

SAFMC Staff Report

June 2026

Sea Grant Reef Fish Extension Fellowship

The Sea Grant Fellow has been hard at work on a variety of projects aimed at highlighting reef fish science and wrapping up the fellowship:

- Working closely with staff at SC Sea Grant to develop a series of hypnoViD (custom animation) videos that will help explain SARSRP methods, results, and next steps. Those videos should be available for use in outreach by the end of the month.
- Completed a seminar series featuring research on shark depredation in the South Atlantic, climate vulnerability of reef fish, and movement and population connectivity of greater amberjack. Recordings of the seminars are available for viewing on South Carolina Sea Grant's YouTube channel.
- Collaborating with Council staff on several efforts, including the Citizen Science Program on a second year of the South Atlantic Release Rodeo and Sea Grant milestones as part of the SAFMC Release Participant Recognition Program.
- Developing a final report that will summarize the qualitative information gathered throughout the fellowship by all four of the Sea Grant Fellows.

The Sea Grant Fellowship concludes on May 31, 2026 with the full "Extending Our Reach" grant concluding on July 31, 2026. Council staff met with the Gulf and South Atlantic state Sea Grant directors at the beginning of May to discuss future opportunities to collaboratively support a fellow in the South Atlantic region.

Website and Digital Communications Updates

- Continued planning and development of SAFMC 50th Anniversary products including a dedicated webpage, updated infographic, photo album, and series of feature articles to be distributed throughout the year.
- Planning and developing an Regional Fishery Management Councils Flickr photo gallery to commemorate MSA's 50th anniversary alongside communication representatives from each of the regional Councils.
- Communication and recruitment for, and attendance at the North Carolina Lines of Communication meetings (March 23rd-27th).
- Attendance, presentations, and facilitation of the Outreach and Communications Advisory Panel (May 5th-6th).
- Writing and distributing news products (South Atlantic Bite, Feature Articles, News Releases, and Announcements) and POC for regulations and fishermen questions.
- Website development and design:
 - Continued general website maintenance, posting meetings, pages, amendments, news, and more.
 - Continued development and distribution of news publications.
 - Continued public comment upkeep.
 - Continued social media management.
 - Continued FishRules updates and management including routine regulation review.
 - Continued design work to support Council initiatives.

Marine Resources Education Program (MREP) Southeast

The MREP Southeast Steering Committee met virtually on April 21st and 22nd. Discussion topics included a debrief from March 2026 workshops, curriculum additions and changes for the 2027 workshop, and the fall in-person steering committee meeting. Plan team meetings for the 2027 workshop will begin at the end of May with the next in-person steering committee meeting held November 16th and 17th in Charleston, South Carolina. *The next MREP Workshop will be held February 1st through February 5th in Charleston, South Carolina.*

South Atlantic Red Snapper Research Program

The South Atlantic Red Snapper Research Project (SARSRP) underwent a comprehensive review from January 13–15, 2026. The review panel included three subject matter experts from the Center for Independent Experts (CIE) and two representatives from the South Atlantic Scientific and Statistical Committee. Independent reports from each individual CIE reviewer as well as the consensus report from the Review Panel were provided to the project team and they integrated those recommendations into the final SARSRP report, which is available on the South Carolina Sea Grant [webpage](#). The Scientific and Statistical Committee reviewed the recommendations provided by the Review Panel and the response from the project team at their April 2026 meeting, and the summary of their discussion and recommendations are included in the April 2026 SSC final meeting report.

Presentations Request Tool

Council staff have drafted a Google form to improve planning for, and the delivery of presentations given during Council and other meetings. The form specifies the length of the presentation, requests an overview narrative (or abstract), whether specific input is sought (e.g., management procedures for an MSE), and details related to whether the presentation would be in-person or remote. Staff are conducting internal review and will edit the form accordingly to begin using it in the fall.

Resilient Fisheries Update

Most of the SAMFC's Resilient Fisheries projects have started and the final request for proposals closes on May 22, 2026. The ongoing projects are addressing several topics including essential fish habitat, wreckfish management, management process review, ecosystem information integration, and communities projects. Updates on the projects can be on [Resilient Fisheries Project](#) page.

Citizen Science Program

Spring has been a busy season for the Council's Citizen Science Program, with a range of Program and project activities underway and highlighted below.

The Citizen Science Program hosted a Collaborative Science Meeting in Charleston, South Carolina, in May 2026 with representatives from the Skipper Science Partnership, the Alaskan Conservation Foundation, and the Commercial Fisheries Research Foundation. These organizations, in partnership with the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission, are developing a cross-regional collaborative proposal focused on creating scalable, fisherman-centered approaches for collecting fisheries, oceanographic, and biological data to support management and assessment.

SAFMC Release

- The Citizen Science Program hired a part-time contractor, Kate Chatman, to support the SAFMC Release project. Kate is a graduate student at the College of Charleston enrolled in the joint Master of Environmental and Sustainability Studies and Master of Public Administration Program. She joined the team in late March 2026.
- Data collection, recruitment, and retention efforts continue for the SAFMC Release project. Staff finalized the [SAFMC Release 2025 Data Summary](#) which is now available on the Program webpage.
- SAFMC Release outreach activities included:
 - Participating in SCDNR's Charter Guide Summit Series in March 2026, where staff delivered a short presentation on the SAFMC Release project in Georgetown, Charleston, and Bluffton, SC.
 - Collaborating with Coastal Scuba and Snapper Grouper AP member, Cameron Sebastian, on a SAFMC Release outreach event in Little River, SC in May 2026.
 - Sharing project updates and information through one-on-one communications with participants, monthly newsletters, and social media.
- Additional outreach collaborations with the BFP and Outreach team included:
 - Citizen Science and BFP staff visited 10 tackle shops/marinas across SC, GA, and northern FL in March 2026 to distribute SAFMC Release and BFP materials.
 - Citizen Science staff and the Sea Grant Reef Fish fellow collaborated on two seminars for Charleston-area high school students through the Lucy Beckham High School Fishing Club and the Academic Magnet Fishing Club, focused on best fishing practices and SAFMC Release.
 - Staff collaborated on a joint seminar at Haddrell's Point Tackle in Mt. Pleasant, SC in April 2026. Citizen Science and Outreach staff presented information on best fishing practices and SAFMC Release. Other speakers included Shimano, a local captain, a SAFMC Release participant, and SCDNR.
 - The second year of the Sea Grant [South Atlantic Release Rodeo](#) launched on May 1, 2026. Through this challenge, on May 1 – July 31, anglers can earn a chance to win Sea Grant giveaways by submitting information on their released shallow water grouper and Red Snapper to SAFMC Release.
- A SAFMC Release recruitment mailing was sent to 40,000 Georgia and South Carolina saltwater recreational license / permit holders (~20,000 per state) in April 2026. This mailing was planned and implemented in collaboration with SCDNR, GADNR, and NCDMF.
- Citizen science staff, in coordination with state partners, are developing a FY27 ACCSP grant proposal, 'Enhancing Recruitment & Retention for the SAFMC Release Citizen Science Project'.

FISHstory

- Staff continued processing newly archived photos for analysis.
- The NC State analytical team has continued advancing analysis of the Zooniverse dataset to develop relative abundance indices for key species. The team is also working to develop a manuscript describing the analytical methodology developed.

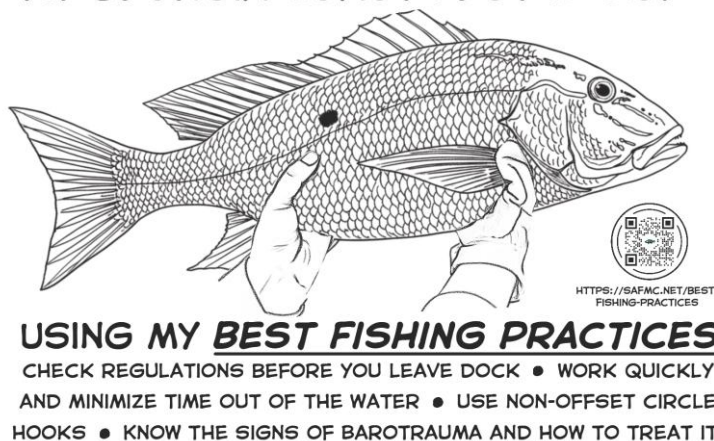
SMILE

- SMILE is transitioning from a single-laser to a dual-laser system and is evaluating the use of video in place of burst photography to simplify data collection methods for volunteer divers participating in the project.
- Substantial progress has been made in developing the AI workflow used to automate analysis of SMILE images and video data.
- Teams from REEF and Colorado State University presented findings from the SMILE Camera Survey Project to the Council's Social and Economic Panel during its April 2026 meeting.
- The team continues to pursue funding opportunities to support the long-term sustainability of the project. The REEF team has submitted proposals to a Mote Marine and a Google AI funding opportunity. Additionally, the SMILE team is developing a proposal for the FY26 Ruth D. Gates Coral Reef Fishery Management Grant RFP.

Additional Outreach Updates

- Council and Sea Grant staff attended Georgia Coast Fest on March 21st. The Council booth was focused on who the Council is, SAFMC Release, and Best Fishing Practices. Staff spoke to over 80 attendees on these topics. Sea Grant Fellow, Ryan McMullen, created an event specific coloring sheet for kids to take home, hang on their fridge, and always be reminded of using their best fishing practices (see below).

**I CAUGHT A _____
AT GEORGIA COAST FEST 2026!**



- Staff presented at a joint seminar at Haddrell's Point Tackle in Mt. Pleasant, SC. Other speakers included Shimano, a local captain, a SAFMC Release participant, and SCDNR. Staff shared information on descending devices and SAFMC Release.
- Staff are planning for ICAST in July. This includes an updated booth design and creation of an educational scavenger hunt for the FWC lead event, Donuts and Descending Devices.