



THE SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

Coral Amendment 11 and Shrimp Amendment 12

Establish a SFAA within the Oculina HAPC

Decision Document, March 2025



Background

In 2021, the Council submitted Coral Amendment 10 to the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) for formal review. The amendment proposed establishing a shrimp fishery access area (SFAA) within the eastern edge of the Northern Oculina Bank Habitat Area of Particular Concern (OHAPC) where trawling for rock shrimp is currently prohibited. In 2022, the Council received a letter of disapproval. Among the reasons for disapproval, NMFS stated that the amendment did not include adequate analysis to ensure that the proposed action would minimize adverse effects of fishing on essential fish habitat (EFH) and minimize bycatch. In 2023, the Council made a motion to resubmit the amendment incorporating updated information including a [predictive mapping study](#) and possible additional alternatives; and directed staff to execute a joint amendment to modify both the Coral and Shrimp FMPs.

Objectives for this Meeting (March 2025)

- Select the range of alternatives.
- Discuss AP (both Coral and Deepwater Shrimp) involvement.

Tentative Amendment Timing

March 2025	Approve the range of alternatives.
June 2025	Draft amendment and preliminary analysis (if all data required is available). Select preferred alternatives, and approve for public hearings.
Summer/Fall 2025	Conduct public hearings.
September 2025	Review public hearing comments.
December 2025	Review final draft amendment and consider approval for formal review.
Early 2026	Amendment submitted.

Purpose and Need Statements

Purpose: The purpose of this amendment is to create a Shrimp Fishery Access Area along the eastern edge of the Northern Oculina Habitat Area of Particular Concern boundary in an area where the rock shrimp fishery operated historically while minimizing impacts to deepwater coral.

Need for Action

The need for this amendment is to allow the rock shrimp fishery to attain OY while minimizing negative impacts to deepwater coral in the Council’s jurisdiction.

Committee Action

- REVIEW PURPOSE AND NEED AND PROVIDE ANY MODIFICATIONS.

Proposed Action and Alternatives

Action 1: Establish a shrimp fishery access area (SFAA) along the eastern edge of the northern Oculina HAPC boundary. Refer to Appendix I for the language of alternatives 1-3 and coordinates.

Alternative	Description	SFAA Length	SFAA Total Area
Alternative 1 (No Action)	Current boundaries of the OHAPC remain in place, no rock shrimping may occur within the area	NA	0 sq miles
Alternative 2 Preferred Alt from Coral AM 10	Establish a SFAA along the eastern edge of the northern OHAPC boundary	55.42 miles	22 sq miles
Alternative 3 Retained, non- preferred from Coral AM 10	Establish a SFAA along the eastern edge of the northern OHAPC boundary	55.42 miles	32 sq miles
Alternative 4 Proposed new alternative	Establish a SFAA that narrows the area proposed in Alt. 2 lengthwise (see discussion for details)	17.3 miles	6.55 sq miles

Visual Comparison of the First Three Alternatives

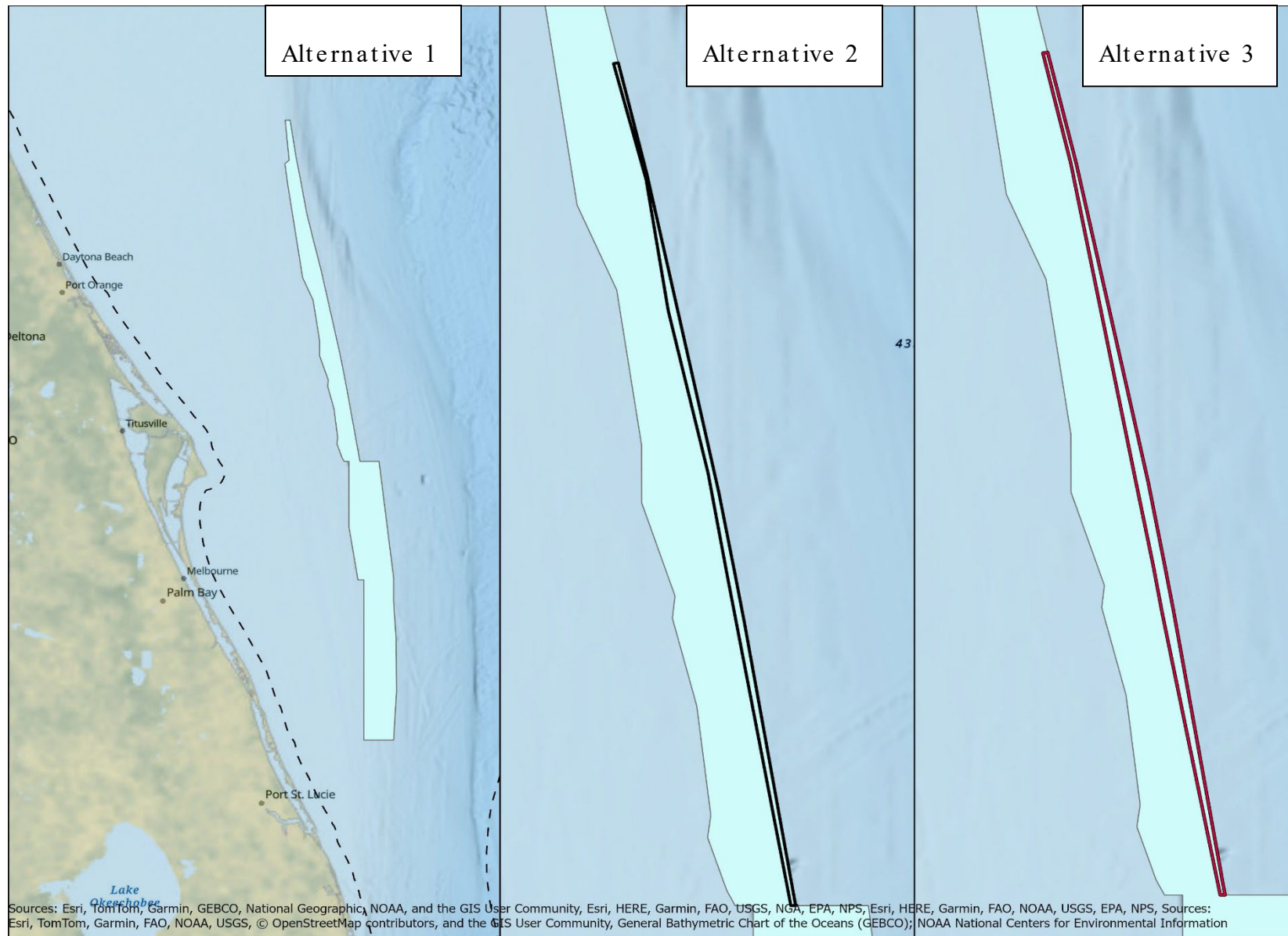


Figure 1: A visualization of Alternatives 1-3: Alternative 1: No action, Alternative 2, and Alternative 3.

Discussion

Alternative 2:

- This was the preferred alternative in Coral Amendment 10 and covers 22 square miles.

Alternative 3:

- This alternative was analyzed along with Alternative 2 in Coral Amendment 10 and covers 32 square miles.

Proposed Alternative 4:

- June 2024: The Council discussed adding an alternative that would shorten the **width** of the preferred alternative from Coral Amendment 10 (Alternative 2) to provide an additional buffer between where shrimping is conducted (according to VMS tracks) and the boundary of the OHAPC.
 - Shrimp fishermen noted that they already conduct trawls with a self-imposed 0.25-mile buffer to ensure remaining outside the OHAPC boundary.
- The IPT noted that shortening the **width** of the SFAA may not be feasible because of how narrow the proposed SFAA already is. It may not be a viable alternative for analysis.
- An IPT sub-group met with staff from SERO, the Deep Sea Coral Research and Technology Program, National Center for Coastal Ocean Science, and the Habitat Conservation Division who provided a heat map of **predicted** coral locations in and around the OHAPC as well as visually identified coral locations mapped in the [Deep Sea Coral Data Portal](#) (Figure 2).
 - The IPT felt that a reasonable additional alternative would be to shorten the proposed SFAA (from Alternative 2) **length-wise** as long as the resulting length was greater than the length of an average rock shrimp tow.
 - The identified area is roughly 20 miles long and, according to observer data, the average tow is 8 miles. More analysis into tow length will be needed if the Council chooses to include this alternative for analysis.
 - Note that adding Alternative 4 would provide a sufficient range of viable alternatives

Proposed Alternative 4

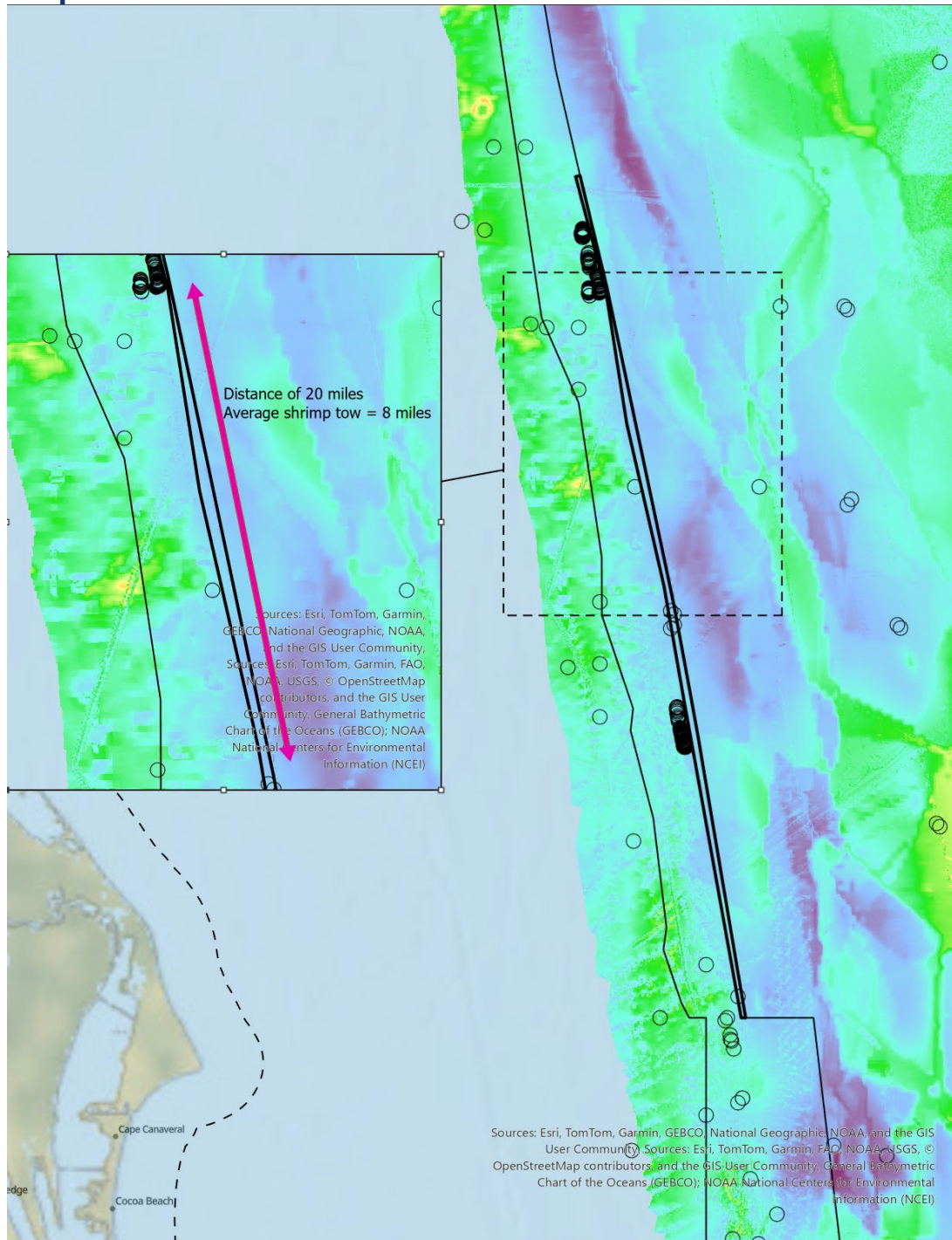


Figure 2: “Heat map” from Saldago et. al. (2022) based on a predictive algorithm. Blue denotes the least likely occurrence of coral; red/yellow denotes a high probability of coral. The circles indicate visually identified coral that have been observed and appear in the Deep Sea Coral Data Portal (DSCRTP, 2024). The thicker black line denotes the boundary from Alternative 2 (preferred in Coral Amendment 10). The thinner black line is the OHAPC boundary. The inset is an identified 20-mile zone with low predicted coral and no known coral locations.

Visual Comparison of all Four Alternatives

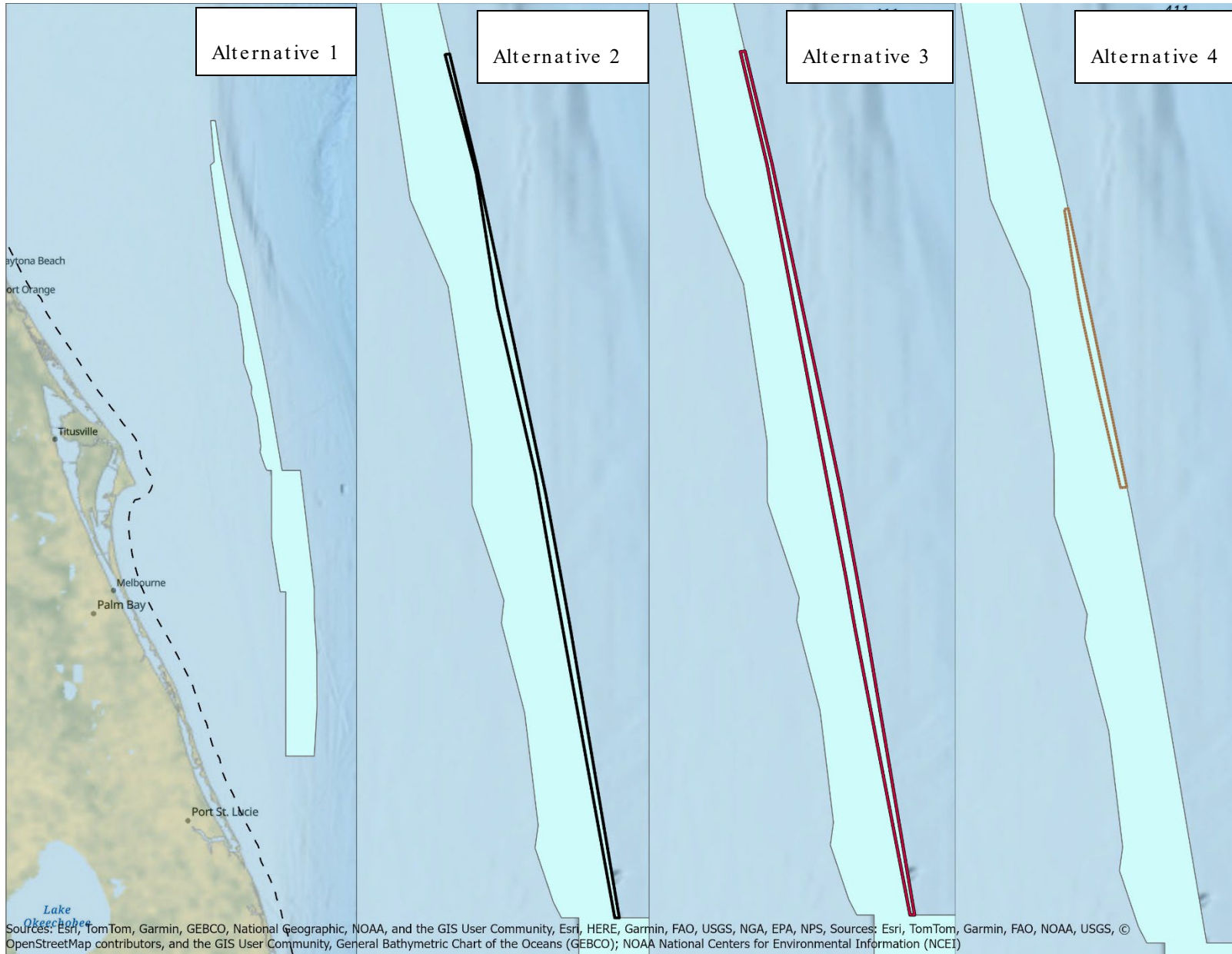


Figure 3: A visualization of Alternatives 1-4: Alternative 1: No action, Alternative 2, Alternative 3, and Alternative 4.

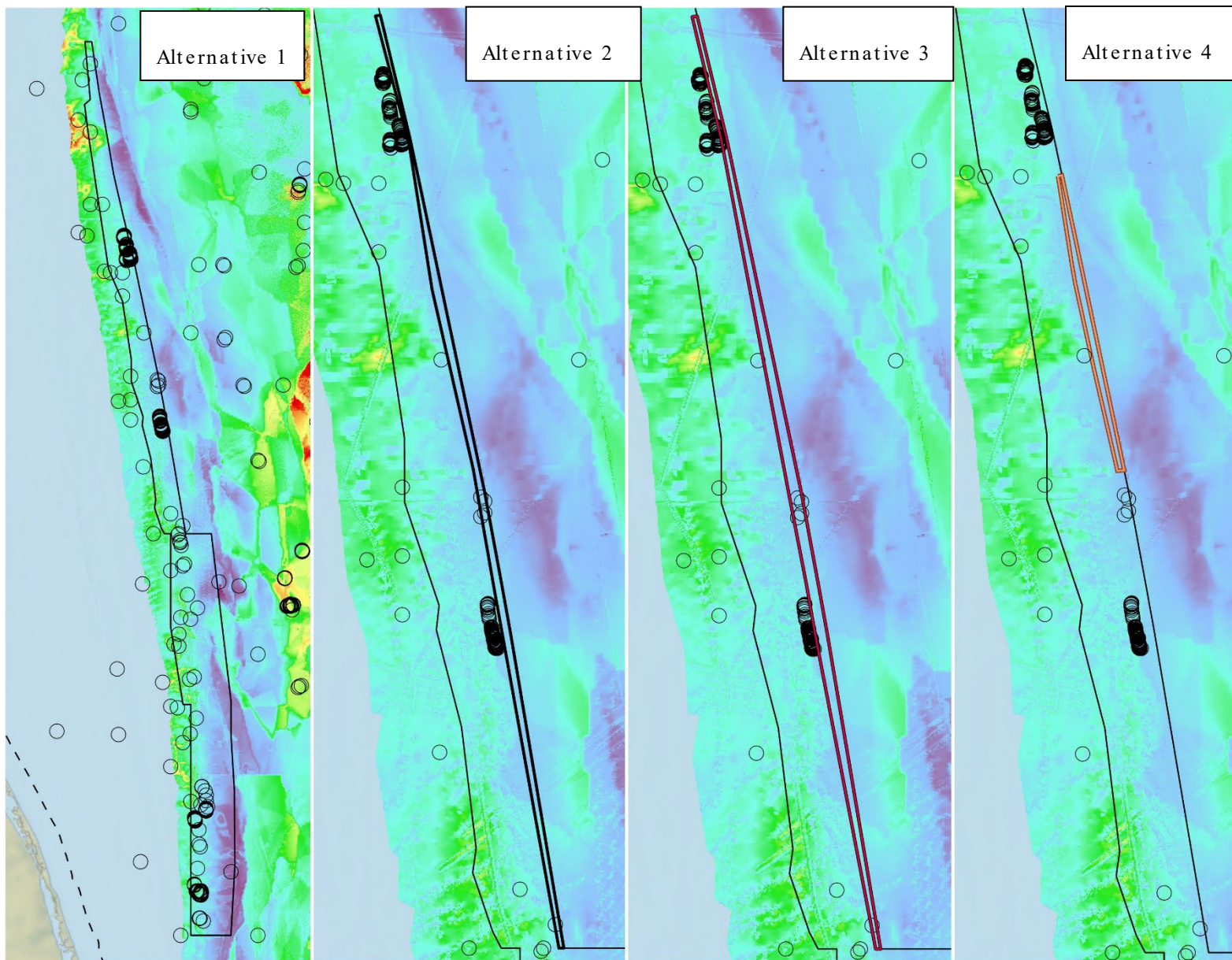


Figure 3: A visualization of Alternatives 1-4 with the “heat map” from Saldago et. al. (2022) and the visually identified coral from the Deep Sea Coral Data Portal (DSCRTP, 2024): Alternative 1: No action, Alternative 2, Alternative 3, and Alternative 4

Committee Action

- Do the Committees want to incorporate proposed **Alternative 4**?

Next Steps

Advisory Panels

- Do the committees recommend convening the Coral or Deepwater Shrimp APs (or both) to obtain additional feedback?
 - In person or webinar?

Literature Cited

Deep Sea Coral Research and Technology Program (DSCRTP) (2024). Observations of Deep-Sea Coral and Sponge Occurrences from NOAA's National Database for Deep-sea Corals and Sponges, 1842-Present, version 20241022-1 (NCEI Accession 0145037). All Genus. NOAA National Centers for Environmental Information. Dataset.

<https://www.ncei.noaa.gov/archive/accession/0145037>. Accessed 2024-06-05.

Salgado, Enrique & Goyert, Holly & Poti, Matthew & Winship, Arliss & Hourigan, Thomas & Coyne, Michael & Coleman, Heather & Bassett, Rachel & Etnoyer, Peter & Christensen, John. (2022). Data Synthesis and Predictive Modeling of Deep-sea Coral and Hardbottom Habitats Offshore of the Southeastern US: Guiding Efficient Discovery and Protection of Sensitive Benthic Areas. 10.13140/RG.2.2.30146.15042.

Appendix I.

Below is a description of each of the original Coral 10 alternatives along with the latitude and longitude of the proposed Shrimp Fishery Access area under each alternative.

Alternative 1 (No Action). No person may use a bottom longline, bottom trawl, dredge, pot, or trap in the Oculina Bank Habitat Area of Particular Concern. No person may use a bottom longline, bottom trawl, dredge, pot, or trap in the Oculina Bank Habitat Area of Particular Concern. If aboard a fishing vessel, no person may anchor, use an anchor and chain, or use a grapple and chain. There are no shrimp fishery access areas within the Oculina Bank Habitat Area of Particular Concern.

Alternative 2. Establish a shrimp fishery access area that is 22 mi² along the eastern edge of the northern extension of the Oculina Bank Habitat Area of Particular Concern. Allow a shrimp vessel with a valid limited access Commercial Vessel Permit for Rock Shrimp (South Atlantic Exclusive Economic Zone) to bottom trawl for rock shrimp within the established area bounded by the following coordinates.

Point	Latitude	Longitude
Origin	29°17'31.98"	80°10'22.02"
1	29°10'58.98"	80°08'39.00"
2	29°03'34.98"	80°07'28.98"
3	28°54'25.02"	80°05'22.98"
4	28°48'36.00"	80°04'22.02"
5	28°30'00.00"	80°01'01.02"
6	28°30'00.00"	80°00'46.02"
7	28°46'00.84"	80°03'28.50"
8	28°48'37.14"	80°03'56.76"
9	28°53'18.36"	80°04'48.84"
10	29°11'19.62"	80°08'36.90"
11	29°17'33.96"	80°10'06.90"
Origin	29°17'31.98"	80°10'22.02"

Alternative 3. Establish a shrimp fishery access area that is 32 mi² along the eastern edge of the northern extension of the Oculina Bank Habitat Area of Particular Concern. Allow a shrimp vessel with a valid limited access Commercial Vessel Permit for Rock Shrimp (South Atlantic Exclusive Economic Zone) to bottom trawl for rock shrimp within the established area bounded by the following coordinates.

Point	Latitude	Longitude
Origin	29°17'31.98"	80°10'22.02"
1	29°11'19.98"	80°8'54.00"
2	28°53'15.00"	80°5'27.00"
3	28°48'36.00"	80°4'33.00"
4	28°45'57.00"	80°4'4.98"
5	28°30'00.00"	80°01'01.02"
6	28°30'00.00"	80°00'46.02"
7	28°46'00.84"	80°03'28.50"
8	28°48'37.14"	80°03'56.76"
9	28°53'18.36"	80°04'48.84"
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