



ECOSYSTEM-BASED MANAGEMENT

Port Orford, Oregon:

A Bottom-up Approach to Ecosystem-Based Management

By Leesa Cobb & Pete Stauffer

Fishing boats moored off of Port Orford.

Surfrider Foundation members are partnering with commercial fishermen in Port Orford, Oregon on a community-based ocean management project. The goal: a “Community Stewardship Area” that will protect the rich marine and coastal ecology of the region, while also promoting sustainable fishing opportunities for the local fleet.

The draft boundaries of the Stewardship Area encompass both the marine environment (i.e., traditional fishing grounds) and adjacent watersheds, providing a place-based context for implementing ecosystem-based management (EBM). Ecosystem-based management is an integrated approach to management that considers the health of the entire ecosystem, including human uses that are dependent upon it.

The Stewardship Area project is being led by the Port Orford Ocean Resource Team (POORT) with support from its project partners—Surfrider Foundation, Pacific Marine Conservation Council, and Ecotrust. POORT is a local non-profit that involves commercial fishermen in the science, management and marketing of its local fishery. Leesa Cobb, Director of POORT, is a fisherman’s wife and long-time Surfrider Foundation member.

For over five years, project partners have been working to formalize a bottom-up approach to management. This has included establishing a ‘Community Advisory Team’ that brings together different local leaders to advise planning efforts. Project organizing has also focused on strengthening partnerships with state and federal agencies that have jurisdiction within the Stewardship Area.

The intent is to foster a more holistic form of management for a place with both rich ecological and cultural heritage.

As part of its community organizing, POORT has conducted a series of outreach interviews with local fishermen. Nearly 40 fleet members have expressed their support for the concept of a Community Stewardship Area, and collectively identified a set of ecological and economic objectives for management of the area. These objectives provide a roadmap for citizen-based management of Port Orford’s ocean and coastal resources.

To address management of the ocean portion of the Stewardship Area, project participants are evaluating area-based management tools including marine reserves. Such spatial approaches can provide benefits that traditional fisheries management often can not, including protection of habitat features, biodiversity, and older female fish that are critical for sustaining stocks. These tools can help maintain the structure and function of nearshore ecosystems, as well as provide insurance for fisheries in the face of scientific uncertainty. Recognizing that Oregon is moving forward with a statewide process to establish marine reserves, the intent is to develop a local management proposal that has community buy-in and addresses both ecological and socioeconomic considerations.

To address watershed stewardship, project participants are examining collaborative ways to promote water quality and protect salmon reproduction. A key component is strengthening partnerships with watershed councils, land trusts, and other local groups.

In addition, Surfrider Foundation has established a water quality testing program (Blue Water Task Force) with Pacific High School and implemented a storm drain marking program with Driftwood Elementary School. Finally, Surfrider Foundation is working to assess current storm water management and identify opportunities to protect water quality through local government action.

To better support management efforts, project partners are also working to enhance research and monitoring within the Stewardship Area. Priorities include strengthening collaboration with agencies and universities, developing new opportunities for fishermen and citizens to participate, and building a local research station. The expectation is that an enhanced nearshore science program will not only support stronger management, but also promote enhanced stewardship through stakeholder participation.

Surfrider Foundation’s work towards supporting this community-based project is ongoing and reflective of our commitment to involving citizens in local efforts to protect their coast and ocean. Huge thanks to the many amazing folks who are participating in this important effort!

Leesa Cobb is a long-time Surfrider Foundation member and the Executive Director of POORT. Pete Stauffer is Surfrider Foundation’s Oregon Policy Coordinator.

<http://oceanresourceteam.northcurry.net/>
www.SurfriderFoundation.org/oregon/southcoast

PETE STAUFFER