

## The National Coastal Condition Report IV

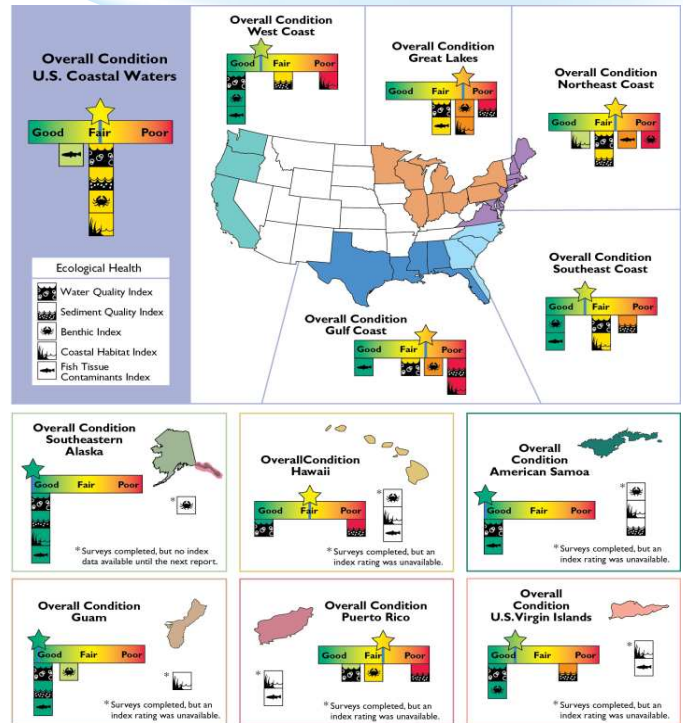
### What is the National Coastal Condition Report IV?

The National Coastal Condition Report IV (NCCR IV) is the fourth in a series of environmental assessments of U.S. coastal waters and the Great Lakes. The report includes contiguous 48 states and Puerto Rico, southeastern Alaska, Hawaii, the U.S. Virgin Islands, Guam, and American Samoa. The NCCR IV presents four main types of data: (1) coastal monitoring data, (2) coastal ocean/ offshore monitoring data, (3) offshore fisheries data, and (4) beach assessment and fish advisory data.

The NCCR IV relies heavily on coastal monitoring data from EPA's National Coastal Assessment (NCA) to assess coastal condition by evaluating five indices of condition—water quality, sediment quality, benthic community condition, coastal habitat loss, and fish tissue contaminants.

### Summary of the Findings

- Overall condition of the Nation's coastal waters was fair from 2003 to 2006.
- The three indices that showed the poorest conditions throughout the U.S. were coastal habitat condition, sediment quality, and benthic condition.
- Southeastern Alaska and American Samoa received the highest overall condition scores (5=Good).
- The Great Lakes received the lowest overall condition score (2.2=Fair to poor).
- Comparison of the condition scores shows that overall condition in U.S. coastal waters has improved slightly since NCCR I.<sup>1</sup>



The overall condition of the Nation's coastal waters was fair, using the five key indices of ecological health. For each of these five key indices, a score of good, fair, or poor was assigned to each coastal region of the U.S. These ratings were then averaged to create overall regional and national scores illustrated in the map above, using "traffic light" color scoring.

### Background

The National Coastal Condition Reports represent collaboration among EPA, the National Oceanographic Atmospheric Administration, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and coastal state agencies. The first National Coastal Condition Report (NCCR I), published in 2001, reported that the Nation's coastal resources were in fair condition. The NCCR I used available data from 1990 to 1996 to characterize approximately 70% of the Nation's coastal resources. The second National Coastal Condition Report (NCCR II) was based on data from 1997 to 2000 representative of 100% of coastal

<sup>1</sup> Although the overall condition of U.S. coastal waters was rated as fair in all four reports, the score increased slightly from 2.0 to 2.3 from NCCR I to NCCR II and III, and increased to 2.5 in NCCR IV (based on assessments for the conterminous U.S.). When south-central Alaska and Hawaii were added to NCCR III, the overall condition score increased from 2.3 to 2.8; Alaska has relatively pristine conditions and a large coastal area which contributed to the increase in score. With the inclusion of southeastern Alaska, American Samoa, Guam, and the U.S. Virgin Islands in NCCR IV, the score increased from 2.5 to 3.0.

area in the contiguous 48 states and Puerto Rico, and showed that the Nation's coastal waters continued to be in fair condition. The third National Coastal Condition Report (NCCR III) assessed condition of the Nation's coastal waters, including Alaska and Hawaii, based primarily on NCA data collected in 2001 and 2002, and indicated that the condition remained fair. This fourth NCCR presents an assessment of coastal water condition based on data collected from 2003 to 2006, and for the first time includes the U.S. Virgin Islands, Guam, and American Samoa.

### U.S. Index Rating Scores for the NCCR I (1990–1995), NCCR II (1996–2000), NCCR III (2001–2002) and NCCR IV (2003–2006) National Coastal Condition Assessments

Category	NCCR I	NCCR II	NCCR III <sup>a</sup>	NCCR III <sup>b</sup>	NCCR IV <sup>c</sup>	NCCR IV <sup>d</sup>
Water Quality Index	1.5	3.2	3.2	3.8	3.2	3.6
Sediment Quality Index	2.3	2.1	1.6	2.8	1.8	2.6
Coastal Habitat Index	1.6	1.7	1.7	1.7	1.7	2.6
Benthic Index	1.5	2.0	2.1	2.1	2.4	2.4
Fish Tissue Contaminants Index	3.1	2.7	2.9	3.7	3.7	4.0
<b>Overall Condition</b>	<b>2.0</b>	<b>2.3</b>	<b>2.3</b>	<b>2.8</b>	<b>2.5</b>	<b>3.0</b>

<sup>a</sup> NCCR III scores, excluding Alaska and Hawaii. Please note that Guam, American Samoa, and U.S. Virgin Islands were not assessed as part of NCCR III, therefore no data are available for these areas.

<sup>b</sup> NCCR III scores, including Alaska and Hawaii (except for coastal habitat index). Please note that Guam, American Samoa, and U.S. Virgin Islands were not assessed as part of NCCR III, therefore no data are available for these areas.

<sup>c</sup> NCCR IV scores, excluding Alaska, Hawaii, Guam, American Samoa, and U.S. Virgin Islands.

<sup>d</sup> NCCR IV scores, including Alaska, Hawaii, Guam, American Samoa, and U.S. Virgin Islands.

### Uses of the National Coastal Condition Reports

The NCCRs are designed to help us better understand the condition of the nation's coastal waters, whether that condition is getting better or worse, and how different regions compare. The NCCR reports, however, cannot represent all individual coastal and estuarine systems of the U.S. and are based on a limited number of ecological indices and component indicators for which nationally consistent data sets are available to support estimates of ecological condition. The assessments provided in this report, and more importantly, the underlying data used to develop the assessments, provide important insights into the historical coastal conditions at state, regional, and national scales. For example, the National Coastal Assessment data have been used to provide insight into the conditions in the estuaries of Louisiana and Mississippi prior to Hurricane Katrina. These data sets are also useful, along with data collected by others, in helping us to understand conditions in Gulf of Mexico estuaries before and after the Deepwater Horizon incident. However, the methodology and data used in this report were not specifically designed to assess the condition of the Gulf from the perspective of oil spills as an ecological stressor. This report does not include, for example, data on certain oil-related contaminants or dispersant compounds.

### Expected Impact

Coastal waters provide both environmental and economic value; however, these waters are vulnerable to pollution from a variety of sources. EPA expects that this report on the condition of coastal waters will support more informed decisions concerning protection of this resource and will increase public awareness about the extent and seriousness of pollution in these waters.

To access the NCCRIV visit EPA's website at:

<http://water.epa.gov/type/oceb/assessmonitor/nccr/index.cfm>

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