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Florida Shelf Mapping Workshop Identifies State Priorities

By [Lisa Robbins](#)

May 2007

The submerged Florida shelf covers an area of more than 210,000 km², and if you ask fishermen, stakeholders, scientists, and so forth, every inch of it should be mapped! Such an endeavor would take billions of dollars and years of effort. Addressing the need to prioritize the areas on the coast and shelf for mapping, a first-of-its-kind workshop, "Mapping of Florida's Coastal and Marine Resources—Setting Priorities," was held February 7 and 8 at the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) Florida Integrated Science Center (FISC) office in St. Petersburg, Florida (URL <http://coastal.er.usgs.gov/>). The USGS, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP, URL <http://www.dep.state.fl.us/>), and the Southeast Regional Partnership for Planning and Sustainability (SERPPAS, URL <http://wrrc.p2pays.org/serppas/index.asp>) cosponsored the workshop. Participants included members from all State agencies, as well as major Federal, academic, and industry partners, who gathered to discuss mapping techniques, inform each other of State and Federal projects and priorities on the coast and shelf, and provide a general consensus of State-agency mapping priorities.

Coorganizers **Lisa Robbins** (USGS FISC Center for Coastal and Watershed Studies, St. Petersburg) and **Steve Wolfe** (DEP's Office of Coastal and Aquatic Managed Areas) conceived the workshop idea in similar, converging visions. **Robbins**, who leads the Florida Shelf Habitat Mapping Project (FLaSH Map, URL <http://coastal.er.usgs.gov/flash/>), initiated shelf-habitat mapping last year and learned that there was no consensus on the priority of areas to be mapped in Florida. "State and Federal biologists, geologists, and managers all indicated to me that their needs were widespread and urgent. The most common answer I got was, 'You need to map it all!' Yet we only had a small amount of money allocated for mapping—a drop in the bucket compared to what was needed. I searched for a document that indicated some priorities for the State, and found none. So, we decided to help

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Above: Jack Kindinger, Associate Center Director for the USGS FISC office in St. Petersburg, presents the USGS Coastal and Marine mapping program to workshop participants, with assistance from facilitator **Janice Fleischer**. [[larger version](#)]



Above: Breakout groups discuss coastal and shelf mapping priorities for Florida, technologies, and baseline-mapping data. Results of each breakout group were presented to the workshop participants for further discussion and refinement. [[larger version](#)]

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create one and to facilitate the communication across State and Federal agencies as an objective."

Meanwhile, as the State liaison to SERPPAS, **Steve Wolfe** was participating in meetings that had a similar intent—to create a mechanism by which the Department of Defense (DOD) could use State priorities for shelf mapping to carry out DOD's mapping mission. According to **Wolfe**, "Mapping the waters off Florida's coasts is a priority of Florida's Oceans Council, and the information from that mapping is needed by those agencies whose responsibility is to manage Florida's natural and human resources. It was clear that we needed a means to assess which areas constituted the highest overall priority, the most 'bang for the buck' in terms of responding to agency management needs." **Wolfe**, also the liaison to the Florida Oceans and Coastal Resources Council (FOCRC, URL <http://FloridaOceansCouncil.org/>), and **Robbins**, a member of FOCRC, found that their common needs folded easily into cohosting the workshop. **Camille Destafney**, SERPPAS cohost of the meeting, commented: "SERPPAS focuses on interdependent resources sustainability and protection of ecosystems across boundaries. In order to accomplish this, the mapping of marine [and] coastal regions and identifying of interested stakeholders are key projects. This workshop was an excellent start in this endeavor."



For 2 days, approximately 90 participants packed into the USGS Center for Coastal and Watershed Studies to discuss coastal and shelf mapping issues. The morning of the first day focused on current and new technologies in mapping. The afternoon consisted of 15 presentations of State- and Federal-agency programs and priorities in mapping around Florida. Led by facilitator **Janice Fleischer** of Flash Resolutions, the agenda allowed for significant discussion time and breakout groups, which furthered the objectives of the workshop. The second day focused on the State agencies coming to consensus on priority areas for mapping on the shelf, with breakout groups delving into such issues as:

- common mapping priorities among agencies,
- facilitation of communication among agencies,
- technologies,
- designation of bioregions, and
- baseline mapping data.

Afternoon sessions focused on the presentation of several habitat-classification schemes by **Becky Allee** (NOAA), **Steve Rohmann** (NOAA), and **Dave Palandro** (Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission), followed by group discussion of plenary questions, such as: How could new data be made available to those needing it, and how should priorities be updated in the future?

The final breakout sessions allowed participants to examine critical next-step issues, such as taking the 13 State priority areas (determined in the morning) and identifying the mapping scales, technologies, and minimum data needed to map these areas successfully. Another breakout group discussed funding, leveraging resources, and facilitation of public/private partnerships. Poster sessions during lunches and breaks allowed participants to discuss techniques and mapping projects in depth. A whitepaper outlining the findings and USGS 5-year plan will be released in summer 2007.



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Updated May 14, 2007 @ 10:35 AM (JSS)