

PREFACE

This publication, *Our Living Oceans: Habitat. Status of the Habitat of U.S. Living Marine Resources*, is the first comprehensive edition of the *Our Living Oceans* habitat report to be released since the inaugural policymakers' summary report was published in 2009. That publication, *Our Living Oceans: Habitat. Status of the Habitat of U.S. Living Marine Resources. Policymakers' Summary*, was an abridged version of earlier material developed as the framework for this, far more comprehensive, version.

This 2015 *Our Living Oceans* habitat report will join previous publications, which covered living marine resources and economics, as the third and final subject covered in the *Our Living Oceans* publication series. Taken together, *Our Living Oceans* serves as a report card on the state of U.S. living marine resources, their economic contributions to the Nation, the condition of their habitats, and the availability of habitat-use information.

The *Our Living Oceans* reports are neither mandated nor intended to fulfill any legal requirement. Instead, the purpose of *Our Living Oceans* from the beginning has been to synthesize existing information and provide status reviews on the health of U.S. living marine resources, their

economic contributions to the Nation, and the habitats necessary for them to survive. Reports in this series were released in 1991, 1992, 1993, 1995, 1996, 1999, and 2009. Over time, this reporting effort has evolved from a one-year cycle to a multiyear cycle so as to better reflect the extended time periods often required to observe and document change in biological populations, the economy, and the marine environment.

The *Our Living Oceans* habitat report provides a comprehensive summary of habitat information for all fishery and protected species under the purview of NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service. The report provides information on habitat science, trends, and research needs nationally and on a region-specific basis. The report also provides a conceptual framework for understanding habitat-use patterns of marine species. It also identifies gaps in the available data and information, and describes how these gaps can be addressed through additional research. As with previous reports in the *Our Living Oceans* series, this publication and the data presented are the result of the collective efforts of National Marine Fisheries Service staff from around the country. The principal contributors to this report are listed in Appendix 1.