

THE SOCIAL INDICATOR PROJECT: INTEGRATING SOCIAL SCIENCE INTO ECOSYSTEM MANAGEMENT FOR NEW HAMPSHIRE'S ESTUARIES

Simone Barley-Greenfield, New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services Coastal Program

New Hampshire's 1000 square mile coastal zone is showing signs of stress in its rivers, shorelines, and two major estuaries. This stress stems from significant population increases and subsequent development, as well as intensifying weather events coupled with land use policies inadequate to manage the impacts of these anthropogenic and natural stressors. To effectively manage this complex socio-ecological system, the management community must expand its current monitoring efforts. Tracking ecological data only tells half the story; collecting social data sheds light on how people engage coastal ecosystems and highlights values crucial for affecting behavior change. Working in collaboration with the New Hampshire Coastal Program, the Piscataqua Regional Estuaries Partnership, the Great Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve, University of New Hampshire, and Plymouth State University, the goal of this NOAA Coastal Management Fellowship project is to establish a process to integrate social indicators into existing measures of the health of New Hampshire's coastal watersheds. To begin this process, relevant stakeholders within the socio-ecological landscape were identified and interviewed to capture a broad array of perspectives. Stakeholders were asked to describe their relationship with the watershed and explain how it fit into their value system. Data from these interviews was coded to identify common ways people engage the coastal watersheds to improve their wellbeing. Common values included recreation opportunities, natural beauty, clean water resources, and a robust economy. Additionally, the data show existence value to be a core component of the New Hampshire identity. These initial data will guide further gathering, understanding, and linking of social and behavioral data to regional environmental indicators so that the management community can be effective in targeting critical social and policy change to protect coastal ecosystems.