

Host University



University Partners



Role & Mission

of the
The North Atlantic Coast
Cooperative Ecosystem Studies Unit

Agency Partners



December 1999
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Introduction: CESUs; a New University-Federal Collaborative

The North Atlantic Coast Cooperative Ecosystem Studies Unit (NAC-CESU) was established in June 1999 by cooperative agreement between agencies of the Department of the Interior (National Park Service and USGS Biological Resources Division) and the University of Rhode Island, with its partner institution, University of Maryland Eastern Shore. In subsequent years the NAC-CESU has expanded to include Rutgers University, the University of Massachusetts at Amherst and Stony Brook University as academic partners. Maryland Coastal Bays Program has also joined the NAC-CESU. In addition, the mission of the NAC-CESU now includes a strong focus on the study and management of cultural resources, as well as the initial natural resource interests.

The North Atlantic Coast CESU is part of a national network of biogeographic programs being established to provide research, technical assistance, and education to federal land management, environmental and research agencies. CESUs will generate collaborations among federal managers and policy-makers, federal researchers, and the academic community. Each partner brings a different perspective and wealth of technical knowledge allowing for the development of new, innovative and creative solutions to the myriad of environmental, cultural and social issues that confront our nation's ecosystems. Host universities are selected by a highly competitive process insuring that each CESU is founded on scientific excellence. To date, 16 CESUs have been established across the continental United States, Alaska, and the Caribbean.

Biogeographic Scope and Issues-Oriented Focus of the North Atlantic Coast CESU

The geographic scope of the CESU includes the North Atlantic coastal zone from Maine to the Chesapeake Bay in Virginia. CESU activities will encompass all ecosystems and cultural resources of coastal watersheds, including barrier islands, estuaries, nearshore oceanic environments, salt and freshwater wetlands, coastal ponds, plus terrestrial watersheds and processes that affect the coastal environments.

The Department of the Interior has many holdings along the North Atlantic coast from Maine to Virginia (map follows document). Just within the National Park Service and US Fish and Wildlife Service, there is one National Park, three National Seashores, two National Recreation Areas, one National Preserve, and numerous National Wildlife Refuges. Other federal agencies also manage extensive land areas within the northeast coastal zone. Increasing urbanization and an expanding recreationally oriented public has exacerbated potential threats to these northeast coastal

ecosystems. This has increased the demand for high-quality science, usable and concise information for resource managers, and responsive technical assistance.

The CESU will focus on the management of Department of the Interior lands and other federal lands that lie in the increasingly urban and suburban coastal zone. Some examples of critical issues confronting the management of federal lands follow:

- Shoreline erosion
- Nutrient enrichment and eutrophication
- Accelerated sea level rise and climate change
- Exotic species expansion
- Overexploitation of renewable resources
- Vector-borne diseases and insect pests
- Loss of habitat quality and biodiversity
- Protection of cultural resources and heritage

Projects of the North Atlantic Coast CESU will endeavor to understand the fundamental ecosystem processes that are affected by a particular issue, to develop natural and cultural resource management solutions based on sound science and an appreciation for societal needs, and to monitor the effectiveness of those solutions. This will require multidisciplinary teams of scientists, social scientists, and managers. The CESU provides the perfect suite of partners for implementing the team approach.

Role and Mission

The North Atlantic Coast CESU is charged with conducting coastal research, providing technical assistance, providing opportunities for education, and enhancing partnerships and cooperative approaches for addressing issues faced by federal land managers. The North Atlantic Coast CESU will entail collaborations between the university partners and federal agencies with substantive active participation by the federal agencies in research and other CESU activities.

Research Mission

- Identify and describe critical research needs for federally managed lands.
- Establish research priorities based on the needs of federal resource managers.
- Conduct research within the North Atlantic Coast biogeographic region.

- Apply research results to support the preservation, management and restoration of North Atlantic Coast ecosystems and cultural resources.
- Monitor the success of resource preservation, management and restoration efforts.

Technical Assistance Mission

- Identify and describe the critical technical assistance needs of federal land managers.
- Provide technical assistance, training, planning support, and other needed services for federal resource managers in a way that is timely and relevant to their critical needs.

Cooperative Education Mission

- Establish cooperative education/internship positions for undergraduate and graduate-level students.
- Encourage the professional development of federal scientists and managers involved in the CESU.
- Provide opportunities for technical training of federal scientists and managers.

Partnership/Collaboration

- Encourage participation by other federal research and management agencies and universities involved in coastal programs.
- Develop collaborative approaches for establishing research & management priorities
- Facilitate collaboration to enhance the generation, synthesis, and use of scientific information for the resolution of critical coastal issues

Administration & Operation

The research, technical assistance, education and partnership missions of the North Atlantic Coast CESU will be under the direction and guidance of a Managers Committee, as stipulated in the cooperative agreement. The Manager's Committee consists of a representative from each Federal Agency participating in the North Atlantic Coast CESU. The Committee, in cooperation with the host university and partners will serve the following functions:

- Prepare a multi-year strategic plan – a document that guides the general direction and fundamental focus of the CESU program.
- Prepare annual work plans, providing specific research projects, technical assistance activities, training opportunities, and cooperative education ventures that will be undertaken.

- Coordinate technical peer review of CESU research products.
- Seek participation of other federal research and management agencies and partner universities as the North Atlantic Coast CESU program develops.

The North Atlantic Coast CESU Managers Committee and partners will meet annually, or at a greater frequency as needed. The host institution will maintain and distribute minutes of each meeting. Other agencies and partners can be added to the CESU following consensus agreement amongst all agencies and partners.

The CESU is intended to provide direct contacts between federal agency scientists, federal managers, and university researchers. The USGS currently has coastal scientists who are duty-stationed at URI, each with collateral duties focused on the CESU. The National Park Service has duty placed a fulltime CESU Research Coordinator at URI. In addition, senior level National Park Service natural resource management professionals are duty-stationed at URI, and it is expected that they will participate in CESU activities. Federal scientists and managers who are in residence at the university are expected to provide valuable services to the university, including support and mentoring of graduate students, teaching, collaboration with university faculty/ staff/ students on CESU projects, participation in academic department activities, and active involvement in the overall intellectual atmosphere of the university.

The CESU will maintain a modest staff to coordinate and plan meetings and workshops, to address administrative matters, to draft written documents for the Managers Committee, and to perform other functions as determined necessary by the Managers Committee.

Funding for CESU activities will be administered by modification to the establishing cooperative agreement which was fully executed on 18 June 1999 between the USGS-Biological Resources Division, the National Park Service, the University of Rhode Island and the University of Maryland Eastern Shore, and thereafter amended to include additional partners. The agreement is in effect for a period of five years and can be continued for another 5 years by mutual consent of the participating parties. Near the end of the initial five-year period, the CESU Working Group, under the direction of the Secretary of the Interior, will conduct a technical review of North Atlantic Coast CESU accomplishments.

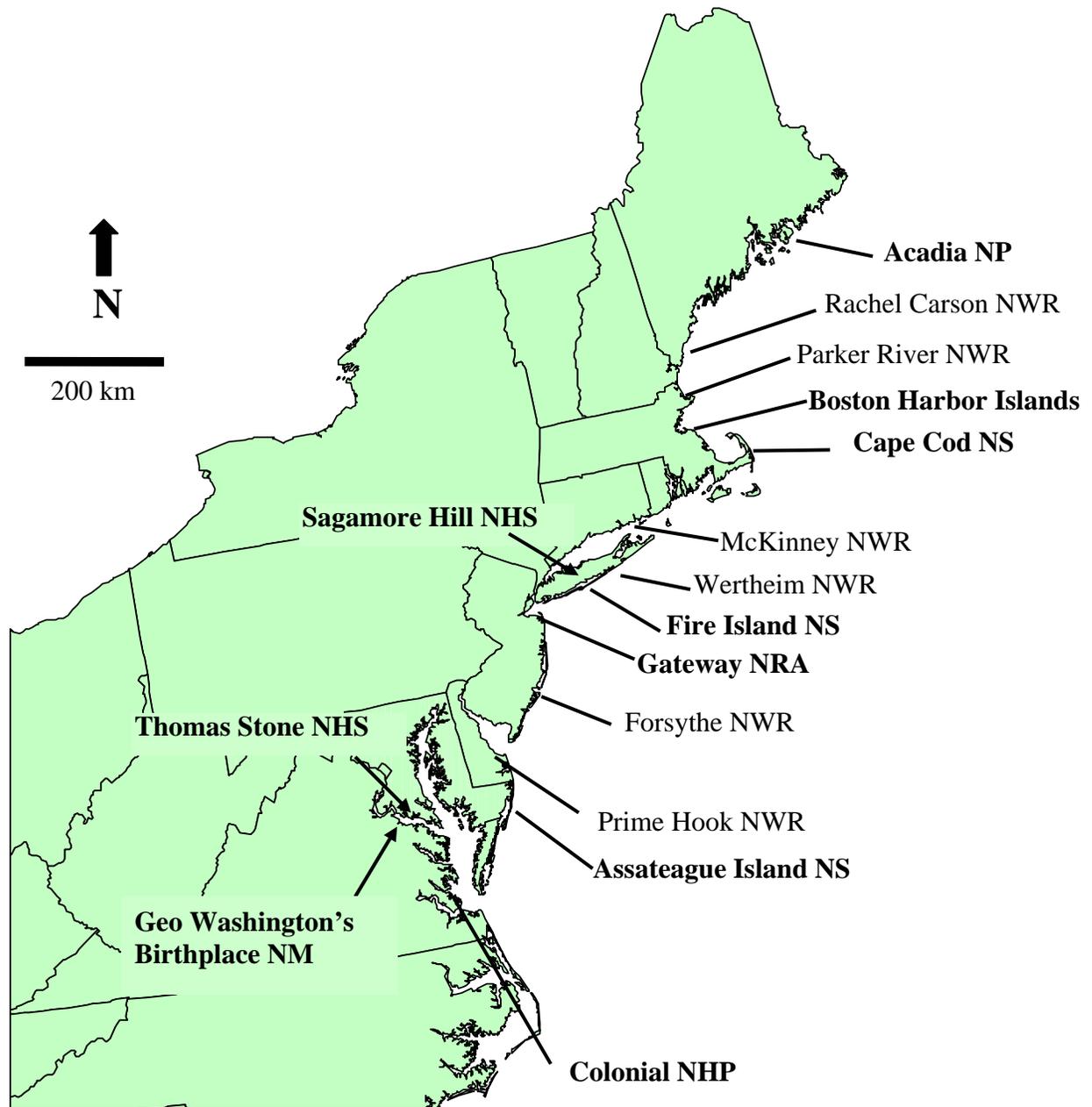


Figure: Coastal National Parks of the Northeast (in bold) and Region 5 US Fish and Wildlife Refuges