

# NOAA's Southeast and Caribbean Region

The Southeast and Caribbean region is one of the fastest growing in the U.S., with a rapidly transforming economic base. Increasing population, particularly along coasts, drives a strong demand for ecosystem services, and puts more people at risk to hazards and changing climate.

## Geography and Environment

The NOAA Southeast and Caribbean region is composed of the land areas of North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands, and the marine environment adjacent to these lands. Topography ranges from interior mountains to coastal plains to expansive or abrupt continental shelves and intervening ocean basins. The region contains over 18,000 miles of coastline, with extensive riverine, estuarine, marsh, barrier island, mangrove, and coral reef systems.

Three large marine ecosystems support a diverse assemblage of marine life, with 18 protected marine species, over 600 marine managed areas, and the world's 3<sup>rd</sup> largest shallow water reef. The Gulf Stream is an important influence on biological, chemical, and physical characteristics. Climate is warm-temperate to tropical. Natural hazards include severe thunderstorms and tornadoes; floods and debris flows; earthquakes; tsunamis; drought and wild fires; winter storms; ground subsidence; coastal erosion; and coastal storms including tropical storms and hurricanes.

## Social and Economic Context

The region is socially, politically, and culturally diverse. The expansion of recreation and tourism, residential development, service industries, and commercial space is transforming the region's social, economic, and physical state. The region boasts 42 of the 100 fastest growing counties and a total population of over 40 million people. Coastal hazards and development-driven pressures on natural resources are major concerns as more than half the population lives in the coastal zone.

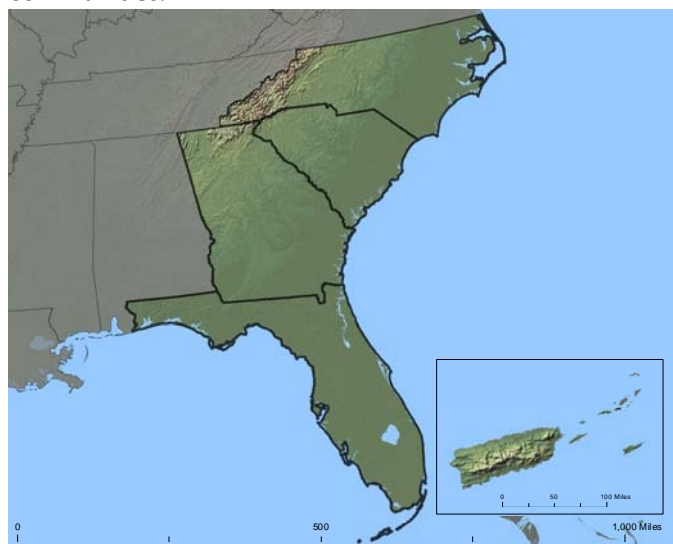
Recreation and tourism, transportation, and shipping are major contributors to the regional economy, especially in the Caribbean. In the four Southeastern states, coastal counties account for 49% of economic activity. The ocean and shoreline economy of these states tops \$20 billion, with 68% attributed to

recreation and tourism and 18% to transportation. The region has over 35 ports and terminals that service cargo and passenger ships including some of the country's largest and fastest growing container ports. The region also hosts the largest U.S. recreational fishery, plus major commercial multi-species fisheries.

## Capabilities and Challenges

Rapid changes, particularly along the coasts, are stressing ecosystems. Issues include impaired water quality, habitat degradation, overfishing, energy development, hazards, and climate change. By developing close partnerships with domestic, Caribbean, and international organizations, NOAA can better address these and other regional trends and issues. Understanding what matters to the people of the region is a significant first step toward improved overall agency responsiveness.

NOAA will leverage partnership efforts to respond to growth impacts on ecosystem services and increased societal demand for those services, while seeking to reduce the environmental, social, and economic impact of hazards. Efforts will include developing science-based approaches to regional ecosystem-level management, and fostering the development of hazard-resilient communities.



The Southeast & Caribbean region has over 600 marine managed areas