NOAA: New Progress on Mapping U.S. Ocean, Coastal, Great Lakes Waters

SILVER SPRING, Md. – The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) has released the first annual report on the progress made in mapping U.S. ocean, coastal and Great Lakes waters, the agency said in a release.

Knowledge of the depth, shape and composition of the seafloor is foundational data necessary to explore, sustainably develop, understand, conserve and manage our coastal and offshore natural resources. The 2019 Presidential Memorandum on Ocean Mapping of the United States Exclusive Economic Zone and the Shoreline and Nearshore of Alaska and the global Seabed 2030 initiative make comprehensive ocean mapping a priority for the coming decade. The Unmapped U.S. Waters report tracks progress toward these important goals.

“The progress made in mapping U.S. waters through 2019 represents the cumulative work of federal and state agencies, nongovernmental organizations, private contracting partners and crowdsourced contributions,” said Rear Adm. Shepard Smith, director of NOAA’s Office of Coast Survey. “Partnerships and advances in technology are key to making significant progress toward our common goal of completely mapping U.S. waters.”

Pulling from an analysis of publicly available bathymetry, the report presents the percentage of unmapped U.S. waters by region and shows our progress towards filling these basic bathymetry data gaps with each passing year. At the end of 2019, the latest analysis yielded the following results:

Percent of U.S. waters that remain unmapped in 2019:

- U.S. total – 54% of 3,592,000 square nautical miles

(snm)

- Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico – 43% of 472,200 snm
- Great Lakes – 95% of 46,600 snm
- Caribbean – 42% of 61,600 snm
- Alaska – 72% of 1,080,200 snm
- Pacific (California, Oregon, Washington) – 24% of 239,700 snm
- Pacific Remote Islands and Hawaii – 50% of 1,691,700 snm

Multibeam and lidar surveys are the two primary sources of bathymetry needed to fill these gaps. In support of the integrated ocean and coastal mapping goal to “map once, use many times,” all the data collected in this effort are publicly available to benefit numerous user communities. For the latest status on these efforts and how you can contribute, click here.