2026 MID-ATLANTIC OCEAN FORUM

Schedule

May 4–6, 2026

This is a working agenda and will be updated as speakers, session times, and details are confirmed.

Day 1 - Interactive Work Group Sessions

Monday, 04 May 2026

9:00 – 9:30 AM | Registration & Coffee

9:30 - 9:45 AM | Welcome & Overview

Opening remarks will provide an overview of Day 1 objectives, emphasizing the role of work groups in advancing priority Mid-Atlantic ocean planning issues and connecting discussions to Day 2 plenary sessions and Day 3 leadership dialogue. *Event Moderator: Avalon Bristow, Mid-Atlantic Regional Council on the Ocean (MARCO)*

9:45 - 11:30 AM | Coastal Hazards & Resilience Network

This inaugural in-person meeting will refine the Network's structure and establish near- and long-term goals. Participants will identify priorities for 2026–2027 and shape the scope, focus, and operating approach moving forward. *Moderator: Jes Watts, Mid-Atlantic Regional Council on the Ocean (MARCO)*

11:30 AM - 1:00 PM | Lunch & Demonstrations

Working lunch with time set aside for informal networking, alongside poster presentations, demonstration tables, and a Tools Café available for participants to explore at their own pace. Attendees are encouraged to connect with colleagues, engage with exhibits, and continue conversations sparked during the morning sessions.

1:00 - 2:45 PM | Seafloor Planning

States will work together to develop a regional understanding of seafloor mapping priorities following Portal Survey Tool input and early 2026 state engagement. The session will identify next steps for coordination with federal agencies and partners. *Moderator: Vicki Ferrini, Columbia University's Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory*

2:45 -3:00 PM | Break

3:00 - 5:00 PM | Fishery Data Working Session

Focused working session on fish habitat mapping and development of decision-ready EFH and FHOC data products. Discussion includes governance, methodology, integration

challenges, funding needs, and future updates to ensure scientific credibility and usability. *Moderator: Jay Odell, Mid-Atlantic Regional Council on the Ocean (MARCO)*

3:00 – 5:00 PM | MARCO Mid-Atlantic Tribal Caucus – Closed Session

Closed convening to discuss shared priorities, perspectives, and coordination needs related to regional ocean planning. *Moderator: Heather Sagar, Mid-Atlantic Regional Council on the Ocean (MARCO) & Karl Vilacoba, MARCO Ocean Data Portal*

Wrap Up

Brief summary of key themes emerging from Day 1 discussions and preview of how these inputs will inform Day 2 plenary sessions.

5:30 – 7:30 PM | Optional After-Hours Event

Join us for a beach clean-up following the day's sessions.

Check-in Location: Virginia Beach Surf & Rescue Museum

Conveniently located on 24th Street between the two room-block hotels, with several nearby parking garages and an easy walk from either hotel. *Note: The Museum may be open for participants during check-in.*

We're grateful to our partners at Clean Virginia Waterways for hosting this event. Be sure to check out their display table during lunch.

Day 2 - Topical Presentations & Panels

Tuesday, 05 May 2026

8:15 – 9:00 AM | Registration & Coffee

9:00 – 9:45 AM | Opening Remarks & Keynote Address

Welcome and event overview. *Event Moderator: Avalon Bristow, Mid-Atlantic Regional Council on the Ocean (MARCO)*

Host state opening remarks. *Speaker: Ryan Green, Virginia Coastal Zone Management Program*

Keynote address. *Speaker: David L. Bulova, Secretary of Natural and Historic Resources, Commonwealth of Virginia*

9:45 – 11:00 AM | Marine Minerals Exploration

Participants will examine emerging marine minerals activity in the Mid-Atlantic, improve understanding of available data and resources, assess current information-sharing practices, and identify opportunities to strengthen engagement in decision-making

processes through a series of technical presentations and facilitated discussion. *Moderator: Ryan Green, Virginia Coastal Zone Management Program*
Speakers:

- *Kerby Dobbs, Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (presentation)*
- *David Hawkins, P.G., Virginia Department of Energy*
- *Laura Brothers, PhD, United States Geological Survey*

11:00 – 11:15 AM | Break

11:15 AM – 12:15 PM | Coordinated Regional Investments in Ocean and Coastal Work

Panel of regional funders and researchers discussing funding priorities, desired outcomes, and how coordination across programs strengthens regional impact and aligns with ocean planning needs. *Moderator: Julia Dumbroski, Regional Wildlife Science Collaborative (RWSC).*

Speakers:

- *Ryan Green, Virginia Coastal Zone Management Program*
- *Paul Ticco, New York State Department of State*
- *Kevin Hassell, New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection*

12:15 – 1:30 PM | Lunch & Demonstrations

Networking lunch with demonstration tables and poster presentations. Participants are encouraged to connect with colleagues and explore exhibits.

1:30 – 2:50 PM | Regional Ocean Economy: Shellfish Industry

Discussion highlighting the shellfish sector as a driver of coastal economies, workforce development, and community well-being, and how coordinated investment in science, people, and partnerships can strengthen the regional ocean economy. *Moderator: Kristi Lieske, Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control (DE DNREC).*

Speakers:

- *Kevin Madley, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)*
- *Ellen Rowe, Virginia Institute of Marine Science*
- *Muhammad Taky Tahmid, University of Delaware*
- *Daphne Munroe, Rutgers University*

2:50 – 3:00 PM | Break

3:00 – 4:00 PM | Maritime Commerce & Navigation Safety

Facilitated panel featuring maritime industry leaders and professionals examining the intersection of commercial expansion and navigational safety. Through operational perspectives, real-world challenges, and lessons learned, the discussion grounds regional coordination efforts in on-the-water experience and fosters direct dialogue with decision-makers. *Moderator: Jefferson Flood, Virginia Coastal Zone Management Program.*

Speakers:

- *Captain Whiting Chisman, Virginia Pilot Association*
- *Captain Peggy Britton, United States Coast Guard*
- *Keith B. Lockwood, United States Army Corps of Engineers*

4:00 – 5:00 PM | Closing Panel & Remarks

Facilitated synthesis discussion addressing economic drivers, conservation priorities, and the value of regional planning, followed by closing remarks and next steps. *Moderator: Tony MacDonald, Mid-Atlantic Regional Council on the Ocean (MARCO) & Monmouth University Urban Coast Institute (UCI)*

Speakers:

- *Kristi Lieske, Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control (DNREC)*
- *Jamie Carter, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)*
- *Beth Roach, Nottoway Indian Tribe of Virginia*
- *Diandre' Richie, Duke University*
- *Captain Frank Rabena, Virginia Pilot Association*

6:00 PM | Optional After-Hours Event

Join us for a ViBe Creative District meet-up and dinner.

Organized by Christina Trapani, Executive Director of Clean Virginia Waterways, this informal outing will include a mural walking tour through the ViBe Creative District, followed by a casual restaurant meet-up. Participants will explore local art, get recommendations on great places to eat in the district, and then gather for dinner at one of the nearby spots.

Day 3 - Mid-Atlantic Ocean Planning Committee

Wednesday, 06 May 2026

Mid-Atlantic Ocean Planning Committee - Closed Session

Day 3 is a half day, closed session for federal and state agency representatives and members of the Mid-Atlantic Ocean Planning Committee. Participants will review Committee priorities, reflect on insights from the Forum, and identify next steps for coordination. A detailed agenda will be shared with confirmed attendees in advance of the session.