

**MERIDIAN INSTITUTE**

**Moderator: Laura Cantral**  
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Operator: This is Conference # 11146097.

Operator: Hello, and welcome to today's Webcast. My name is (Lauren) and I will be your event specialist today. All lines have been placed on mute to prevent any background noise. And please note that today's Webcast is being recorded.

During the presentation, we will have a question-and-answer session. You can ask text questions at any time. Click the green Q&A icon on the lower left hand corner of your screen, type your question in the open area, and click Submit.

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And finally, should you do need technical assistance, as a best practice we suggest you first refresh your browser. If that does not resolve the issue, please click on the Support option in the upper right hand corner of your screen for online troubleshooting.

It is now my pleasure to turn today's program over to Laura Cantral. The floor is yours.

Laura Cantral: Thank you, (Lauren). And welcome everyone. We want to thank you for joining this public Webinar this afternoon, being hosted by the Mid-Atlantic Regional Planning Body.

We -- I'm going to quickly run through the objectives and the agenda for this Webinar, and then I'll turn it over to RPB co-leads and other members who are going to walk you through a few updates and other information. So we have a couple of objectives for this Webinar. We intend to review changes that have been made to Mid-Atlantic Regional Ocean Action Plan in response to public comment. And then we will go through -- provide some input and answer questions during a Q&A session.

And you just heard from the event specialist, (Lauren), about how you can ask questions. Many of you had joined these Webinars and are familiar with the format. You can send us a question anytime during this Webinar, and we will be collecting questions, and then having a dedicated Q&A session for a few minutes after we hear some presentations and updates.

So let me just offer a couple of other logistical details. I already told you about the Q&A and that we'll be reviewing them. We will also be posting a number of documents at the -- after this Webinar. There will -- you heard our event specialist share with you that this event is being recorded. So we will post a recording of the Webinar, the full slide presentation, a list of Webinar participants.

And in a few weeks, we'll have a summary that captures the major points of our discussion. We will adjourn this at 5 PM. And before I kick it off, I want to take the -- it's my pleasure to announce for anyone who didn't hear the good news that Mid-Atlantic Ocean Action Plan was certified yesterday by the National Ocean Council as was the Northeast Regional Ocean Plan. Very exciting. A historic moment. A lot of hard work has gone in to the development of these regional plans and view -- in no small part to the stakeholder engagement and input that has been critical to the development of the plan.

And now, let's -- next is implementation and some of that work is already underway. And you're going to hear about the plan for moving towards with the plan starting right now.

And with that, I'm going to turn it over to Gwynne Schultz from the State of Maryland and Mid-Atlantic RPB's state co-lead.

Gwynne Schultz: OK, well, good afternoon, everyone. Over the past three and a half years, the members of the RPB have had a unique opportunity to collaborate on the development of this region's first Ocean Action Plan. And we really are happy that it's, you know, had been certified.

Over this time, we work to improve the coordination and data-sharing and to build relationships that are needed to address the opportunities and challenges that are facing our region's ocean resources and uses. Stakeholders from all parts of the region in representing a diversity of sectors provided ideas and feedback during this multi-year planning process.

Next slide. We -- the RPB released a draft plan this past summer for a 60-day public comment period. In addition, the Mid-Atlantic Regional Council on the Ocean hosted a series of five open houses around the region during which representatives from the RPB presented the draft plan and we engaged in question and answer sessions with the public.

During this comment period, we received 3,400 -- no, 34,600 public comments in the form of individual letters, e-mails, letters by multiple signatories, and (form letter) submissions. And all of these comments -- we read them all. So all of the comments were reviewed and considered during the development of the final plan.

Next slide. The sections of the plan that generated the most comments are noted in these eight bullets. As stated in the first bullet, we received many compliments on the plan and the overall ocean planning process.

So in a minute, I'm going to just briefly characterize some of the comments that were submitted and the clarifications or modifications that were made to the plan in response to these comments. But first, I want to make sure that

you are aware that the RPB has posted on our Web site a very detailed -- I think it's (that) 31 pages, but a very detailed response to comments that describes how the comments were addressed and were incorporated into the final plan.

Next slide. We received quite a few comments on the section of the plan that described the best practices for enhanced coordination. The public expressed support for the use of these practices by the agencies and requested clarity on how they would be incorporated into agency business, so the RPB agency, you know, have agreed to provide that additional information in response to this request.

Also, since the number of the best practices focus on the use of data that's posted on the ocean data portal, we felt that it was really important to clarify that the information, you know, the data that's on the portal is available to all interested parties, you know, whether it's a project applicants or the public. You know everyone had access to the data portal.

Next slide. The vast majority of comments weighs -- weighed in were on the ocean -- the Healthy Ocean Ecosystem Action 1 for the Ecologically Rich Areas. There were requests for further detail on the data to be used -- the process to identify the ERAs -- and future stakeholder engagement opportunities.

So in response the Regional Planning Body, we find the action to clarify that the data products used to identify the ERA could be shared publicly. And that the work will proceed, you know, in a very careful stepwise manner as for their detail in the plan and in future work plan.

So some stakeholders expressed concern about potential restrictions for users of areas identified as ERAs, while other stakeholders advocated for the identification of specific management measures to protect these areas. So you we just -- on this one alone, we had a diversity of input. So in response -- so that the RPB clarified that it does not have the authority to identify discrete areas of the ocean for specific management objectives.

Next slide. There was a recognition that for many of the datasets, the ocean data portal represents the first time these data are being made accessible to the public and stakeholders in a comprehensive and easy to navigate mapping surface on service. The RPB responded to many of the questions regarding the data gaps, you know, the limitations and datasets and the need to continually update and enhance the data portal. And those refinements were made either in the final plan or in the response to comments that were posted on the internet or on our Web site.

Next slide. So if you have been engaging in the Mid-Atlantic, you know, ocean planning process over the past three and half years, you know that the RPB has worked hard really along with its partners to provide as many opportunities as we could for stakeholder engagement. The RPB received many compliments for those outreach efforts, as well as a call for future opportunities.

In the final plan, we reinforce the message that stakeholder engagement is key. It's important that we're committed to providing additional information about these opportunities as we transition from planning to implementation. The regional planning bodies already started the plan's future engagement opportunities, and you're going to hear more about those efforts later on in the Webinar.

Next slide. So I'm not -- this is actually my final slide. And in this one, many of the comments that we received about plan implementation in the future of the RPB. In a moment, I'm going to hand the mike over to our next speakers who are going to say more about the future of the RPB. But I will note that we do plan to further develop the performance in monitoring evaluation approach and are looking at developing potential indicators to measure our success in engaging stakeholders. And that was a key comment throughout the plan.

So at this point, I would like to introduce our federal co-leads Bob LaBelle from the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management.

Bob LaBelle: Well, thank you Gwynne. Good afternoon everyone. I'm going to talk on the next slide about plan certification. And as Laura mentioned, we are very pleased that the National Ocean Council certified the Mid-Atlantic Regional Ocean Action Plan as announced yesterday through the White House blog.

And the plans as a result of this historical collaboration amongst states, tribes, federal agencies, the Fishery Management Council, and ocean stakeholders everywhere. This Ocean Plan approach is designed to work across all levels of government and to advance economic, environmental and cultural priorities within the region.

Another reminder, the plan describes all the RPB will use data, agency coordination and stakeholder engagement to inform and guide federal, state, and tribal with Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council activities all under existing authorities. And I do want to mention that -- I want -- on behalf of the RPB, we want to acknowledge the really great work that Meridian performed in helping us reach this milestone.

Because ocean plans offer opportunities to support the interest of a number of governmental and of the stakeholders, (neutral) third-party facilitation was essential to ensure mutual trust and transparency and a lot of consensus agreement to be achieved on key milestone throughout the plan development process. Meridian provided essential facilitation on logistical services along with substantive expertise and experience, not to mention planning -- (patience) with ocean planning. And these are all vital as the RPB navigated this complex effort to reach this milestone, and so we extend our great thanks to Meridian.

Next slide please. So future plans for the Mid-Atlantic RPB. Now, that our plan -- ocean plans have been certified, the RPB is looking towards to plan implementation. The RPB has unique form for intra-jurisdictional collaboration that successfully increased mutual understanding across multiple levels of government and identified specific ways to work together to address regional challenges and some opportunities, service plan and throughout the planning process.

The RPB members are committed to working together to implement the plan action, which directly supports. As I just mentioned, existing agency missions, mandates and priorities.

The RPB will continue to leverage all relevant opportunities and engage stakeholders. In January, Laura McKay from State of Virginia will become the state co-lead.

Kelsey Leonard will continue to serve as the tribal co-lead. And I will continue to serve as the federal co-lead through the spring when the next federal co-lead will be named. More information about the on-going role of the RPB is found in Section 4.1 of the Ocean Plan.

And I will go to the next slide please. So future of the data portal. The data portal is a key resource and the cornerstone of our ocean planning effort. It's an informative tool for everyone to use, including stakeholders, project proponents and decision-makers. The portal allows everyone to easily obtain and use information about the ocean environment and engage in decision-making processes such as National Environmental Policy Act review. And this is done by identifying those who may be affected by proposed activities or where additional information may be needed.

So the RPB members and the (views) are committed to using, enhancing and maintaining the portals going forward.

Next slide please. This is on our next steps. As you are aware, we've been working hard to submit the plans for the National Ocean Council. And now that the plan has just been certified, we are now getting underway with implementation. The RPB is continuing our regular procedural discussion and we have outlined our next steps.

Our mantra is on-going but (receives) communication, coordination and collaboration. In 2017, we will share a draft work plan for public review. And then we anticipate having an in-person for public RPB meeting during the summer.

And now, I am going to turn it back to Laura Cantral for the next slide. Thank you.

Laura Cantral: Thank you, Bob. And thank you for those kind words about Meridian's role. It's been our honor and pleasure to work with the RPB and should be part of this process.

So now, we're going to hear -- we're going to move now to some specific action updates and talk about the next steps for implementation of some of those specific actions that are outlined in the plan. Both are related to healthy ocean ecosystem and actions related to sustainable ocean uses. And I'm going to turn it to the first speaker who will provide each of the upcoming speakers are leads on this action. And I'll turn to the first, and then they will enter the next speaker and so forth.

So now, I'm going to hand it off to another Laura who plays a critical role in this process. And as you heard from Bob, who will become the next state co-lead in January and that's Laura McKay. Laura?

Laura McKay: Thank you, my Laura twin. And I just want to echo my thanks to Meridian for all the wonderful work you've done to help us get to this point, and to Bob, to Gwynne, and to Kelsey as our co-leads to get us this far. We've really come a long way. In some ways, it seems a long time. In other ways, it seems a short time.

So anyway, we're really excited to be able to move now from plan development to plan implementation. And I've been especially happy and excited to work on some of this Healthy Ocean Ecosystem Actions.

So the first one, Ecologically Rich Areas. It is perhaps one of the more innovative ones and more controversial. But we are moving ahead. We are starting to form a work group. We discussed that at our RPB meeting this week. And I think we are getting there and excited to get started. We are continuing our work with the marine life data analysis team. We have contracts -- one contract that's finishing up end of this year. And we hope to keep moving ahead on a new contract with them and get as far as we can with that work.

The first step in the plan is that step A just finalized our framework for identifying Ecologically Rich Areas. And we're going to be doing that as we have in the past in collaboration with the Northeast. So our aim is to get that done as soon as possible.

We did have interesting discussions this week about the possibility of adding to the framework ideas about there being different types of ERAs. Some that are fixed in space and time -- others that are clusters of fixed areas -- others that are (as similar) -- and still others that are dynamic or what they call "ambulatory". We recognize that Ecologically Rich Areas can move over time and we want to be able to take that into account in our framework.

We've also -- my program submitted a grant proposal that we are hopeful to get funded. That would allow us to continue this work beginning in October 2017, as that would carry us forward. We're not sure how many steps we can get through how quickly. That will depend on the funding that we receive and we hope to keep just -- (allowing ahead) working our way through these steps and identifying the pilot ERA and developing the in-depth report on that area, and then having the federal agencies look at the report and determine how it can be used in their existing permitting procedures in decision-making processes. And we'll find out how useful that is to the federal agencies and have a checkpoint there before we move ahead.

So that's the basic plan for that. We do anticipate a lot of stakeholder engagement in these steps. The first one will be in soliciting stakeholder input on refinements to the approach for identifying ERAs. And we will certainly have a stakeholder workshop to identify the pilot ERA, assuming grant funds are going to be available.

So with that, we'll go to the next slide and the next action, which is mapping species shift. And again, our marine life data analysis team, (Ed Duke), (Pat Helt) and Jesse Cleary, that group has been doing terrific work. They are providing us with a literature review under their current contract at the end of this year. They've been tracking down whatnot, fix this, what information we do have about how fish, marine mammal, sea bird, sea turtle species are

shifting over time. And they were able to show us a pretty dramatic maps with those shifts and where the core abundance of species are occurring. A lot of shifts northward.

The next step after that, we have to complete formation of this workgroup. We've had some initial talks about that and hope to have a first call to review the available data this spring, and eventually have this workgroup to make recommendations to the RPB on how the available data could be displayed in the portal to be of most use to all of our stakeholders. And also, to provide a list of data gaps to be filled in and we're sure there'll be a fair numbers, so the opportunities for stakeholder engagement there.

We do expect to convene stakeholders to preview the data before we post it on the MARCO portal, but we're not exactly sure what form that convenient stakeholders will take, and of course to get input from stakeholders on data gaps as well.

The third action -- we can go to the next slide, is ocean acidification. And we have made some terrific progress there. I want to -- I just want to back step one bit too and thank NOAA for being the federal co-lead on the mapping species shift action. And now, I thank EPA for being the federal co-lead on this ocean acidification action. And also, special thanks to Kaity Goldsmith in our MARCO staff, who's been -- really helping us to form the workgroup for this action.

And what we've done here is to take advantage of the structure that's already in place in the country for groups called "CANS" Coastal Acidification Networks. There are some already existing, but that there had not been one in the Northeast, so under some current funding that MARCO has NOAA. We are kind of setting up what we call, "MACAN" Mid-Atlantic Coastal Acidification Network. And Sherilyn Lau from EPA and myself are going to sit on that steering committee. And that will in effect be the RPB's workgroup for our steps under this action. So that's exciting.

We do want to note that even though it's called "Coastal Acidification Network", the intent is to look at acidification all the way from (estuaries) out to the open ocean.

So we have some pretty specific steps here. We've already outlined this with this MACAN group. By spring, we're going to identify and prioritize questions that are regional (Marshall Network) should address. We're compiling a list of the current monitoring that's going on in the technologies, in the data gap by August, and developing a plan for a monitoring infrastructure by the end of 2017.

And we have already setup Webinar series and you'll see the dates there for four different Webinars coming up. One in just a week and a half -- two weeks, December the 20<sup>th</sup>. That first one, the focus will be on what we know right now about current monitoring and biology and chemistry of all that.

The January 17<sup>th</sup> Webinar will focus on the ecological impacts of acidification. The February 1 will be on industry perspectives and industry needs for dealings with ocean acidification. And the March one will be about natural resource manager perspectives and needs. And then we are planning a workshop sometime in May to really get together on data gaps and high priorities.

So a lot's going on with that workgroup. That group is ready to roll.

And so with that, we'll go to the next slide. And I would like to turn it over now to my colleague Buddy LoBue at EPA, who is federally a co-lead along with me as the state co-lead on our marine debris action. So thank you, Buddy.

Buddy LoBue: Thank you, Laura, and thank you for co-leading with this action. The purpose of this action is to develop our regionally appropriate strategy for marine debris reductions to address key issues described in the Ocean Action Plan, such as debris from storms, derelict fishing gear, the containers, plastic bottles, bags, balloons, et cetera.

We began this process with this action by convening an inaugural call of the Mid-Atlantic working group. And our immediate task is to develop an implementation plan for this task. Our call was well attended by a federal state MARCO and facilitated contracting members. And in that call, it was really a good time to exchange ideas -- to meet each other -- to focus where we're going and to exchange some preliminary discussion on existing efforts and ideas for how we move forward with this.

We got some really good summaries from the state efforts -- various state efforts going on and also NOAA's Marine Debris Program efforts. We'll begin implementation of this action in January soon as possible. We tried to set a nice schedule to move forward with this. We agreed to (prior) -- to maintaining monthly calls on this to keep in contact.

So, you know, our goal is to build on those marine debris programs and EPA's (treasury waters) programs and other existing programs that already exist and to build on that and with a coordinated effort to cover marine debris within the Mid-Atlantic.

And so our next steps are to create an inventory of existing efforts in the Mid-Atlantic. We're going to develop immediately a template that -- to pass around to our members to be able to canvas for the existing member -- existing efforts in the states' federal areas.

We also agree that we determine that as a report put out by Delaware Coastal Zone Management Program entitled "Assessment of Marine Debris in Mid-Atlantic". It's a good area that we can assist our cataloging. And so we can use that as a nice resource for that. We intend to create this inventory by February 2017.

Then with that inventory, we want to -- our next step to identify gaps and needs by March 2017, using this inventory from step one. And this whole assessment will be to identify choices for priority strategies going into the future.

Then by June 2017, we'd like to host a workshop to help identify priority strategy to recommend to the RPB. We'd like to engage stakeholders to invite

-- to help us decide what types of approaches to marine debris reduction in the region we wish to pursue whether it'd be prevention, removal, monitoring, et cetera, to get our hands around. It will help us identify these and these, and identify priority gaps.

If possible, we'd like to develop a proposal that's ready for the next cycle of NOAA granting. I mean if we can get that.

Then by July 17th -- I'm sorry, by July 27<sup>th</sup> of 2017, we'd like to secure the RPB's approval for the strategy moving forward and begin implementation by August 2017. We intend to maintain stakeholder agreement as engagement on this throughout the process.

And so with that, I'd like to move to the next slide and reintroduce Bob LaBelle to take it from here.

Bob LaBelle: OK. Thank you, Buddy. So this slide is on Ocean Energy Action. And BOEM is working to facilitate greater collaboration around ocean energies in the region.

And as you can see on the slide, we have some actions already on the way. Several of these steps are in coordination with action that's just being developed with the joint effort between the Department of Energy and Department of Interior. And it's a national offshore wind strategy that was just released in September. And it's posted on the DOE Web site.

Now, in their -- were in -- identifying key intersections of relevant federal program and authorities that will inform site assessment and construction on operation plans for offshore wind projects, we anticipate posting this information on the BOEM Web site by July. We also intend to leverage that offshore wind strategy action for stakeholder meetings next fall to gather input for BOEM's decision on the path forward for potential future of Atlantic planning and leasing. So more details to come on this later.

Also, there's a White House offshore wind permitting subgroup that is chaired by BOEM. And each agency on that is working to identify their federal

responsibilities related to offshore wind and so information will be coming out from that group as well.

BOEM continues to use the data portal and its on-going work and reviews and we're updating our standard operating procedures for area identification for offshore wind energy leasing, and we'll link to the guideline pages on the BOEM Web site as well in terms of encouraging use of the data portal.

Also, all this -- what -- that's something that just came out today that I wanted to mention on the best -- is best manager -- best management practices workshop for Atlantic offshore wind facilities. And this workshop will take place at NOAA in Silver Spring on March 7 to 9, and it's to engage stakeholders in developing best management practices for Atlantic offshore wind activities and protected species. So that's hot off the press, and we hope that, that will be very successful.

Next slide, please. So I wanted to update you on Offshore Sand Management Action. This slide presents a brief update on actions that we're championing. BOEM will convene a regional sand management working group and also convene a meeting of fishermen about issues of New Jersey likely in early 2017. We're also meeting with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, New York District in early next year to discuss collaboration on upcoming projects on Long Island, meeting offshore OCS families with -- and we have been coordinating with U.S. Corps Philadelphia District on locations of potential offshore sand resource areas for future New Jersey projects.

You can find more details about the steps to accomplish these sand actions and the report on chapter 2.4.6. Next slide, please. So this slide is combining both ocean energy and sand management in that it's related to partnering and research and study. In November, BOEM held a public Atlantic Ocean Energy and Mineral Science forum that describes on-going studies and completed studies that have been used in preparation for MidA documents. And the forum also was very helpful in identifying possible new studies to fill information needs going forward. We hope to hold these meetings periodically and they are focus directly on the Mid-Atlantic regions as well.

Also, BOEM announced in late November that we are beginning to formulate our FY 2018 Environmental Studies Development Plan covering BOEM energy and minerals activities. We encourage public input in identifying potential city ideas for consideration for the -- for studies in the Atlantic area.

Our environment studies program is particularly interested in study ideas that include hypothesis testing and the opportunity to include a citizen science component. Ideas submitted must be relevant to BOEM's information requirements in the areas of biological, oceanographic, social, economic, and cultural research. So it's a broad swath that we're interested in. And the deadline for submitting ideas is December 30<sup>th</sup>. We only need a paragraph explaining why this is an important barrier of research for BOEM to consider, and we would encourage all of you to look and to maybe respond to that.

I'm now going to turn it over to our (Chris Scraba) in the Coast Guard.  
(Chris)?

(Chris Scraba): Good afternoon, Bob, thank you very much. We greatly appreciate everybody being on today. I would like to give you a quick update on the maritime commerce and navigation action. I think as you've already heard from many of our speakers the critical importance that we all take in identifying our coordination actions to address the regional important ocean management, challenges and opportunities that we face. When you go to our MARCO data portal site, you quickly get to see all of the ocean uses and the importance as Bob LaBelle has already talked about, to coordinate, collaborate and communicate.

When you put those layers of national security, maritime, commerce, commercial and recreational fishery, wind energy areas and nonconsumptive rec activities on top of each other, you quickly get to understand and know the importance of us having to collaborate with the ocean uses offshore.

Our summary here really is to enhance the institutional awareness and the impact that maritime commerce has on our nation's economies. And in the next steps, we really have been implementing these steps, probably over the last six to 12 months ongoing and many have already started where we're

monitoring the maritime commerce trends and traffic patterns, trying to update the MARCO portal site with updated information with Marine Cadaster so that we can better understand and maintain reliable ocean datasets that shows us all the different ocean uses in the Mid-Atlantic.

And more importantly, to catalog the intersections between these different entities, but we've also been looking at identifying the impacts of, not only the Panama Canal, but Suez Canal. The Panama Canal, as you all know, opened up in late June and we're already seeing the impacts, I call it the "50-foot dredge club". We've had a 50-foot dredge now in New York and New Jersey for the approaches into their area.

You have Baltimore and Hampton Roads that are at 50 feet and they're already looking at a study to potentially go to 55 feet. And down in the southern part of us, even in Wilmington, North Carolina, which is not necessarily part of the Mid-Atlantic, but adjacent to us, they are looking to do 45 feet.

And the Army Corps is working very closely on the Delaware River right now to ensure that that's 45 feet. And the Coast Guard is working closely to update some of the ranges there, MARCO's (shooking) out places. So you can see that we're starting to work very collaboratively with all the different agencies to ensure that we can move forward in a positive manner with the next steps.

As part of our stakeholder engagement, we would anticipate that the Mid-Atlantic will have some type of future public forum where we had our last one, as you remember, in Baltimore in March. We'll continue to utilize the existing harbor safety committees that are currently set up in New York City and New Jersey as well as Philadelphia, Baltimore, Norfolk. And more importantly, as we're looking to initiate a Mid-Atlantic action plan for a maritime commerce and navigation safety group, we will provide updated information to all of the stakeholders involved in maritime commerce and navigation safety.

We are looking to try to do this, probably in May and November. Three concentric circles happened during that time of the year. You have (right wheel) migration that is ending in this area. You have the beginning of hurricane season, and then the onslaught of the large number of recreational boaters and recreational activity that Kevin Hassell will get into here shortly with nonconsumptive recreational activities. So we figured, the best to talk about to our stakeholders during that time of the year as we try to enhance the overall safety on the water.

And then the last thing obviously is another point of the MARCO data portal and the ability to champion that to make sure that we have the most recent data that is available to the general public to be able to view that. I will now turn it over to Kevin Hassell from the State of New Jersey who will go over nonconsumptive recreational activities. Thank you very much.

Kevin Hassell: Great. Thanks, (Chris). So basically, the purpose of this action is to account for the importance of nonconsumptive recreational uses and their economic impact in the region. So in this action, we're looking to define collaboration with our stakeholders. What it means for uses in areas to be considered important for nonconsumptive recreation. We'd like to identify and assess potential impacts and conflicts to important nonconsumptive recreation uses as well as potential impacts and conflicts between nonconsumptive the recreation and marine and coastal resources.

Based on that, we'd like to develop best management practices to minimize conflicts and also pursue opportunities for improvements in government practices with regards to nonconsumptive recreation. To date, we've created a workgroup where we'll be developing surveys to work with our stakeholders so we can begin to define what important uses are. Identify the impacts and conflicts and begin to develop those best management practices.

So over the next year, ultimately, this will lead to convening stakeholder meetings throughout the region, where we can begin to gather ideas and garner feedback from all of our stakeholders and partners and work together to advance all of those actions.

So with that, I would turn it back to Laura Cantral for the Q&A session on the next slide.

Laura Cantral: Thank you, Kevin. So this is Laura Cantral. We're now at our Q&A period. We have had a few questions coming in already, but if you have a question that you have posed yet, now would be a good time. Operators are standing by, you know, to take your question, and we will try to get through as many as time will allow.

So I'm going to start. There are two questions that have come in. There are types of variations on the same theme I think. Ali Chase is asking if there are any differences between the final plan and the version of the plan that was sent to NROC. And Brent Greenfield wants to know if the certified plan includes any changes to the plan that the RPB sent to the NOC for review.

And I think I will just go ahead and field that question. The answer to that is no. There are no differences between the final plan that the RPB sent to the NOC for review and the NOC has certified. And you heard from Gwynne that there is a detailed document -- a 30-page document that outlines the nature of changes that were made based on public comment. And she summarized some of that that were made to the draft before it was sent to the NOC. But what was sent to the NOC is -- here's what it is and that's what's been certified.

All right. So now, I'm going to go to a question from Matt Gove who is seeking clarification about the next meeting. He said that -- so the RPB will not meet in person for 12 months. The last meeting was in July 2016. I don't know if this is -- who -- this is a question for Gwynne. Maybe this is for you.

Gwynne Schultz: I'm on mute. Let's see. I know that we have just recently had a meeting to, you know, talk about the next scheduled public meeting, and we set a date of this summer. I know that it had been a while. We've been extremely busy getting the plan out the door, getting it revised. So, you know, given our, you know, our current work getting a work plan together and working -- kicking off implementation, I think it really is realistic that our next meeting will not be until the summer.

Laura Cantral: OK. We have a few other questions that are related to implementation and work plan and things like that. So let's just stay on the theme of implementation.

Another question from Ali Chase who wants to know when in 2017 that the RPB expect to release a draft work plan for public review and comment.

Bob LaBelle: Hello. This is Bob. I'll weigh in on that one. I think the goal there is to have that draft ready for some period of time before we have our next public meeting. So we need to -- we're planning on how to get that -- the individual member input that will form the body of the plan, pull it together, and send out a draft. And some of those action items that individual members will be working on will include public outreach as well and input.

So we'll then pull it into a draft that will go out for public review for a period of time, and then we will have to build in a little time to revise the plan based on those comments and have it ready before our next meeting.

Gwynne Schultz: OK. Laura...

(Multiple Speakers)

Gwynne Schultz: ...supplement -- what I said the response to Matt's question. This is Gwynne...

Laura Cantral: Yes, go ahead.

Gwynne Schultz: It does seem like, you know, looking at it that it would be quite a while before we have kind of the full RPB meeting. But as you could on the slides that were presented and some of the work that we're, you know, thinking through on the other actions is that there are going to be multiple opportunities for stakeholder engagement in between now and our next full RPB meeting. So, you know, there is going to be some strong engagement. It might be more actions specific oriented, but then also the next full meeting would be later in the summer.

Laura Cantral: OK, great. That's a good supplement. And so I hope that clarifies about the timing around the draft work plan. (Brent) -- I know you had that same question, so hope that helps.

And we'll now post a different question that it's coming from Amy Trice who wants to know the RPB is going to be tracking implementation on the plan, so that we can see when and how it's getting used. Is there going to be some sort of mechanism to report on successes?

Bob LaBelle: This is Bob. I'll jump in on that one. Yes, there are plans to have individual action champions and we call them the "individual members that are working on these various initiatives across the agency" to build in as they develop those actions to build in the criteria that that are easy to measure and keep track of.

What the overall intent of pulling -- gathering that data that's available, and then pulling it together to fit into our structured approach that's going to be coming on in the future assessing how well we're implementing the plan and also assessing plan performance, so the blocks to be worked out on that. But we are paying attention to gathering the data that will be needed to inform that.

And so what I mean by all that is let's say that we're going to have a workshop for an action, we will record, you know, the major findings in that workshop, any gaps in research we haven't noticed or action items that might come out of the workshop, and related to the overall -- the plan goals. And so, you know, we'll evaluate how well that particular action item sort of -- how well it was attended -- did we get the input we were looking for -- and things like that.

So that gets all set back and you can picture this going across a lot of action -- a lot of data is being gathered. And then we'll be pulling it together at some point down the road.

Laura Cantral: Thanks, Bob. So we're going to move now to some questions about specific actions. And I think just before we move out of this line of questions about implementation, I think I would just like to observe that as a reminder, the

plan was just certified yesterday, right? So there are a lot of things to figure out and I know I can speak for the RPB that they are very committed to continuing to keep all of you on this Webinar engaged, as well as other stakeholders, and are going to be looking for the ways to do that to communicate it. So those opportunities are coming up whether it's through workshop engagement or full RPB meetings and the timing of all of that. And there's a lot to figure out.

But as has been it's practice, they will be making sure that you are aware of this opportunity just as soon as those opportunities are known. So hopefully, you can bet it makes sense and that you understand that reality.

So this question is from Ali Chase. It's about the ERAs. When do you anticipate that workshop to refine the ERA framework when you -- (if that -- could that) workshop will be? And when will the consultants' final work be presented? Will that consultant final work be presented during that meeting? Could there be a Webinar series regarding the ERA work as well? So those are the three different questions.

Laura McKay, I think this is for you.

Laura McKay: Sure. I think, you know, as I said, as soon as possible, we want to finalize the framework in collaboration with the Northeast. We -- and the folks are finishing up their current contract. And as I mentioned, we're in negotiations next month with our funding source to do -- figure out what we can, you know, what we can do -- how much we can do -- and by when we can do it during 2017?

But I would hope that, you know, we would have something in the early spring, late winter or early spring, if at all possible, but again, we hesitate to commit to any particular date right now until we have a contract in place with our funding source.

Laura Cantral: OK. Thanks, Laura. Buddy, I think this is a question for you related to (HOE 4), the Marine Debris Action. Oh, this is from Matt Gove. Can you elaborate on what marine debris working group is and how stakeholders can be involved?

Buddy LoBue: Yes. Thanks, Matt. Yes, right now, we had an initial gathering of our RPB members that are available -- that were available to meet. And we have every intention to have stakeholders involved, and we will reach out to you for involvement in that.

We haven't worked out the details on our integrating, you know, the public partnership with the government, you know, type of business being (above), but we are working through this. And certainly, we stand by because we will be seeking -- when we clarify that, we will be seeking our stakeholder input as a very important part of where we're going from this.

So right now, we can move forward with our, you know, intergovernmental working group. And then, we will, you know, keep you informed on where stakeholders -- where we can engage stakeholders. We will -- with that, we will have a formal workshop. We do intend to have that, you know, a facilitated workshop to actually engage. And that I think it was setup for on the slide there...

Laura McKay: I think it was June of 2017, Buddy.

Buddy LoBue: Yes. By June -- yes, by June and maybe before then. Exactly.

So that's who we are.

And anything else, Laura, on that topic?

Laura Cantral: No, I don't think so. I think that covered it for now, so thank you.

So now, with Bob, we have a couple questions for you. This one is from Katie Morgan related to sand mining. Sand mining is going to be a big issue in the Mid-Atlantic. So the plan has seen good actions in it, but are there ways the public can engage with the RPB on this issue specifically, to flesh out the details and help to tackle issues as they arise?

Bob LaBelle: Oh, yes. That's a great comment -- question. And that's quite in line with why we're doing this particular initiative. I want to say first off that we were

very encouraged recently to have really good discussions with the Army Corps of Engineers on this. And the goal here is to take a regional approach to look at existing and maybe future sand resources that could be used in beach nourishment and other coastal recently in two projects.

Then by doing so in a regional sense, the hope was to avoid some of the conflicts that arise when you have individual counties and states going after sand resources on a first-come, first-serve basis after a big storm goes by. And it's crucial that we do get more public input into this. And we're forming -- the main action item there is to form a regional sand management working group. There were already -- there are already federal state groups that certainly work on individual projects.

But the regional approach again would be to do more advance planning on how best to do the next projects for example. And as part of any regional approach, stakeholder input is paramount. So as that group forms, we will be seeking input. And I'm not sure, you know, what will come out of the first action steps after the group forms. But we'll be seeking input and look forward to folks taking part in how that all operates.

Laura Cantral: Thanks, Bob. Another question. This one is from (Charles Russo) who is asking if you can direct him to the BOEM site for the new environmental grant funding that you identified that is due by December 30?

Bob LaBelle: Right. If you go on BOEM Web site in general, go to the Environment Studies Program link, and you'll see -- there'll be something like latest news or might just be there in the headline, it'll say "inputs" something along the line of input requested for FY '18 SDP, which stands for Studies Development Plan. And if you don't find it, just send me an e-mail at [robert.labelle@boem.gov](mailto:robert.labelle@boem.gov), and I'll get you over there. Thanks.

Laura Cantral: So Bob, one more that I think you're the best person to field this one. This is a big picture question. And we don't have -- we're about ready to wrap up unless another question comes in the next minute, and we're almost out of time.

But Judith Weis wants to know if there is a possibility that the new administration will stop progress on the Ocean Plan?

Bob LaBelle: I certainly wouldn't think so. I think that, you know, it depends on what you call the Ocean Plan. The plan exists. It's been certified. It's something that in the creating of it, you know, that's where it's really -- the value of it comes from the collaboration and the partnerships. And, you know, the actual discussion and consensus on new ideas on how best to manage our ocean.

And so that exists. And fortunately, the action items in the Mid-Atlantic are all part of existing agency missions and responsibilities. So those are not going to go away. And, you know, these things are improvements to how we do our jobs.

Now, no one knows, you know, and I can't speculate about the next administration as a federal employee. But, you know, no one knows what's going to happen with regard to ocean planning in general and the way it's perceived in the new administration. But, you know, the full intent of each of the federal agencies is to -- we have -- we planned our work, and now, we're going to work our plan, as the old saying goes.

Chris Scraba: Laura, this is Chris Scraba. One thing I think we can also add to that that we were briefed on by Bob LaBelle and also by (Deerin Babb-Brott), was that our federal agency principals who attended the one in December National Ocean Council Certification to certify both the Mid-Atlantic and the Northeast Ocean Action Plan recommitted to ensure that the under existing authorities within the ocean action plan will continue to carry out our action and objectives.

Laura Cantral: Great. Thank you, (Chris). So we are almost out of time and about ready to wrap up. I want to close out the Q&A session with a comment. That's from Ali Chase who has asked us to please thank the RPB for all their work and ask them to let stakeholders know what they need help with, so we can help advance the plans and important actions. Thank you.

Now, Ali that's a very nice comment, and I know that the RPB very much appreciates the sentiment and the point here that, you know, you're all in this together and that it is going to take stakeholder input and engagement in

working together to realize the implementation of the actions outlining the plan.

So let's go to the next slide here. I just want to recap by reminding you that the following materials will be posted on the RPB Web site. You can see there's a link there. We'll have a recording of the Webinar and the transcript. We'll have the full slide presentation, a record of all of the questions and comments that we got through the chat function in the session that we just had, as well as a list of participants for today's Webinar.

We know it's late on -- at the end of the day on a Thursday, and we really appreciate you joining us and hanging out with us for the last hour. I'm going to offer the final concluding words to our RPB colleagues or anyone else who -- on the RPB who wants to say a final word.

Gwynne Schultz: Well, this is Gwynne who has been serving as our state RPB co-lead. Really, I've enjoyed (technical difficulty) he past and welcome Laura as serving as the next (though) state co-lead. And really, it's been great working with all of our federal, state and tribal partners. You know we wish that Kelsey Leonard who is our (star) tribal co-lead could have been present today, but she had another commitment. But again, all the members, we really appreciate the work at the -- of stakeholders and the public working with us on this plan.

(Multiple Speakers)

Bob LaBelle: And this is Bob. I'll echo that. And also, send best regards to Kelsey who really wanted to be here but couldn't. And we're looking forward to continuing to work with her and Laura coming in as a state co-lead. I also want to say that one of the challenges at the RPB has going forward is to maintain the great levels of communication and coordination that were engendered by Meridian once again. So thank you very much for that.

Laura McKay: This is Laura McKay and I just want to thank you again, Bob and Gwynne and Meridian and all of you stakeholders -- all of you that have kept their eyes on us and helped develop this plan. We are so appreciative. We send you oceans of thanks as folks were saying yesterday in response to having the plans be certified. And I really, really look forward to seeing this through and

watching these actions come to fruition. And I hope you all stick with us.  
Thank you.

Laura Cantral: Great. Thanks, everyone.

Operator: Thanks to all our participants for joining us today. We hope you found this Webcast presentation informative. This concludes our Webcast, and you may now disconnect. Have a good day.

END