



Office of Wetlands, Oceans and Watersheds

Mission

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Office of Wetlands, Oceans and Watersheds (OWOW) is one of four offices within EPA's Office of Water (OW). It was created in April 1991 to bring together Agency programs that manage and protect the aquatic ecosystems of inland and coastal watersheds. OWOW combines the Agency's responsibilities for abating nonpoint source pollution; restoring and protecting wetlands, lakes, and coastal and marine environments; and providing leadership for surface water quality monitoring and water quality assessment activities. OWOW assists EPA Regional offices in implementing these programs by developing policies and regulations, providing technical support, and serving as an advocate for the programs with Congress and the public at large. Through coordination of all of its activities, OWOW strives to provide integrated, holistic habitat and watershed protection.

Legislative Authorities

Clean Water Act (CWA)
Coastal Zone Act Reauthorization Amendments of 1990 (CZARA)
International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships (MARPOL)
London Dumping Convention (LDC)
Marine Plastics Pollution Research and Control Act (MPPRCA)
Marine Protection, Research and Sanctuaries Act (MPRSA)
Ocean Dumping Ban Act (ODBA)
Shore Protection Act (SPA)

Programs

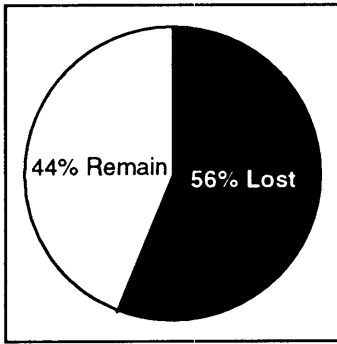
Wetlands Protection

OWOW promotes wetlands protection through both regulatory and cooperative programs. OWOW and the Army Corps of Engineers jointly administer the CWA Section 404 program which regulates the discharge of dredged or fill materials into wetlands. OWOW also works with states to develop State Wetlands Conservation Plans that will improve the efficiency and effectiveness of government and private sector efforts to protect, restore, and create wetlands. In addition, OWOW works with other EPA, Federal, and international programs to ensure that wetland values and functions are adequately considered in activities. OWOW also provides technical and financial assistance to public and private organizations to help them develop specific geographically tailored, locally based strategies for wetlands protection.

Ocean Disposal of Wastes

Ocean Dumping

Under the MPRSA, the domestic legislation for implementing the provisions of the LDC, OWOW is responsible for developing criteria to be used in evaluating ocean dumping proposals, issuing permits for the dumping of all wastes except dredged material, and designating sites suitable for the dumping of wastes. As part of this program, OWOW conducts monitoring and takes enforcement actions to ensure that waste disposal is not causing any unexpected impacts and



Since the 1700's our nation has lost more than half of its wetlands

that dumpers are complying with their permits. While the dumping of sewage sludge and industrial wastes from the U.S. into the ocean has ceased, OWOW continues to evaluate the dumping of fish waste, scuttled vessels and dredged material as well as work with the international community to protect the world's oceans from harmful dumping.

Point Source Discharges

OWOW implements the ocean discharge waiver program under CWA Section 301(h) which assesses whether sewage treatment plants discharging to marine waters are to be exempted from secondary treatment requirements. In addition, OWOW develops criteria for evaluating the environmental impact of discharges to ocean waters under CWA Section 403(c). Finally, OWOW oversees the marine sanitation device program, which regulates toilets on vessels, under CWA Section 312.

Oceans and Coastal Enforcement

OWOW manages a marine and coastal enforcement program to ensure control and regulation of ocean disposal and marine debris. Enforcement actions are taken to ensure compliance with CWA, MPRSA, permit conditions and site restrictions, to require accurate dumping within sites, and to eliminate illegal dumping. OWOW provides training and guidance to assist Regions and States in their enforcement efforts.

Marine Debris

OWOW implements the marine debris program to prevent and control debris (trash, discarded man-made articles) from entering our oceans and waterways. This is a serious problem with consequences for marine life, human safety and the economy of coastal cities. EPA, with the cooperation of NOAA, develops and implements programs to assess, identify and control the sources of such debris. EPA also works jointly with the U.S. Coast Guard to regulate the transportation of municipal and commercial waste on vessels and to develop waste handling guidelines and regulations.

Recent estimates suggest that nonpoint sources of pollution, such as agricultural run-off, cause approximately 50 percent of U.S. water pollution problems



Nonpoint Source Control

Nonpoint sources of pollution—those that are diffuse, or otherwise difficult to trace to a single point of discharge, such as agricultural and certain kinds of urban runoff—are thought to be the cause of approximately 50 percent of all current water pollution problems in the country. All three divisions of OWOW are addressing nonpoint source pollution, with the Assessment and Watershed Protection Division (AWPD) having the lead responsibility.

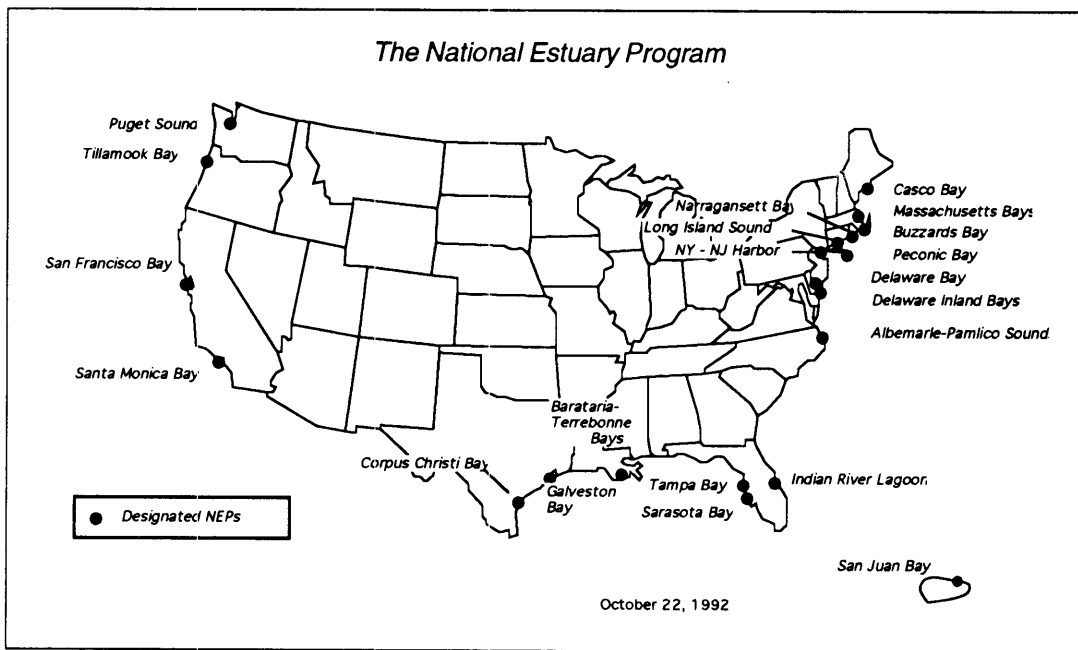
Under CWA Section 319, OWOW awarded more than \$140 million in grants to States in

1990 through 1992. States use these grants to implement programs approved by EPA that include, as appropriate, nonregulatory and regulatory programs for enforcement, technical assistance, financial assistance, education, training, technology transfer and demonstration projects for nonpoint source control. In addition, under Section 6217 of the CZARA, OWOW is providing guidance to States on controlling nonpoint sources of pollution affecting coastal areas.

Clean Lakes Program

With awards of more than \$131 million over 16 years under CWA Section 314, OWOW's Clean Lakes Program has provided support through 580 grants and cooperative agreements for selected lake monitoring, assessment, and protection projects in all areas of the country. This support has included initial identification of water quality problems, in-depth diagnostic and feasibility studies, and post-restoration monitoring. The program is one of the earliest to use the watershed

protection approach in monitoring and restoration activities to control the sources of pollution.



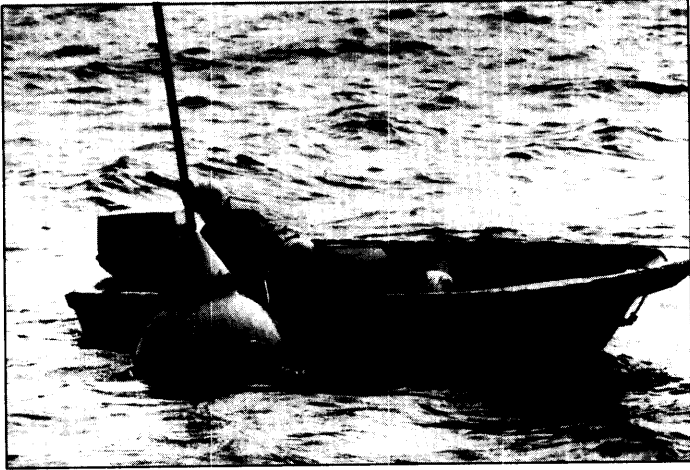
National Estuary and Near Coastal Waters Programs

The National Estuary Program (NEP) grew out of earlier restoration efforts in the Chesapeake Bay and Great Lakes. The purpose of the program is to show how estuaries and their living resources can be protected through comprehensive, action-oriented management. OWOW also initiated the

Near Coastal Waters program to create a broader framework for promoting coastal protection beyond the limited number of estuaries addressed by the NEP. In support of both of these programs, OWOW provides financial and policy guidance, and works with other EPA and Federal programs to enhance their participation in coastal and estuarine protection efforts.

Watershed Protection

OWOW leads OW's effort to align traditional regulatory and nonregulatory programs to support overall watershed protection in an integrated, holistic manner. The Watershed Protection Approach draws on experience gained from other programs and activities (e.g., Chesapeake Bay, NEP, and Clean Lakes Programs) that focus on comprehensive identification, assessment, and action on environmental problems within a single watershed. All divisions of OWOW are implementing geographically targeted programs and assisting many of the Regional and State watershed initiatives currently underway.



Monitoring and Data Management

To achieve its various missions and objectives, OWOW is updating its national water quality and environmental data systems (STORET, ODES, and BIOS) to better serve the needs of their many Federal, State, local and private users. This includes expansion of the data systems to incorporate additional biological, as well as chemical data; integration of increased quality assurance/quality control information to record data validity and ensure increased data sharing.

Monitoring water quality

OWOW also develops guidance on biological methods and environmental indicators, works closely with the Office of Science and Technology in the development of water quality and sediment assessment methods; and supports the use of monitoring in the watershed protection approach. OWOW also operates the Agency's ocean survey vessel, the PETER W. ANDERSON, to provide the ocean sampling and laboratory facilities. The ship is used intensively by Regional scientific and technical teams in the management of ocean disposal sites for dredged material and for the assessment of ocean water and sediment quality along the Atlantic and Gulf coasts.

Volunteer Water Quality Monitoring

OWOW has taken the lead in supporting and encouraging volunteer monitoring. This support has included the development of technical guidance to assist volunteers in the collection of accurate and comprehensive water quality data and the conduct of workshops, training classes, and educational conferences.

Public Education and Outreach

All divisions of OWOW conduct public outreach and technical assistance activities such as: newsletters, fact sheets, videos, training, and workshops. OWOW also has a policy and communications staff that helps coordinate office-wide outreach, policy and legislative activities that cut across the OWOW divisions.

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