

# Statewide Ecosystem Assessment of Coastal and Aquatic Resources



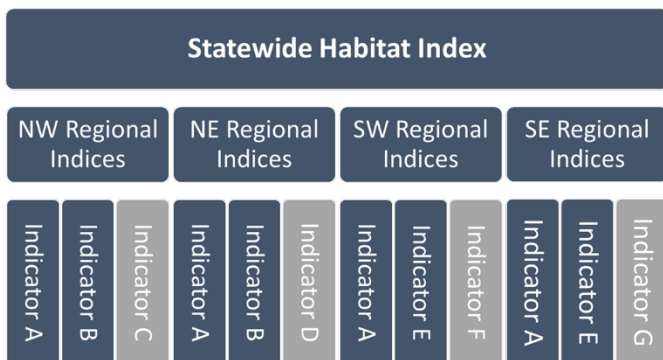
The Statewide Ecosystem Assessment of Coastal and Aquatic Resources is a collaborative process which involves local, state and federal natural resource managers, data providers, researchers and partners to identify and assess ecological indicators and to develop Decision Support Tools to better understand the status of aquatic resources.

Current knowledge of coastal processes and scientific data obtained from inventory and monitoring programs around the state will be used to identify **ecological indicators**. These indicators will help determine **ecosystem status and trends**. The indicators will be identified by Resource Assessment Teams and focus on submerged habitats within defined areas.

Florida Coastal Office *“Conserving and restoring Florida’s coastal, aquatic and offshore resources for the benefit of people and the environment.”*

## Goals

- Resource Assessment Teams will establish ecological indicators using current knowledge, for habitats in the Florida Coastal Office’s managed areas.
- Resource Assessment Teams will work cooperatively to provide consensus on indicators and product format.
- An analysis of the statuses and trends of coastal resources will be conducted at a locally relevant scale, to support state and local programs, planning and decision making.
- Relevant statuses and trends will be communicated to local and state decision makers, providing best available science.
- Data will be integrated into a Decision Support Tool that promotes ecosystem based resource management.



The **habitat index** is a model used to evaluate the overall long term health patterns or trends of pre-determined habitats (regional or statewide).

**Indices** are a cumulative summary of various indicators which quantify information in a more usable format.

An Ecological **Indicator** characterizes measurable, characteristics related to the structure, composition or functioning of ecological systems.

# SEACAR Project Guidance

*The Statewide Ecosystem Assessment of Coastal and Aquatic Resources (SEACAR) will...*

## 1. Identify:

- a) Long-term ecosystem conditions of specific habitats in Florida Coastal Office submerged managed areas.
- b) Submerged habitat ecosystem condition through a habitat index

## 2. Identify indicators for the habitat index that meet the following needs:

- a) Show statewide and site specific trends over time
- b) Allow comparisons between sites/across state
- c) Illustrate habitat change over time driven by biotic and abiotic factors which define community structure
- d) Allow data/results to directly inform and/or be utilized in local and state natural resource management decisions, submerged land planning and/or restoration
- e) Allow for site and/or regional specific environments and conditions (while being comparable statewide)

## 3. Allow for expansion of indicators in the future

## 4. Determine the frequency of habitat index assessment to allow for adaptive management

## 5. Identify data gaps

## 6. Utilize existing data

## 7. Incorporate assessment information into a decision support tool/system

*SEACAR will not...*

## 1. Identify the cause(s) of enhancements or declines in ecosystem health

## 2. Collect new data

## 3. Evaluate areas beyond Florida Coastal Office's management during the 5-year pilot

## 4. Set targets or thresholds

## Resource Assessment Teams

DEP Steering Group	Resource Assessment Data Team	Resource Assessment Partner Team	Interested Parties
<p><i>Project staff, agency leadership</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Provide guidance</li><li>• Ensure successful management and implementation of the assessment</li></ul>	<p><i>Agencies, land managers, NGOs and universities collecting long-term ecological data within the FCO managed areas</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Identify data and information needs</li><li>• Recommend indicators</li></ul>	<p><i>Natural resource managers, planners and elected officials</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Evaluate pilot indicators and product formats which can be used for management</li></ul>	<p><i>Public, NGOs</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Maintain communication regarding project progress and outcomes</li><li>• Disseminate information</li></ul>