

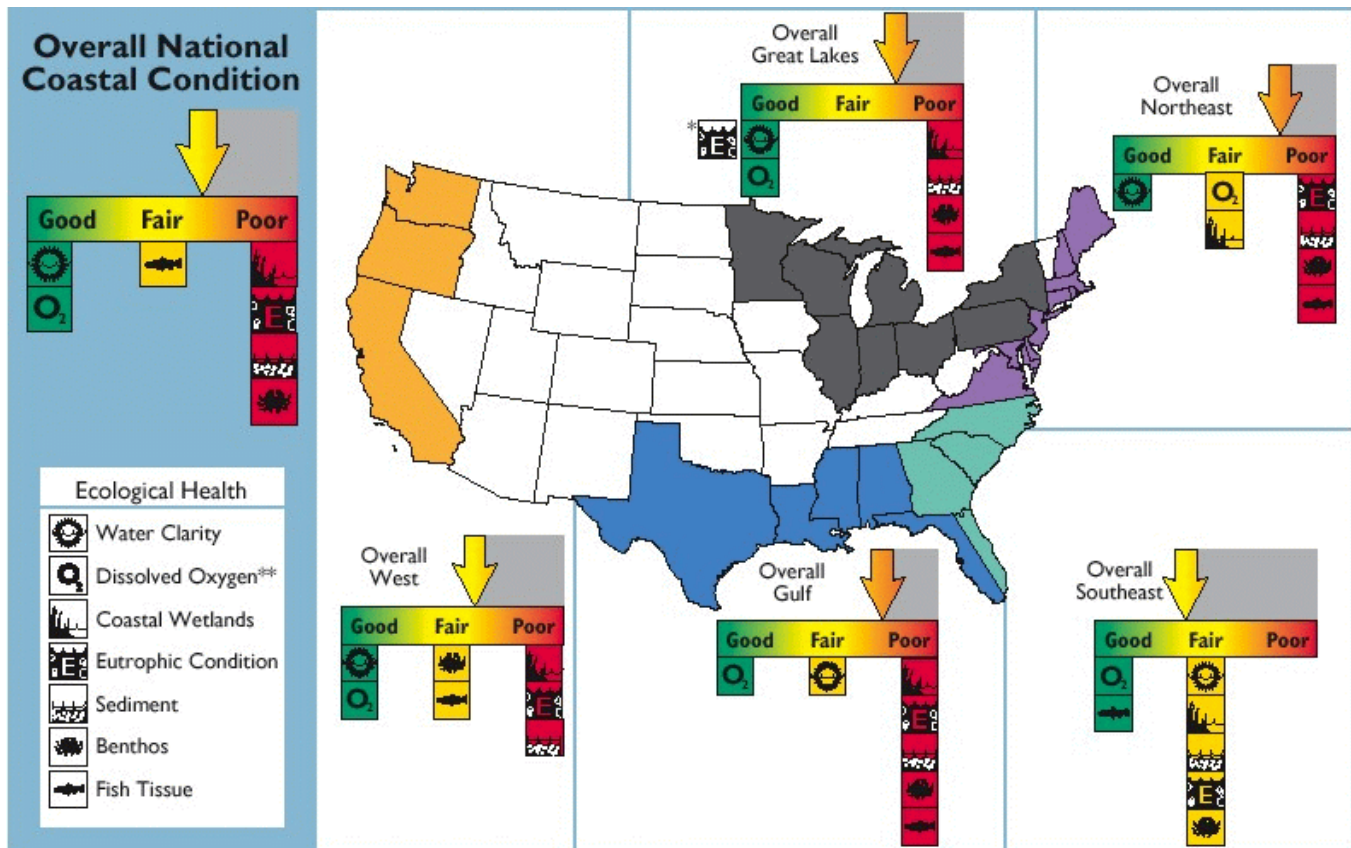


# National Coastal Condition Report Fact Sheet

## Summary

The *National Coastal Condition Report* describes the ecological and environmental conditions in U.S. coastal waters. This first-of-its-kind *Report*, presents a broad baseline picture of the overall condition of U.S. coastal waters as fair to poor, varying from region to region. This *Report* will serve as a useful benchmark for measuring progress in coastal programs in the future. In subsequent years, this *Report* will be followed by reports on more specialized coastal issues and measure condition changes over time.

This *Report* represents a coordinated effort among EPA, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the U.S. Geological Survey, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. It summarizes the condition of ecological resources in the estuaries of the United States and highlights several exemplary federal, state, tribal, and local programs that assess coastal ecological and water quality conditions.



\* No indicator data available.

\*\* Does not include the hypoxic zone in offshore Gulf of Mexico waters.

NOTE: Overall conditions are shown for each coastal region (e.g., purple represents the northeast coast).

## Background

Although EPA, federal and state partners, and other scientists have been assessing the condition of estuaries for decades, the *National Coastal Condition Report* is the first comprehensive summary of coastal conditions using information from 1990-2000. This document can be used by scientists, environmental managers, and the public to make informed decisions concerning the protection of coastal resources and to increase awareness of the extent and severity of pollution in coastal waters. It also can serve as a benchmark for analyzing the progress of coastal management programs.

The *Report* is based on data collected from a variety of federal, state, and local sources, most notably EPA's National Coastal Assessment Program. These data sets include samples taken from over 1,000 randomly selected sites, representing nearly 88% of the Nation's estuarine resources. Overall confidence in the accuracy of these data in assessing the coastal condition is within 95-98%.

This *Report* is the first federal effort to provide a comprehensive picture of the health of the nation's coastal waters. For the first time, researchers can compare the conditions of estuaries across the country. Researchers carefully designed the sampling programs to use ecological measurements or indicators, such as types of fish, status of aquatic vegetation, and changes in coastal wetlands to assess the conditions of the estuaries. Using ecological indicators, in addition to chemical measures, makes it easier to compare the condition of estuaries in different parts of the country.

## Condition of the Nation's Estuaries

Existing data show that the overall condition of the U.S. coastal waters is fair to poor, varying from region to region and that 44% of estuarine areas in the U.S. are impaired for human use or aquatic life use. To determine the overall condition of the Nation's estuaries, EPA measured seven coastal condition indicators, including water clarity, dissolved oxygen, sediments, benthos, fish contamination, coastal wetlands loss, and eutrophication. These indicators were rated in estuaries in each region of the country (northeastern, southeastern, Gulf of Mexico, west coast, and Great Lakes regions). The condition of each resource was rated as good, fair, or poor. The indicators were combined to describe the overall coastal condition for each of the regions.

The northeastern estuaries, Gulf of Mexico and the Great Lakes are in fair to poor ecological condition, while southeastern and west coast estuaries are in fair ecological condition. Water clarity is good in west coast and northeastern estuaries, but fair in the Gulf of Mexico, southeastern estuaries, and the Great Lakes. Dissolved oxygen conditions are generally good and sediment contaminant conditions are generally poor throughout the estuaries and Great Lakes of the United States. Eutrophication in coastal waters is increasing throughout much of the United States and results in poor eutrophic conditions in the Gulf of Mexico, west coast and northeastern estuaries and in fair to good conditions in the remaining estuaries of the continental United States.

Living resources are in fair condition in estuaries throughout the United States, although small changes in water quality could cause this condition to worsen and result in a poor rating. Living resources in the Great Lakes, northeastern estuaries, Gulf of Mexico and the west coast are currently in poor condition. Contaminant concentrations in fish tissues are low throughout the estuarine waters of the United States with exceptions in selected northeastern estuaries, Gulf of Mexico estuaries and the Great Lakes. Fish consumption advisories exist throughout the Gulf of Mexico and northeastern coastal areas, although these advisories largely pertain to offshore species (e.g., king mackerel).

State assessments of water quality presented in the EPA's *National Water Quality Inventory Report* largely agree with the water quality and ecological assessment of the Nation's estuaries in the *National Coastal Condition Report*. States determine water quality conditions by comparing available water quality data to their state water quality standards. If a body of water does not fully support its designated use, such as recreation and swimming, drinking water source, or aquatic life habitat, then it is considered impaired. In 1998, states reported that 44% of estuaries and 12% of coastal shoreline in the United States (excluding Alaska) were impaired by some form of pollution or habitat degradation.

## For More Information

The *Report* this fact sheet refers to is a joint effort between EPA's Office of Water and Office of Research and Development. This fact sheet should be referenced as EPA842-F-02-001, December 2001. For more information on EPA's coastal program contact Barry Burgan at EPA's Office of Wetlands, Oceans, and Watersheds at 202-566-1242. For more information on EPA's coastal and other research efforts, contact Kevin Summers at EPA's Office of Research and Development at 850-934-9244. For a copy of the *National Coastal Condition Report*, visit EPA's Web site at <http://www.epa.gov/owow/oceans/nccr/index.html>. Copies of the *Report* are available by calling 800-490-9198. EPA's *Coastal Research and Monitoring Strategy* which assesses national needs for coastal research and monitoring and recommends an integrated framework for protecting vital coastal resources is available at <http://cleanwater.gov/coastalresearch/>.