and return to them later to continue their work. Drawing and design tools are also included in the suite of upgraded features enjoyed by registered users.

"I love how easily the Portal's new features lets you arrange data layers, save bookmarks, create your own designs and send map links," says Laura McKay, the MARCO Chair and Manager of the Virginia Coastal Zone Management Program. "It empowers anyone to illustrate new or existing uses, and identify interactions among ocean uses. I hope this will encourage all who care about and use the ocean to become more involved in its wise management. Our portal has come a long way since its launch in 2010."

Currently, the Portal houses data from seven sectors: Administrative, Fishing, Marine Life, Maritime, Recreation, Renewable Energy, and Security. All data are found in one location and available for download, making the Portal an efficient alternative for the scientific and planning community who need to access this information and rely on it to inform their work. With a simple keyword search, users can quickly and easily find the data they're most interested in, layer it, save their map, and share it via link, printed materials, or with other Portal users through the Groups feature.

Data on the Portal is being provided by a wide array of agencies and organizations – spanning federal, state, industry and non-profit sectors. Contributors include NOAA, the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, The Nature Conservancy, USGS, as well as the US Coast Guard and Navy. "Many of us have been delivering geospatial ocean data for a long time, but until recently we haven't had an easy way to share up-to-date data with our colleagues," says Megan Trembl, Coastal Geospatial Policy Specialist contracting with NOAA. "the MARCO portal can now integrate authoritative federal data directly from sites like MarineCadastre.gov."

As a dynamic repository, new data will be added to the Portal as it becomes available. Later this year the team expects to have new data on commercial fishing, improved information on

sediment and seafloor habitats, important coastal bird and bat habitat, and improved data layers on active submarine cables.

Improvements to the Portal were funded in part by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and led by the [Monmouth University Urban Coast Institute](#) on behalf of a team of design and communications professionals.

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About MARCO

Established by the Governors of the five coastal Mid-Atlantic states (Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, and Virginia) in 2009, the Mid-Atlantic Regional Council on the Ocean (MARCO) is a partnership to address shared regional priorities and provide a collective voice for the region. The five MARCO states focus on four-shared priority areas identified in the Governors Agreement: climate change adaptation, marine habitats, offshore renewable energy and water quality. MARCO also uses regional ocean planning as a means to advance these priorities.

Learn more at: www.midatlanticocean.org