

# NATIONAL CENTERS FOR COASTAL OCEAN SCIENCE

Science To Sustain Thriving Coastal Communities and Economies

## Social Science to Support Vibrant Coastal Communities

The National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science (NCCOS) conduct research and provide information to help sustain thriving coastal communities and economies. Coastal communities use NCCOS tools, maps, and products to sustainably manage their natural resources and protected areas, and to better understand and respond to coastal hazards, such as flooding, storms, harmful algal blooms, and contaminated coastal waters.

**Stronger, more resilient coastal ecosystems and communities support stronger coastal economies**

The NCCOS social science team is made up of sociologists, economists, geographers, and coastal specialists who focus their research on the connections between people and the environment.

### Why Coastal Communities Matter

Over 123 million people live within America's coastal shoreline counties. These coastal communities produce \$6.6 trillion annually in goods and services, and employ over 51 million people. This large coastal population depends on natural resources for food, health, economic security, cultural benefits, and recreation. Coastal communities also depend on the environment for access to clean water, livelihood opportunities, and protection from coastal storms.

Because our coastal communities and economies are dependent on nearby coastal and marine ecosystems, it is important that we understand the relationships between them. Only with this knowledge can we ensure that our policies and actions support the well-being and sustainability of both ecosystems and nearby human populations.



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National Ocean Service

<http://coastalscience.noaa.gov>

## What We Do to Help Coastal Communities

### Ecosystem Services Valuation

**E**cosystem services are the goods and services from ecological systems that benefit people. These services include protection from coastal storms, habitat for fish and shellfish, and outdoor recreational opportunities. Assigning a value—whether economic, social, or cultural—to the services provided by ecosystems allows managers to compare management options, such as whether to develop or conserve a natural area. It also makes communicating the value of ecosystems to policy makers and the general public easier. NCCOS identifies, measures, and estimates the economic, social, and cultural value of ecosystem services for use by coastal communities, planners, managers, and regulators.

### Assessing Human Use

**R**esource managers and community planners need to understand how people use, value, and impact natural resources so that they can effectively manage coastal and marine areas. Managers who consider patterns of human use are better equipped to address conflicts between competing stakeholders. They are also able to understand the potential impacts of human activities on sensitive natural resources, such as endangered or protected species. NCCOS identifies and characterizes how people understand, interact with, and use coastal and marine environments. Patterns of social, cultural, and economic behaviors influence how spaces are used and valued, and can be used by decision-makers to better manage coastal spaces.

### Assessing Vulnerability and Resilience

**T**he impacts from coastal hazards threaten property, community well-being, and marine industries, the latter of which contributes billions annually to the U.S. economy. By understanding the vulnerabilities of communities to potential coastal risks—such as sea level rise, flooding, water pollution, storms, and coastal erosion—communities can take action to prepare and become more resilient. NCCOS generates tools and information to improve community resilience to these risks and other coastal hazards. We provide coastal communities, planners, managers, and regulators with the social science research needed to better plan, recover, and adapt to coastal hazards and events.

*For more on this research, please see our research area summaries or visit our website below.*



#### For More Information

##### Theresa Goedeke

Marine Spatial Ecology Division  
NOAA | NOS | NCCOS  
✉ [theresa.goedeke@noaa.gov](mailto:theresa.goedeke@noaa.gov)  
📞 240.533.0383

##### John Christensen

Marine Spatial Ecology Division  
NOAA | NOS | NCCOS  
✉ [john.christensen@noaa.gov](mailto:john.christensen@noaa.gov)  
📞 240.533.0378



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