

EPA and its state and tribal partners will conduct the 2020 National Coastal Condition Assessment. NCCA is a survey of the nation's coastal waters and Great Lakes. It is designed to provide statistically valid regional and national estimates of the condition of coastal waters and the Great Lakes. Consistent sampling and analytical procedures ensure that the results can be compared across the country.

As part of the 2020 NCCCA, the Quality Assurance Team has been requested to conduct a technical assessment to verify quality control practices in your laboratory and its ability to perform biology analyses under this project. Our review will be assessing your laboratory's ability to receive, store, prepare, analyze, and report sample data generated under EPA's 2020 NCCA.

The first step of this assessment process will involve the review of your laboratory's certification and/or documentation. Subsequent actions may include (if needed): reconciliation exercises and/or a site visit.

All laboratories will be required to complete the following forms and check the specific parameter in which your laboratory will be conducting an analysis for the 2020 NCCA:

- Mercury in Fish Plugs
- Benthic Macroinvertebrates
- Sediment Toxicity

If your laboratory has been previously approved within the last 5 years for the specific parameters:

- A *signature* on the attached Laboratory Signature Form indicates that your laboratory will follow the quality assurance protocols required for biology laboratories conducting analyses for the 2020 NCCA.
- A signature on the Quality Assurance Project Plan (QAPP) and the Laboratory Operations Manual (LOM) Signature Form indicates you will follow both the QAPP and the LOM.

If you have not been approved within the last 5 years through the laboratory verification process for the specific parameters, in order for us to determine your ability to participate as a lab in the NCCA, we are requesting that you submit the following documents (if available) for review:

- Documentation of a successful *quality assurance audit* from a prior National Aquatic Resource Survey (NARS) that occurred within the last 5 years.
- Documentation showing participation in previous NARS for this indicator.

Additionally, we request that all labs provide the following information in support of your capabilities, (these materials are required if neither of the two items above are provided):

- A copy of your laboratory's *accreditations and certifications* if applicable (i.e. NELAC, ISO, state certifications, NABS, etc.).

- Documentation of NABS (or other) *certification* for the *taxonomists* performing analyses (if applicable).
- An updated copy of your Laboratory's *QAPP* and Laboratory Quality Assurance Manuals.
- Standard Operating Procedures* (SOPs) for your lab for each analysis to be performed (if not covered in 2020 NCCA LOM).

Laboratory Signature Form – Biology Laboratories

I _____ certify that the laboratory located in _____, will abide by the following standards in performing biology data analysis and reporting for the 2020 National Coastal Condition Assessment (NCAA).

This applies to the _____ biological indicator.

Use procedures identified in the 2020 NCCA Lab Operations Manual (or equivalent). If using equivalent procedures, please provide the procedures and obtain approval from EPA. Read and abide by the 2020 NCCA Quality Assurance Project Plan (QAPP) and related Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs).

Have an organized IT tracking system in place for recording sample tracking and analysis data.

Use taxonomic standards outlined in the 2020 NCCA Laboratory Operations Manual.

Participate in taxonomic reconciliation exercises during the field and data analysis season, which include conference calls and other laboratory reviews.

Provide Quality Control (QC) data for internal QC checks, including for sorting, on a monthly basis.

Provide data using the template provided on the NARS SharePoint.

Provide data results in a timely manner. This will vary with the type of analysis and the number of samples to be processed. Sample data must be received no later than March 1, 2021 or as otherwise negotiated with EPA. Samples results for independent taxonomic QC described in the LOM and QAPP must be provided to EPA prior to final datasets to allow for reconciliation to take place.

Participate in a Laboratory technical assessment or audit if requested by EPA NCCA staff (this may be a conference call or on-site audit).

Agree to utilize taxonomic nomenclature and hierarchical established for NCCA 2020.

Signature _____ Date _____