

January 2005

The National Coastal Condition Report II

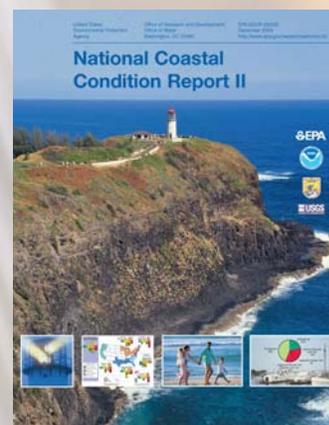
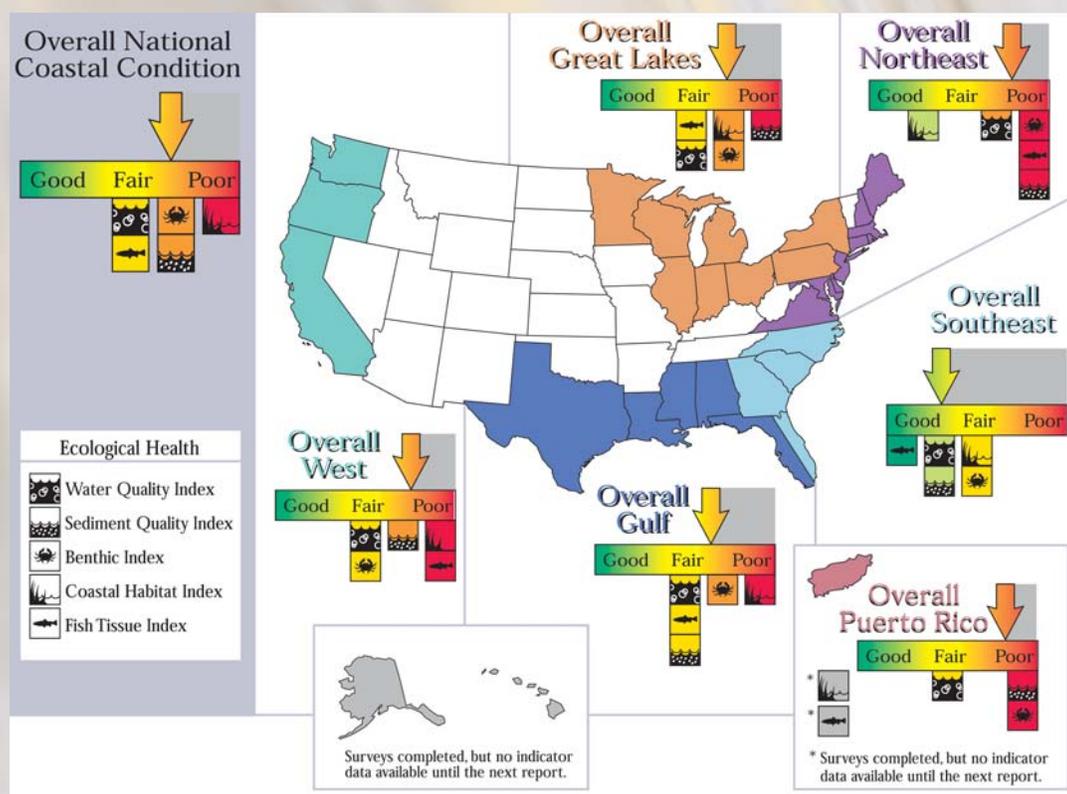
What is the National Coastal Condition Report?

EPA issued the National Coastal Condition Report II (NCCR II) in January 2005 as the second in a series of environmental assessments of U.S. coastal waters and the Great Lakes. The report includes assessments of 100 percent of the nation's estuaries in the contiguous 48 states and Puerto Rico. Estuaries are bodies of water where fresh water from rivers meets the salt waters of the ocean. This interaction provides a unique, highly productive environment that supports a great diversity of wildlife and fisheries and contributes tremendous value to the nation's economy.

The NCCR II is based on data gathered by a variety of federal, state and local sources, and includes over 50,000 samples taken between 1997 and 2000 in all continental seacoasts and Puerto Rico. We analyzed three types of data: coastal monitoring data, offshore fisheries data, and assessment and human health advisory data.

What is the Overall Condition of the Nation's Coastal Waters?

The overall condition of the nation's coastal waters is fair, which is essentially the same as the first report in 2001. This rating is based on five key indicators of ecological health: water quality, coastal habitat loss, sediment quality, benthic community condition, and fish tissue contaminants. For each of these five key indicators, we assigned a score of good, fair, or poor to each coastal region of the U.S. We then averaged these ratings to create overall regional and national scores illustrated in the map below, using "traffic light" color scoring. Consistent with the recent Oceans Commission report (www.oceancommission.gov), this report sends a clear message about the serious challenges facing our nation's ocean and coastal resources.



Summary of Other Findings

- From a regional perspective, the coastal condition in the Southeast is good, Gulf of Mexico and the West is fair, the Great Lakes is fair to poor and the Northeast and Puerto Rico is poor. The next report will assess regional trends for the majority of the U.S. coastal waters.
- Nationally, twenty-one percent of assessed resources are unimpaired; thirty-five percent are impaired; forty-four percent are threatened for aquatic life use or human use.
- Suitability of waters for fishing is measured using the fish tissue contaminants index. Twenty-two percent of coastal waters are impaired for fishing, based on EPA's guidelines for moderate consumption of recreationally-caught fish.
- Suitability of waters for aquatic life use is measured using the water quality, sediment quality, habitat loss, and benthic indices. Twenty-eight percent of coastal waters are impaired for aquatic life use.
- Among the key indicators, coastal habitat condition, sediment quality, and benthic condition ranked the lowest; whereas, individual components of water quality, including dissolved oxygen and dissolved inorganic nitrogen, ranked slightly better.

Changes from the Last Report

The first NCCR, published in 2001, also reported that the nation's estuarine resources were in fair condition. The NCCR I used available data from 1990 to 1996 to characterize about seventy percent of the nation's estuarine resources. We reduced the number of indicators in the second report from seven to five. We consolidated the eutrophication index, dissolved oxygen, and water clarity indicators from NCCR I to form a single water quality index. As a result, the new water quality index better reflects a balance between water quality, sediment quality, and living resource indicators. Comparisons between the two Coastal Condition Reports are not straightforward because of these and other changes. An indirect benefit of the NCCR II has been to build local, state, and tribal capacity in cost-effective and scientifically sound monitoring of local conditions required under the Clean Water Act.

For More Information

The National Coastal Condition Report II reflects a collaborative effort among the U.S. EPA, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the U.S. Geological Survey, and many state, regional and local organizations. For more information, contact:

- Barry Burgan in EPA's Office of Wetlands, Oceans and Watersheds at (202) 566-1242 or
- Kevin Summers in EPA's Office of Research and Development at (850) 934-9244.

For a copy of the report, please call 1-800-490-9198 and request EPA publication # 620/R-03/002 or visit EPA's web site at: <http://www.epa.gov/owow/oceans/nccr2/>.

Our Treasured Coastal Waters

- Coastal habitats provide spawning grounds, nurseries, shelter and food for finfish, shellfish, birds and other wildlife, as well as nesting, resting, feeding, and breeding habitat for 85 percent of waterfowl and other migratory birds.
- Estuaries provide habitat for more than 75 percent of America's commercial fish catch, and for 80 to 90 percent of the recreational fish catch.
- In 2001, commercial fishermen landed 9.8 billion pounds of fish and shellfish valued at \$3.3 billion.
- Nationwide, commercial and recreational fishing, boating, tourism, and other coastal industries provide more than 28 million jobs. Coastal recreation and tourism generate \$8 billion to \$12 billion annually.

