



MarineGEO Data Terms of Use

Updated January 2026

Summary

- Most data are made available to all participants in the network immediately after basic quality control.
- Network experiment data are made public following the first network publication, or within 3 years of submission.
- Monitoring data are made public within 1 year after submission.
- Use of network project data prior to public release requires pre-approval by the MarineGEO Central team and project participants. Use of monitoring data prior to public release does not require pre-approval when used for academic purposes.
- Participants who make substantial contributions to MarineGEO activities will be eligible for co-authorship on resulting publications and products, as per the [MarineGEO Authorship Guide](#).

Overview

The Smithsonian-led MarineGEO program values collaboration and open sharing of our collective knowledge. Acquiring, curating, sharing, and analyzing data are central functions of our network's research. This document summarizes data contribution and sharing by contributors to activities coordinated by MarineGEO. Adherence to these terms is a requirement for any use of MarineGEO data or participation in any MarineGEO activity that involves data collection. By contributing data to MarineGEO, participants agree to MarineGEO Central's use and release of data as described herein. MarineGEO Central reserves the right to modify the terms as needed, with notification to all participants.

Terms & Definitions

MarineGEO refers to both the Marine Global Earth Observatory research program and the broader community (network) of partners that conduct its activities, which are led and coordinated by the MarineGEO Central team at the Smithsonian Institution.

MarineGEO Central refers to the leadership and support team, part of the Smithsonian Institution, that coordinates MarineGEO activities. MarineGEO Central is responsible for collating, curating, archiving, and serving MarineGEO data to contributing participants and, where appropriate, to the public.



Data refers to all content generated by MarineGEO activities, including measurements stored in spreadsheets and on original field sheets, images, video, genetic sequences, GIS layers, computer code, and associated metadata.

A *contributing participant* is any party who has collected and contributed original data to MarineGEO. Participants can include principal investigators, technicians, students, and/or volunteers at MarineGEO partner institutions, as well as those contributing to a MarineGEO project by mutual agreement.

Data Collection

MarineGEO Central provides standard protocols and data formats for most network activities. Contributing participants are responsible for ensuring that the data they collect adhere to MarineGEO's protocols. Contributing participants agree to utilize the resources provided by MarineGEO, including protocols, field sheets, and data entry spreadsheets.

MarineGEO protocols occasionally undergo revision from MarineGEO Central and the MarineGEO Working Groups. Once finalized, MarineGEO Central will alert participants to updated resources via email and during participant meetings. It is the responsibility of network participants to ensure they are using the most up to date materials.

MarineGEO protocols and related resources are available on our [website](#). Some protocols use data entry spreadsheets that are custom-made for each partner. MarineGEO Central is responsible for creating and sending those spreadsheets ahead of data entry based on expected sampling times provided by MarineGEO participants.

Data Submission

Contributing participants are responsible for using MarineGEO's data submission guidelines to submit their data for curation in a timely fashion. Contributors also are responsible for responding promptly to any requests that arise during the Quality Assurance/Quality Control (QAQC) process to ensure data quality and completeness.

- For tabular data collected using MarineGEO's habitat monitoring protocols, data should be entered into MarineGEO's data entry spreadsheets and emailed to marinegeo-data@si.edu with the spreadsheets as attachments.
- Data sheets used in the field and/or lab should be digitally scanned or imaged and included along with the data entry spreadsheets. If they cannot fit as an email attachment, they can be transferred via cloud storage. MarineGEO can provide a OneDrive folder, if necessary.



- For Electricblue EnvLoggers temperature loggers: Participants should submit the exported CSV files from the logger application and a deployment spreadsheet, found on MarineGEO's website, as email attachments to marinegeo-data@si.edu.
- For images used for scoring: MarineGEO Central can provide cloud storage for image transfer. Images should be named and structured according to the relevant protocol.
- For physical samples: See protocol instructions for packaging and mailing physical samples.

The timely submission of data is necessary to support MarineGEO's research goals. We expect that annual monitoring data will be submitted to MarineGEO within 2 months of data collection, although we understand that additional time might be necessary during busy field seasons. Network experiments deadlines will vary by project, but in general should be submitted no later than a month after data collection. Participants who repeatedly do not submit data in a timely manner or do not respond to efforts for data submission may not be invited to participate in network experiments, serve on working groups, or attend in-person meetings or workshops.

Participants must contribute only original data that they own or possess all rights in, subject to the constraints of their host institutions, and are necessary to contribute for MarineGEO purposes. Contributing participants retain personal or institutional rights to their data, subject to MarineGEO's right to use them as described herein.

Participants may identify products of experiments and student thesis research, that can be embargoed for a term specified by mutual agreement with MarineGEO Central before public release.

MarineGEO Central's Use of Data

MarineGEO strives toward open-access data. However, we recognize there are different categories of data (Table 1) and contributors deserve priority in their capacity to utilize certain types of data they contribute.

In general, MarineGEO Central will make data collected as part of MarineGEO activities available to contributing participants upon determining that the data meets all requirements for data quality. Participants in one-time network projects or experiments will only have access to data from those projects they are participating in. Participants in any annual monitoring program will have access to all annual monitoring data collected by the MarineGEO network, regardless of protocol or habitat.

MarineGEO Central will annually release applicable monitoring data on public repositories. MarineGEO Central makes these data available under a Creative Commons ["CC BY" license](#). For repositories such as Figshare, those data publications will be updated each year with new data, rather than creating separate publications for each annual release of data. Repositories that feed into



aggregators, such as an IPT for GBIF/OBIS, will receive a new, unique data publication each year (e.g. “MarineGEO Seagrass Monitoring Data, United States, 2025”)

Network experiment data are made public following the first network publication, or within 3 years of submission.

Metadata associated with MarineGEO data will be made available to the public. Most types of data will also be made public at the appropriate time (see Table 1), except for certain types of data deemed by the Smithsonian to be sensitive, such as locations of vulnerable species or habitats, and Personally Identifiable Information (PII), including names, contact information, and images of people. MarineGEO may share data visualizations derived from non-public data on their website, data dashboards, or newsletter, but will only do so with permission from the contributing partner.

MarineGEO Central may analyze, synthesize, and share data as needed to advance the MarineGEO community’s collective goals, provided this does not conflict with other guidelines described here. MarineGEO Central may share data with parties outside of the network prior to public release to assist in data curation, analysis, and/or synthesis as needed to ensure quality and accessibility at its discretion.

Data may be updated by MarineGEO Central periodically to fix errors, update nomenclature, and adhere to current standards. MarineGEO will strive to make the identity of the latest version and the history of all data sets clear. It is the user’s responsibility to ensure that they are working with the most current versions of standards and protocols. When in doubt contact marinegeo-data@si.edu.

Accessing public MarineGEO Data: MarineGEO data is published on multiple online repositories, including Figshare, OBIS, and [AODN](#) (Reef Life Survey data).

Accessing non-public MarineGEO Data: Network partners generally have access to all data relevant to the projects they are participating in. MarineGEO uses multiple cloud service providers to share data with network partners, including Dropbox and SharePoint. Once partners have submitted data to MarineGEO, they will be given access to these shared resources. Partners can also email marinegeo-data@si.edu if they need assistance accessing data.

Data Use by Contributing Participants Prior to Public Release

Prior to the release of data to the public, contributing participants are free to use any MarineGEO data



to which they have access for scientific purposes (e.g., manuscripts, dissertations, theses) within the guidelines described in this document, unless expressly restricted by prior agreement with MarineGEO Central. Note that download and use of data will require acceptance of the license associated with that data type; use of MarineGEO data always requires proper attribution (see Table 1 and Data Attribution).

Network Projects: Where data are collected for a particular use (e.g., a collaborative MarineGEO project), participants may not share those data outside the network or publish until the collaborative project is concluded or the project data is made public, whichever comes first, unless the project participants and MarineGEO Central grant prior approval. Where samples may be used for additional studies beyond an established project scope, project leads must obtain permission for sample use from each relevant participant.

Annual Monitoring Data: Participants may not use MarineGEO Data collected by other participants outside a given partner site for grant or contract proposals, or for commercial or for-profit applications, without the prior written approval of the participant that collected the data and MarineGEO Central.

Data Attribution

All products developed using public data collected for and/or provided by MarineGEO must cite the data set's Digital Object Identifier (DOI). Each dataset will provide guidance on the proper citation to use.

All products developed using non-public data collected for and/or provided by MarineGEO must provide proper attribution in the form of a written acknowledgment citing MarineGEO and any contributing participant and their organizations as the source of the data. MarineGEO Central will assist users in determining the proper acknowledgement.

Authors of peer-reviewed publications and other products using MarineGEO data must request and register a MarineGEO contribution number prior to publication and cite it in the acknowledgements of the publication ([Publication Request Form](#)).

PIs and participants who participate in the entire sampling process are eligible to be added as authors to data publications. It is the joint responsibility of MarineGEO Central and contributing participants to ensure public datasets list the proper contributors. MarineGEO Central will circulate author lists by email each year and participants are responsible for making any updates in a timely manner.

It may not be feasible for users of MarineGEO data accessed through services such as GBIF and OBIS to follow the acknowledgement requirements due to the nature of how that data is aggregated



from many different sources. However, the data is licensed with a requirement for attribution, and a DOI is included in a field within a data table.

Data Liability

MarineGEO Central make available all data “as is.” It is the sole responsibility of the user to ensure that the data are being used and interpreted properly, and that they adhere to the terms of this agreement. Neither the contributing participant(s) nor the Smithsonian Institution are liable for any damages resulting from any use or interpretation of the data.



Table 1. Description of MarineGEO data types and their schedule of availability to contributing participants (the network) and public release. Exceptions may be made in certain cases for sensitive data, including locations of vulnerable species or habitats or data that forms part of a student thesis.

Data category	Data type	Details	Availability to Participants	Availability to Public
Geophysical	Maps	Drone imagery, GIS layers	Immediate after basic QAQC	Immediate after basic QAQC
Environmental	Geophysical	Water quality sonde, meteorological station	Immediate after basic QAQC	1 year
Biodiversity	Bio-monitoring	Surveys (e.g., quantitative abundance by taxon)	Immediate after basic QAQC	1 year
Biodiversity	Experiments	Coordinated experiments	Immediate after basic QAQC	At publication or after 3 years, whichever comes first
Personal Information	Personally Identifiable Information	Names, contact information, photographs, and other personal details	Only with signed permission of person*	Only with signed permission of person*
Metadata	Metadata	Descriptions and summaries of data sets, including visualizations	Immediate after basic QAQC	1 year, or earlier with permission of contributing partner
Metadata	Metadata	Descriptions and summaries of data sets, including visualizations	Immediate after basic QAQC	1 year, or earlier with permission of contributing partner

*The Smithsonian Institution (SI) requires that non-SI individuals sign a waiver before appearing in images displayed by SI to the public.