



## Executive Order 13921

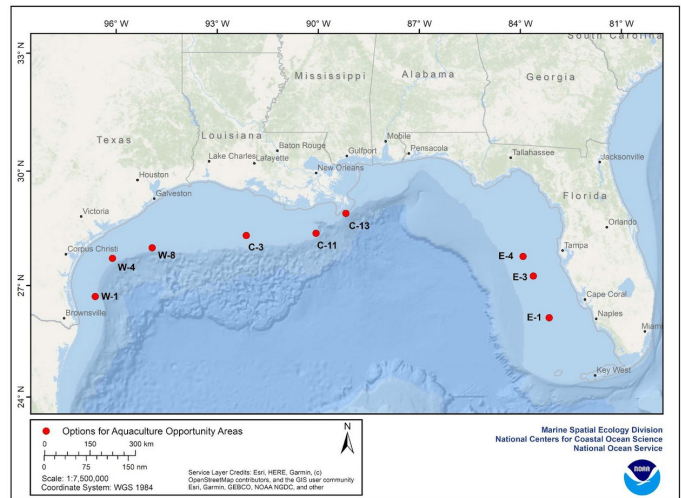
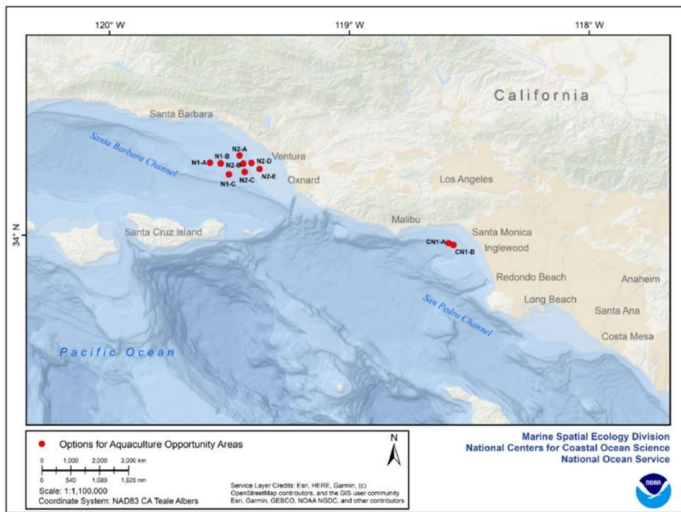
EO 13921 is an Executive Order left over from the Trump Administration. As of May 2023, the Biden Administration fully revoked or partially revoked almost 25% of the EO's signed by Trump, but not this one.

EO 13921 directs the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration - NOAA - to be the lead in promoting offshore finfish aquaculture in U.S. federal waters. NOAA is tasked with identifying fish farm sites, called Aquaculture Opportunity Areas, and fast-tracking a regulatory process in coordination with the Army Corps of Engineers. Offshore fish farming - or OFF - does not benefit fishing communities, the environment, or healthy food production. So who does OFF benefit? An industry block of a handful of corporations that includes agribusinesses and the industrial seafood lobby. In fact, many of them advanced the same industrial food production model that forced farmers to sell their land, incentivized the polluting of waterways, and contributed to poor nutrition and human health problems.

## Aquaculture Opportunity Areas

An Aquaculture Opportunity Area (AOA) is an area designated by NOAA and deemed “suitable” for offshore aquaculture operations. The set of areas in one geographic location is called an Atlas. These are all located in federal waters, at least three miles from the coast. However, the negative impacts of offshore fish farming at these sites will reach the states and coastal communities near them. These AOAs work to facilitate industrial fish farming by streamlining the permitting process for potential farms, making it easier than ever for large corporations to set up operations.

In 2022, two years after the signing of EO 13921, NOAA identified AOAs in two areas: The Gulf of Mexico and the Southern California Bight. The Gulf of Mexico Atlas includes nine AOAs, two of which are in the dead zone. The Southern California Bight Atlas contains 10 AOAs, two of which are near a DDT Superfund site off Catalina Island.



## Nationwide Permit

EO 13921 also provides Nationwide Permitting through the Army Corps of Engineers. Without this Executive Order, the Army Corps of Engineers would need to approve each and every offshore fish farm to ensure that it is not located in a place that would obstruct shipping routes or other commercial activities. With “Nationwide Permit 56,” the Army Corps of Engineers can issue a universal permit, which allows the construction of any fish farm structure anywhere within an AOA. This further deregulates the industrial fish farming industry to benefit profits while putting consumers and small-scale producers at risk.





### **Anticipated harms from EO 13921**

Offshore fish farming exacerbates the pressures that marine ecosystems and fisheries already experience and exposes the public to health dangers. Industrial offshore fish farms could contaminate our waters with drugs, other chemicals, and untreated waste, and create a breeding ground for pests and diseases. Due to the projected increase in pollution and other ecological damage caused by these industrial farms, the value of wild-caught fish and fish populations could decline. Independent fishermen - many of whom are already struggling - could be pushed out of business. Coastal economies that depend on tourism are likely to suffer as polluted areas will attract fewer visitors. Overall, the goal of increasing domestic seafood and jobs through offshore finfish farming does not benefit coastal communities, nor does it provide consumers with healthy fish options.

Unfortunately, the stakeholder involvement that NOAA has held up as evidence that they are looking out for small-scale fisherfolk resulted in little to no consideration of stakeholder wants and needs. A detailed analysis of public opinions submitted on EO 13921 by Don't Cage Our Oceans revealed overwhelming opposition from those in Southern California and the Gulf of Mexico - the two areas which would be most impacted by the AOA's.

This Trump Era Executive Order is giving the green light to the Biden Administration to continue a Trump-supported dirty industry. EO 13921 is not the answer to degraded environments, public health crises, and struggling coastal economies. Executive Order 13921 must be revoked. Coastal communities and marine ecosystems must be protected by investing in values-based aquaculture and marine conservation.

<https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2020/05/12/2020-10315/promoting-american-seafood-competitiveness-and-economic-growth>