



SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

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Habitat Protection and Ecosystem-Based Management Advisory Panel Meeting May 16-17, 2017 Town and Country Inn, Charleston, South Carolina

The Habitat Protection and Ecosystem-Based Management Advisory Panel met May 16-17, 2017 at the Town and Country Inn, in Charleston, SC. Issues addressed during the meeting included: Development of the Council Artificial Reef EFH Policy Statement; Energy Development Activities in the South Atlantic Region; Regional Deepwater Coral Mapping; FEP II Development; Aligning Threats and Policies; SALCC Conservation Blueprint; NMFS Permit and Policy Activities; Sargassum Research and International Conservation; and Waccamaw Partnership Project Proposal.

The Panel approved a revised agenda and minutes for the November 2016 Panel meeting.

Artificial Reef EFH Policy Statement

Description: Pat Geer, GDNR and Lisa Havel, ASMFC updated the Panel on recent coordination with the ASMFC Artificial Reef Committee meeting to advance the developing policy statement. Group Solutions further extended the membership to Basecamp as needed and a google doc to support artificial reef policy development for the team completion of the draft. Lisa Havel, Habitat Coordinator with ASMFC, identified the policy sub-committee as Keith Millie, Christine Kittle, and Brad Ennis with Florida FWC, January Murray with Georgia DNR, Bob Martore with South Carolina DNR, and Jason Peters and Amy Comer with North Carolina DMF, Brian Hooker with BOEM. Pat Geer, GDNR and Charlie Barans also provided comments. She coordinated the development and reviewed the draft Artificial Reef EFH Policy Statement for the Panel. The policy emphasizes that properly placed artificial reefs are essential fish habitat however if artificial reefs are not properly placed reefs they could be detrimental. While the team addressed some of the protected resources issues that are impacting state programs in the Policy, the Panel recommends the Committee and Council request NMFS SERO clarify the issue at a September Habitat and Ecosystem Committee meeting.

Panel Member Action: Members provided edits to the policy draft but will edit and refine the latest draft further to include newer citations identified by state agency representatives. Members will provide edits by June 15 and an updated draft will be circulated by August 1 for completion and subsequent review by the Habitat and Ecosystem Committee and consideration for approval at the September Council meeting in Charleston. The Panel also recommends the Habitat Protection and Ecosystem Based Management Committee and Council request a briefing during the September Council meeting from the National Marine Fisheries Service Southeast Regional Office regarding any concerns the Protected Resources Division or other NMFS divisions may have regarding siting of and operation of artificial reefs. The briefing would be followed by interactive discussion of those concerns, with particular regard to the states' permit applications to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

Energy Development Activities in South Atlantic Region

Description: Brian Hooker, BOEM, provided an update on activities of the Atlantic BOEM Office of Renewable Energy Program, status of Oil and Gas Program and the Marine Minerals Program with a focus on the South Atlantic Region. Highlights included the recent leasing on March 16, 2017 of the Kitty Hawk Wind Area 122,445 acres by Avangrid Renewables for \$9 million. The remainder of the North Carolina Wind Areas, Wilmington West and East are pending coordination with consideration of South Carolina Areas. No timeline at this time and the next step will be area identification and followed by environmental assessment and leasing off South Carolina.

Brian identified Secretarial Order 508 which pertains to Atlantic activities and directs BOEM to immediately begin development of a new 5-year program considering Mid and South Atlantic Planning Areas with the intent to expedite G&G permitting.

Recent BOEM publications included Socio-Economic Impact of Outer Continental Shelf Wind Energy Development on Fisheries in the U.S. Atlantic and Benthic Habitat Mapping and Assessment in the Wilmington-East Wind Energy Call Area. Ongoing BOEM studies include:

- Documenting the Marine Soundscape of Selected Reefs within Onslow Bay, North Carolina
- Atlantic Marine Assessment Program for Protected Species
- Atlantic Deepwater Ecosystem Observatory Network (ADEON) – An Integrated System for Long -Term Monitoring of Ecological and Human Factors on the OCS
- Data Synthesis and Advanced Predictive Modeling of Deep Coral and Hardbottom Habitats in the Southeast Atlantic: Guiding Efficient Discovery and Protection of Sensitive Benthic Areas
- Deepwater Atlantic Habitats II: Continued exploration coral, canyon, and seep communities in South Atlantic
- Ecological Function And Recovery Of Biological Communities Within Dredged Ridge -Swale Habitats In The South -Atlantic Bight

Brian noted future fisheries studies through BOEM include:

- Understanding fish auditory thresholds/masking
- Describing Marine Wildlife Distribution and Movement Patterns on the South Atlantic OCS

In addition FY 18 BOEM Studies Development Plan is under development with several study ideas submitted regarding offshore wind and fishing.

Note: the Environmental Studies Program Plan links is: <https://www.boem.gov/SDP-2017-2019/> with Chapter 6 highlighting Atlantic Activities. In addition, Brian touched on national action potentially affecting the Region.

Presentation:

<http://safmc.net/download/Briefing%20Book%20Habitat%20May%202017/2aHookerPresBOEMupdateMay17.pdf>

Regional Deepwater Coral Mapping

Description: Dr. Daniel Wagner, NOAA, NCCOS reviewed planned activities associated with the Southeast Deep Coral Initiative. The Deep-Sea Coral Research and Technology Program was established in 2009 following reauthorization of Magnuson-Stevens Act to advance science to address fishing and other threats to deep corals. The effort is intended to integrate expertise across NOAA and provide funding for studies and fieldwork initiatives. The program focuses on 3-4 year efforts identifying research expeditions and data collection and analysis. The 2016 -2019 program focuses on the southeast including the Gulf of Mexico, South Atlantic and US Caribbean.

Previous priorities identified in completing mapping and possible characterization of existing deepwater managed areas were included in consideration and siting of upcoming research efforts.

Dr. Wagner assured ongoing coordination with the Council on both providing guidance on locations and access to collected spatial information to enhance Council Habitat and Ecosystem in-house and online spatial information systems including the Habitat and Ecosystem Atlas which will include the SA Mapping Strategy highlighting map priorities in the South Atlantic. Steve Ross identified the Stetson Bank in the Stetson Miami Terrace CHAPC as a unique habitat which could be considered a priority in the upcoming research activities.

Presentation:

http://safmc.net/download/Briefing%20Book%20Habitat%20May%202017/3aWagner_Pres_SEDecpCoralInitiativeHabEcoAPMay17.pdf

FEP II Development - Core Section Completion

Description: Brittany Boston, Group Solutions Inc. reviewed the development and completion of FEP II core Sections on South Atlantic Food Webs and Connectivity, South Atlantic Climate Variability and Fisheries, and South Atlantic Managed Species.

Panel Member Action: Members recommended revisions and edits to the developed Sections which are being addressed through coordination with Team chairs in completion of the Sections for Committee consideration in June.

Aligning Threats and Policies

Description: Roger Pugliese provided an overview of policies updated or created as part of FEP II development process as they relate to core threats. Group Solutions in cooperation with Council staff facilitated a focused session on aligning policies and core threats addressed.

South Atlantic Landscape Conservation Cooperative (SALCC) Conservation Blueprint Workshop for Panel Members

Description: Brittany and Brett Boston with Group Solutions Inc. in cooperation with Rua Mordecai, SALCC Science Coordinator, ran an SALCC Conservation Blueprint Workshop for Panel Members. The Blueprint has been developing incorporating Essential Fish Habitat and Habitat Areas of Particular Concern into the process. Additional Background on the SALCC can be found at: <http://www.southatlanticlcc.org/> and on the Conservation Blueprint at:

<http://www.southatlanticlcc.org/blueprint/>

The SALCC supports the developing an Ecosystem Modeling Suite for the South Atlantic region. Model efforts support Council activities for EBFM and FEP II development and better represent the estuarine and marine systems necessary to refine the Conservation Blueprint. Tom Okey provided a presentation to the Panel progress on the development of an integrated Ecopath/Ecosim/Ecospace model for the South Atlantic Region. The models will advance and refine the SALCC Conservation Blueprint, support the SAFMC's move to ecosystem based fishery management, link to hydrodynamic oceanographic models and satellite data, provide more realistic predictions about spatial policy options and predict impacts of episodic events that are limited in space (oil spills, red tides, upwelling, and meet the needs of the SSC and the South Atlantic Council. A South Atlantic Ecosystem Modeling Workgroup supporting development is meeting May 24-25, 2017 to advance development of the Ecopath model.

Panel Member Action: Members provided input as part of the facilitated workshop.

Presentations:

http://safmc.net/download/Briefing%20Book%20Habitat%20May%202017/6aMordecaiPresBlueprint2_EcospaceMay17.pdf

<http://safmc.net/download/Briefing%20Book%20Habitat%20May%202017/6bOkeyPresSABmodelHabEcoMay17.pdf>

NMFS Permit and Policy Activities

Description: Pace Wilber, reviewed the scope of NMFS Habitat Conservation Division activities addressing the EFH mandate in the Region. In addition, the combination of NMFS and Council responses to a proposal to dredge Frying Pan Shoals, North Carolina designated as an Essential Fish Habitat - Habitat Area of Particular Concern and initiation of the elevation process was reviewed.

Presentation:

http://safmc.net/download/Briefing%20Book%20Habitat%20May%202017/7WilberPres_SAFMCBriefingAtlanticBranchActivities_May17.pdf

Sargassum Research an International Conservation

Description: Andrew Brumfield, NCSU review his thesis on the challenges of using remote sensing to quantify Sargassum boundaries from Cape Hatteras into the Sargasso Sea. New technology employing a drone /charging buoy system could provide field verification of detailed Sargassum distribution. Dr. David Freestone, Executive Director with the Sargasso Sea Commission presented the Panel with the Commission activities as an innovative approach to the conservation of areas beyond National jurisdiction.

Presentations:

http://safmc.net/download/Briefing%20Book%20Habitat%20May%202017/8aBrumfield_Pres_QuantifyingSargassumBoundariesEasternandWesternWallsCape%20HatterasintoSargassoSea.pdf

<http://safmc.net/download/Briefing%20Book%20Habitat%20May%202017/8bFreestonePresSargassoSeaCommissionMay17.pdf>

Other Business

National Coastal Wetland Grants: Waccamaw Partnership Project Proposal

Wilson Laney presented a proposal to the National Wetlands Conservation Grant Program by the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission in partnership with the North Carolina Coastal Land Trust to purchase the 3,000 acre Waccamaw River Partnership Tract along 7.5 miles of the Waccamaw River in Columbus County, North Carolina. Support letters from the USFWS Charleston and Raleigh Offices were provided.

MOTION #1. Recommend the Council send a letter of endorsement of the Waccamaw Partnership Project National Coastal Wetland Grant. Motion by Bill Parker Seconded by Anne Deaton
APPROVED BY ADVISORY PANEL