

Executive Summary

Foreword

Nearly two-thirds of Earth's surface is covered by the ocean, a global system essential to all life. Impacts on one part of the ocean can have worldwide effects. The ocean moderates our climate, provides valuable resources, and produces at least half the oxygen we breathe: it makes our planet livable. We know little, however, about the physical, chemical, geological, and biological aspects of this crucial life support system.

The Smithsonian Institution, in efforts to increase knowledge about the ocean, has established a network of marine laboratories that monitors coastal habitats along a latitudinal gradient from the Chesapeake Bay through the Indian River Lagoon to the Mesoamerican barrier reef and on both sides of the Isthmus of Panama. The maintenance of long-term research projects and environmental monitoring is crucial to understanding changes that exceed in time the professional career of any given scientist. The information gained from such studies at stable sites enables scientists to differentiate between long-term changes and local or short-term environmental variations. Results contribute to our knowledge of systematics and ecology, physiology, behavioral sciences, geology, and paleoecology.

Our marine science universe comprises Smithsonian staff scientists and external collaborators and encourages the next generation of scientists, graduate students, and fellows. This symposium presents a Smithsonian-wide sample of marine science results.

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Acting Under Secretary for Science, 2007–2008



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