

FINAL
SUMMARY REPORT
CITIZEN SCIENCE COMMITTEE
SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

Kitty Hawk, North Carolina
December 9, 2025

The Committee approved the December 2024 Citizen Science (CitSci) Committee meeting agenda and the transcript from the December 2025 meeting.

Citizen Science Research Priorities

Staff provided background information on the CitSci Research Priorities and gave a brief overview of the process outlined in the Citizen Science SOPPS to update these priorities. The Council reviewed and discussed the updated CitSci Research Priorities which incorporated input from the CitSci Projects and Operations Advisory Panels (AP).

The Committee supported adopting the updated citizen science research priorities as presented with the modifications described below.

- Make the following changes to the ‘**Age Sampling**’ priority
 - Remove Knobbed Porgy, Porgy complex, Lane Snapper, and Spiny Lobster (ossicles) from the Target Species
 - Add ‘age/growth’ to the Anticipated Outcomes
- Make the following changes to the ‘**Genetic Sampling**’ priority
 - Add ‘for-hire’ to target volunteers
- Make the following changes to the ‘**Fishery Oral Histories and Historic Personal Fishing Logbooks/Diaries**’
 - Add asterisk (*) to denote as a high priority
- Make the following changes to the ‘**Shifting Species and Rare Event Observations**’ and ‘**Rare or Data Limited Species Observations**’ priority
 - Add ‘unmanaged species in the Mid-Atlantic’ and ‘invasive species’ to the Target Species
 - Add ‘observations of invasive species’ and ‘inform essential fish habitat’ to the Anticipated Outcomes
- Make the following change to the ‘**Observations in Managed Areas**’ priority
 - Specify that projects developed under this priority likely need high coordination with NOAA Fisheries and could require exempted fishing permits.
- Make the following changes to the ‘**Shark & Marine Mammal Depredation**’
 - Add asterisk (*) to denote as a high priority
- Make the following change to the ‘**Habitat Characterization**’ priority

- Specify the location information under Data Needed should ‘concentrate on South Atlantic Essential Fish Habitat live bottom’

Additional key points from the Committee’s discussion are summarized below:

- The Committee emphasized the importance of sampling design when developing projects for several of the CitSci Research Priorities. Staff noted that Project Design Teams play a critical role in ensuring projects are designed appropriately.
- Members highlighted that projects requiring substantial involvement or collaboration across multiple organizations—such as ageing or genetics laboratories—will require early communication and coordination to understand partner capacity.
- The Committee discussed the potential benefits of “banking” biological samples, particularly fin clips, as epigenetic ageing methods continue to advance. However, members acknowledged that doing so would require resources.
- Members discussed opportunities to develop projects that address multiple priorities simultaneously (e.g., a project collecting both discard information and shark depredation observations similar to SAFMC Release, or one that collects discard information while also gathering fin clips for genetic sampling or future ageing work).
- NOAA representative noted there was alignment between several of the research priorities and the SEFSC’s interest in a cooperative research fleet and could be an opportunity for collaboration between the Agency and the CitSci Program.
- Members noted the value of gathering information that can provide greater context for South Atlantic fisheries (e.g., shifting baselines), even if said data may not be aimed at use in a stock assessment at this time.
- The Committee identified the following research priorities as areas of particular importance: *Discard Information*, *Genetic Sampling*, *Fishery Oral Histories and Historic Personal Fishing Logbooks/Diaries*, and *Shark & Marine Mammal Depredation*.
- Looking ahead, the Committee noted that developing a method for ranking the CitSci Research Priorities into high, medium, and low categories could potentially be helpful.

MOTION: ADOPT THE UPDATED CITIZEN SCIENCE RESEARCH PRIORITIES WITH MODIFICATIONS AS SUGGESTED.

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

Citizen Science Program Indicators

In 2020, the Council adopted the CitSci Program’s goals, objectives, and strategies. Since then, Council staff have used these to guide the overall Program’s direction and develop annual work plans. To help evaluate progress, the Program plans to review its activities under each goal, objective, and strategy every five years. The first review took place in fall 2024 and covered Program activities from 2019-2024.

In addition to this five-year review, staff are interested in identifying key indicators under each goal that can be monitored more regularly to help assess progress between the five-year reviews, highlight opportunities for improvement, and measure the Program’s ongoing impact.

Staff provided an overview of the 14 recommended indicators for regular monitoring, which were developed with input from the CitSci APs.

The Committee was supportive of the indicators as presented, noting they help monitor and assess the important parts of the Program. Members also observed that as the Program matures, there may be opportunities to narrow the list of indicators. Additionally, members noted that as the Program continues to grow it may be helpful to monitor trends in data over time.

Additional feedback suggested that monitoring volunteer retention (which staff are currently monitoring within individual projects) could be valuable. Members also suggested tracking whether CitSci project data are used in assessment and management, not just recommended or considered for use would be valuable.

Citizen Science Program Organizational Structure

Staff provided an overview of the CitSci Program's organizational structure as outlined in the SOPPS including brief descriptions of the roles of the CitSci Committee and the various CitSci Advisory Panels (AP).

The Program currently has two active Advisory Panels – the 'Citizen Science Operations' and 'Citizen Science Projects' APs, as well as a 'Citizen Science Pool' that can be used to create short term 'ad-hoc' work groups to address specified topics. A third AP, the 'Citizen Science Program' AP has not yet been established.

During their May 2025 webinar meeting, the CitSci Operations AP discussed whether there remains a need for the CitSci Program Advisory Panel. Members noted that, as the Program has evolved, the originally envisioned roles and responsibilities of this group have largely been absorbed by other CitSci or Council advisory bodies. Given that and limited staff capacity, the CitSci Operations AP recommended that the Council consider removing the CitSci Program Advisory Panel from the Citizen Science Program SOPPS.

The Council was supportive of this recommendation for the reasons outlined by the AP. Members noted that ASMFC/ACCSP held a seat on the unestablished CitSci Program AP. Due to the CitSci Program's ongoing partnership and collaboration with ACCSP, the Committee supported adding a seat for an ACCSP representative to the CitSci Operations AP. ASMFC indicated that they would be able to support travel for this representative to attend AP meetings.

MOTION: REMOVE THE 'CITIZEN SCIENCE PROGRAM ADVISORY PANEL' FROM THE CITIZEN SCIENCE PROGRAM'S STANDARD OPERATING POLICIES AND PROCEDURES (SOPPS).

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

MOTION: ADD AN AP SEAT FOR AN ACCSP REPRESENTATIVE TO THE CITIZEN SCIENCE OPERATIONS ADVISORY PANEL

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

MOTION: APPOINT JULIE SIMPSON (ACCSP) TO THE CITIZEN SCIENCE POOL AND TO THE ACCSP SEAT ON THE CITIZEN SCIENCE OPERATIONS AP.

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

Citizen Science Program Update

Staff prepared a recorded presentation highlighting recent Citizen Science program and project activities and encouraged Council members to review the presentation.

Other Business

No further business was brought before the Committee.