

Developing Marine Benthic Indices for the U.S. National Coastal Assessment

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency began the Environmental Monitoring and Assessment Program (www.epa.gov/emap) in 1990 to assess the ecological health of the nation's rivers, lakes, wetlands, and marine waters. The purpose of this survey is to determine whether environmental programs are effective in protecting ecological health and biodiversity, to find out where there are problems, and to see how conditions are changing over time. The coastal and marine part of this is called the National Coastal Assessment, or NCA (www.epa.gov/emap/nca). The NCA measures water quality, sediment quality, benthic community health, and fish contaminants at a system of random stations in each biogeographical province and has developed a set of ecological indicators. An example of how an ecological indicator, a marine benthic index, was developed and how ecological indicators are used by environmental managers will be discussed.