

SAFMC Coral Advisory Panel

May 2012 Meeting:

Summary of Approved Recommendations and Motions

Stephen M. Blair
Chair, Coral Advisory Panel

Ecosystem-Based Management Committee Session
South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (SAFMC) Meeting
June 11, 2012

SAFMC Coral AP May Meeting Topics

The Coral Advisory Panel (AP) met in Charleston on May 9 & 10, 2012. The main items for discussion were:

- *An update on the final version of Spiny Lobster Amendment 11, submitted for Secretarial Review in March 2012.*
- *DOE report relating to pre-project/proposal assessment procedures for proposed 'bottom-tending' activities within C-HAPCs*
- *Inclusion/exclusion of exotic coral species within the FMP*
- *Measures proposed for inclusion in Comprehensive Ecosystem-Based Amendment 3 (CE-BA 3) pertaining to expansion and boundary modifications of Coral Habitat Areas of Particular Concern (C-HAPCs).*
- *A number of informational presentations by AP members on specific projects, reports, and agency updates.*

As a result of the information presented, 5 recommendations and 4 motions were approved by the AP, and forwarded to the Ecosystem-based Committee, for Council consideration.

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Recommendations and Motions

SPINY LOBSTER - AMENDMENT 11. Measures were developed to protect species of *Acropora* coral. Recommended Actions were:

1. Established areas with known significant *Acropora* coral densities in SE Florida EEZ that would be closed to lobster fishing (closed to all fishing or just 'trap' fishing) – 60 closed areas defined; closed to trap fishing
2. Considered requiring marking of lobster trap lines to provide for identification of fishery-based equipment – “No Action” selected.

Recommendation 1 (Paraphrased).

Based on the knowledge of the spatial and temporal variability of the species of *Acropora*, the Coral AP recommends the Spiny Lobster AP consider a periodic review and update of closed, to allow 'release' of those areas that no longer support significant cover of *Acropora* species, and inclusion of any locations that are found to contain significant *Acropora* spp. colonies.

Recommendation 2.

The Coral AP draft, for Council approval and forwarding, a letter to the State of Florida requesting they identify and evaluate conservation measures similar to those identified in the Spiny Lobster Amendment 11, for implementation in State waters.

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Recommendations and Motions

Overview of Department Of Energy (DOE) Report: *“Protocols for Survey Methodology for Offshore Marine Hydrokinetic Energy Projects”*.

- The purpose of the project was to enhance environmental assessments and regulatory review processes in initial site assessments for bottom-tending activities proposed in the Atlantic Ocean offshore Southeast Florida.
- Report focused on assessment of selected BOEM ‘Lease Blocks’ within the ‘Stetson-Miami Terrace’ C-HAPC, that were identified as possible locations for conduct of pilot studies and projects, that would require bottom-tending equipment/facilities.
- A two-tiered approach to the assessment was employed:
 1. Geophysical surveys, with subsequent post-processing and data interpretation by geophysicists and marine biologists experienced & knowledgeable DSCE habitats.
 2. Video and photographic validation of benthic habitat types interpreted from the geophysical data, and determine correlation between geophysical data and verified habitat(s)

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Recommendations and Motions

Overview of Department Of Energy (DOE) Report: *“Protocols for Survey Methodology for Offshore Marine Hydrokinetic Energy Projects”*.

The report recommended 12 measures to avoid and/or minimize impact to hard-bottom and coral habitats. The AP approved 2 related recommendations:

Recommendation 3 (Paraphrased).

The Coral AP draft a policy for Council approval, regarding appropriate assessment protocols to be used in habitat assessments and impact statements conducted within C-HAPCs. The Policy will be based on the recommended protocols listed in the DOE Feb. 2012 report on survey protocols (Vinick et al., 2012); and include a tiered approach to which provides for increased informational needs associated with increased magnitude and complexity of the activity and habitat(s) found in the areas under investigation.

Recommendation 4 (Paraphrased).

Prior to May 24, Council forward a comment letter to BOEM, regarding the available EA for proposed activities with the Stetson-Miami Terrace HAPC, expressing that information available indicates that the proposed project related activities within the ‘Lease Blocks’, pose significant risk to deepwater coral and benthic community habitats.

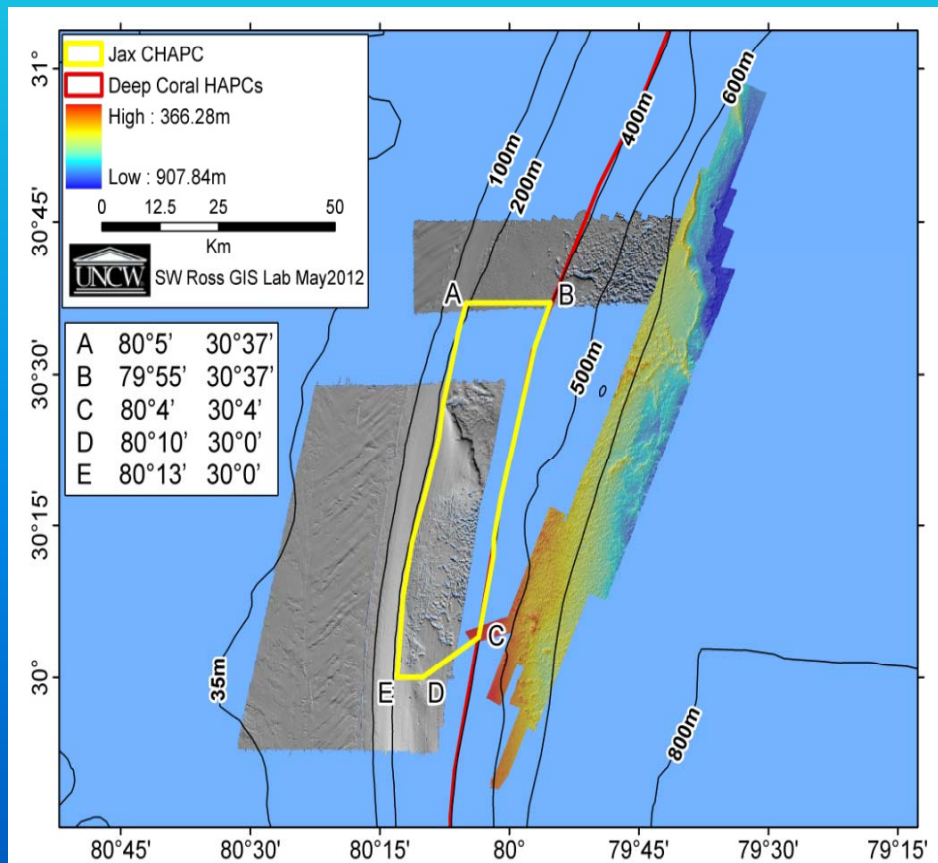
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Recommendations and Motions

The AP received an update on efforts toward mapping of DSCE habitats. It was shown that data gaps in mapping could be augmented through coordination with NOAA to target priority areas (i.e., “shallow” Jacksonville *Lophelia* sites) during NOAA cruises that have bottom mapping technologies. The AP approved 1 recommendation:

Recommendation 5 (Paraphrased).

The Coral AP draft a letter to NOAA, for the Council's consideration, supporting continued efforts to coordinate mapping activities and information exchange among agencies, to improve the understanding of the distribution and linkages of DSCE benthic communities and habitats within C-HAPCs



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Recommendations and Motions

Exotic Invasive Coral Species inclusion/exclusion from the FMP

- Minimally 2 species of exotic scleractinian hard coral (*Tubastraea coccinea*, *T. micanthrus*), have been identified within the SAFMC and/or Gulf Council regions.
- At least 1 species (*T. coccinea*) has shown fast and extensive expansion of cover and regional distribution (Shearer 2010).
 - The species pre-empts substrate from native coral recruitment, decreases coral diversity of invaded areas, and reduces habitat complexity.
 - It has become very abundant on artificial substrata in southeast Florida, and presently “... is the single, most abundant hard coral on artificial substrata in the Gulf of Mexico” (Sammarco et al., 2010).
- *T. micanthrus* presently shows a very limited distribution, but due to its similar characteristics, is anticipate to expand as did *T. coccinea*.
- Exclusion from the FMP would be required if control/eradication measures are to be considered

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Recommendations and Motions

The Council's "Policy for the protection of South Atlantic Ecosystems from Invasive Species":

- Identifies species of *Tubastraea* as a threat to the coral ecosystems in the SAFMC;
- States "*In instances where an invasive species belongs to a group of organisms included in the Fishery Management Unit (i.e., stony corals), the species would need to be excluded from the FMU via a plan amendment (or an existing framework).*" (SAFMC, 2010).



Based on the information and discussion, the AP approved:

- Motion 1.
The Coral AP deems the presence of *Tubastrea* in the South Atlantic region a threat to coral reef systems, and recommends that the species of the genus *Tubastraea* be removed from the Coral FMP; and that the states within the Council (South Atlantic region) modify existing rules as necessary to allow for the take of the Genus in waters of the state and EEZ. Take may be through a regulatory or non-regulatory process as deemed appropriate by the state.

Motion passed (9 Yes: 3 No)

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Recommendations and Motions

Comprehensive Ecosystem-Based Amendment 3 Review and Selection of Recommended Alternatives.

Review of proposed Alternatives for expansion/boundary modifications of C-HAPCs:

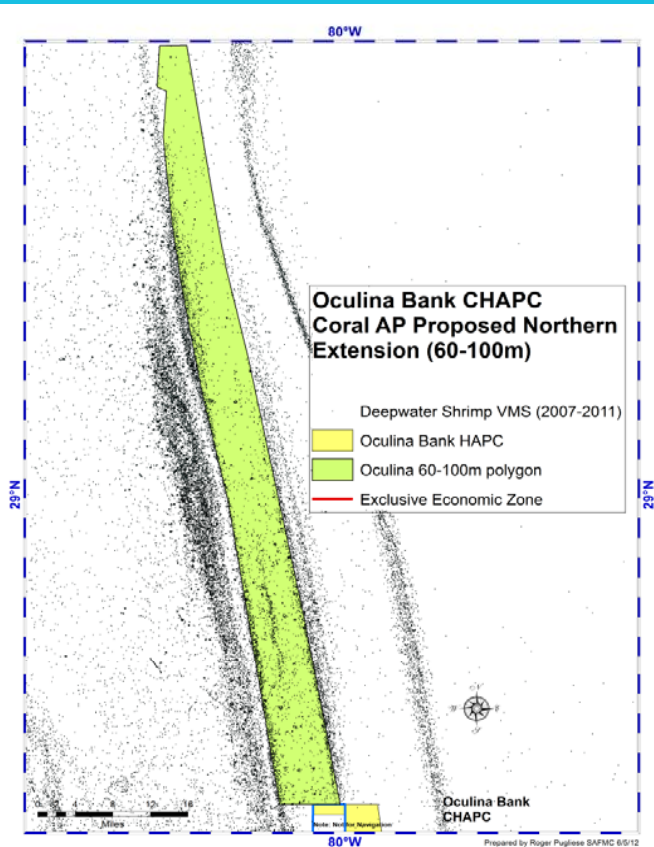
1. **Expansion of the Oculina HAPC (CEBA-3 *Decision Document: Action 1*)**
 - A. Northern expansion of Oculina HAPC (Alternative 2)
 - B. Western Extension of existing HAPC (Alternative 3)
2. **Extension of the Stetson-Miami Terrace HAPC off Jacksonville to incorporate identified *Lophelia* mounds and hard-bottom habitat. (CEBA-3 *Decision Document: Action 2*)**
3. **Expansion of the Cape Lookout HAPC to include identified DWC habitat (CEBA-3 *Decision Document: Action 3*)**

The reviews included consideration of Public Scoping comments, and alternatives proposed by the Deepwater Shrimp AP (where applicable).

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Recommendations and Motions

NORTHER EXTENSION OCULINA HAPC (Action 1-Alt 2). Bathymetric charts and mapping efforts completed since establishment of the Oculina HAPC have shown the existence of significant and extensive *Oculina* mounds north of the present Oculina HAPC boundaries. The Coral AP proposed an extension of the C-HAPC to protect those regions with *Oculina* mounds. Impacts, consistent with 'trawling' activities were evident along the western borders.



- The Coral AP proposed a region bounded on the east and west by the 60m and 100m isobath respectively.
- Based on input from Shrimp and Deepwater Shrimp APs, Council staff proposed 3 alternatives for consideration. The Alternatives used the same north/south boundaries but varied in the east/west boundaries. The additional Alternatives were:
 1. Area bounded by 70m to the east and 100m to the west
 2. Area bounded by 60m to the east and 90m to the west
 3. Area bounded by 70m to the east and 90m to the west

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Recommendations and Motions

Review of bathymetry and multibeam sonar imagery showed significant areas of *Oculina* mounds and DWC habitat existed between the 60-70m and 90-100m contours, and would be omitted using reduced boundaries.

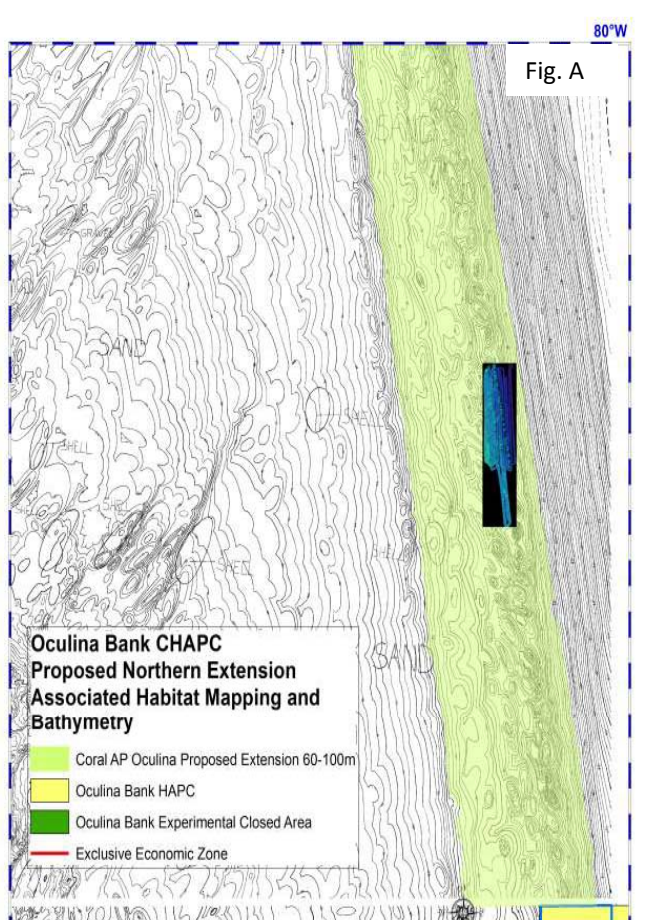


Figure A. Southern portion of proposed expansion area showing probable habitat east of 60m and between 90-100m contours

Figure B. 2011 multi-beam sonar off Daytona area. The multi-beam map shows over 100 individual, high-relief mounds (80m-100 m, with peaks to 60-70 m). Two ROV dives (thick black lines) verified *Oculina* coral mounds

Figure C. NOAA regional bathymetric contour chart of same site; black polygon is area of the multi-beam in Figure B. Red line= 100 m contour line.

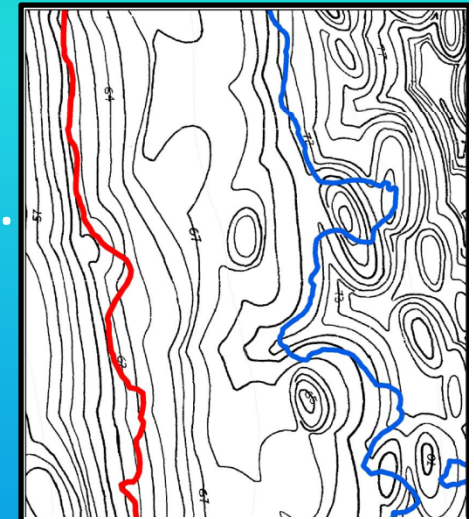


Fig. B: 60m (red) & 70m (blue) Contour (Reed & Farrington, 2010)

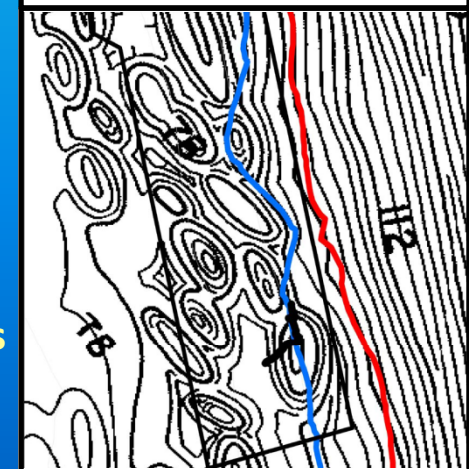
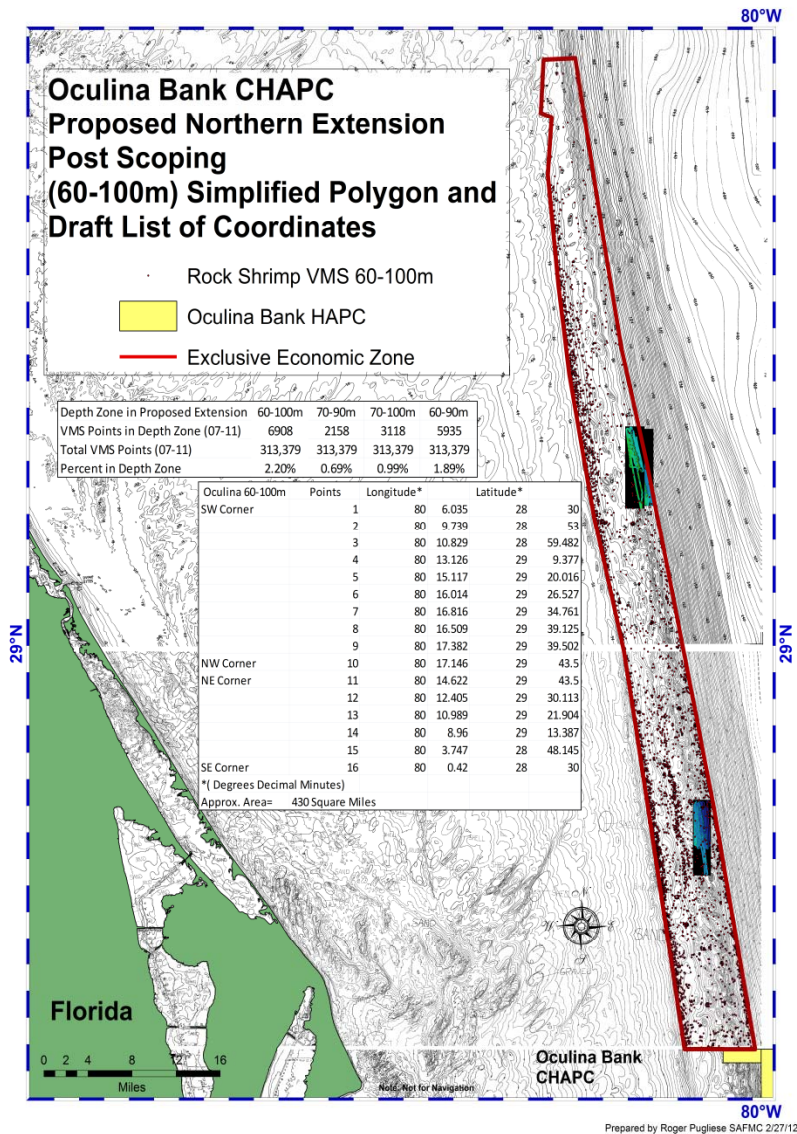


Fig. C: 90m (blue) & 1000m (red) Contour (Reed & Farrington, 2010)

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The Coral AP reviewed the Council's proposed alternatives for east/west boundary locations and, in consideration of known and mapped regions of *Oculina* mounds and DSCE habitats, determined that the originally proposed eastern and western boundaries provided the appropriate protection of documented resources, while minimizing impacts to fisheries. Any reduction of the east/west boundaries would place significant amounts of *Oculina* DSCE habitats at risk.

Motion 2.

Recommend Sub-Alternative 2a, as depicted in Figure 1 'Simplified Polygons and Draft Lists of Coordinates' (Attachment 6, CEBA-3 Decision Document, Figure 1) as the preferred Action for modification of the northern Boundary of the Oculina Coral HAPC. Approved unanimously.

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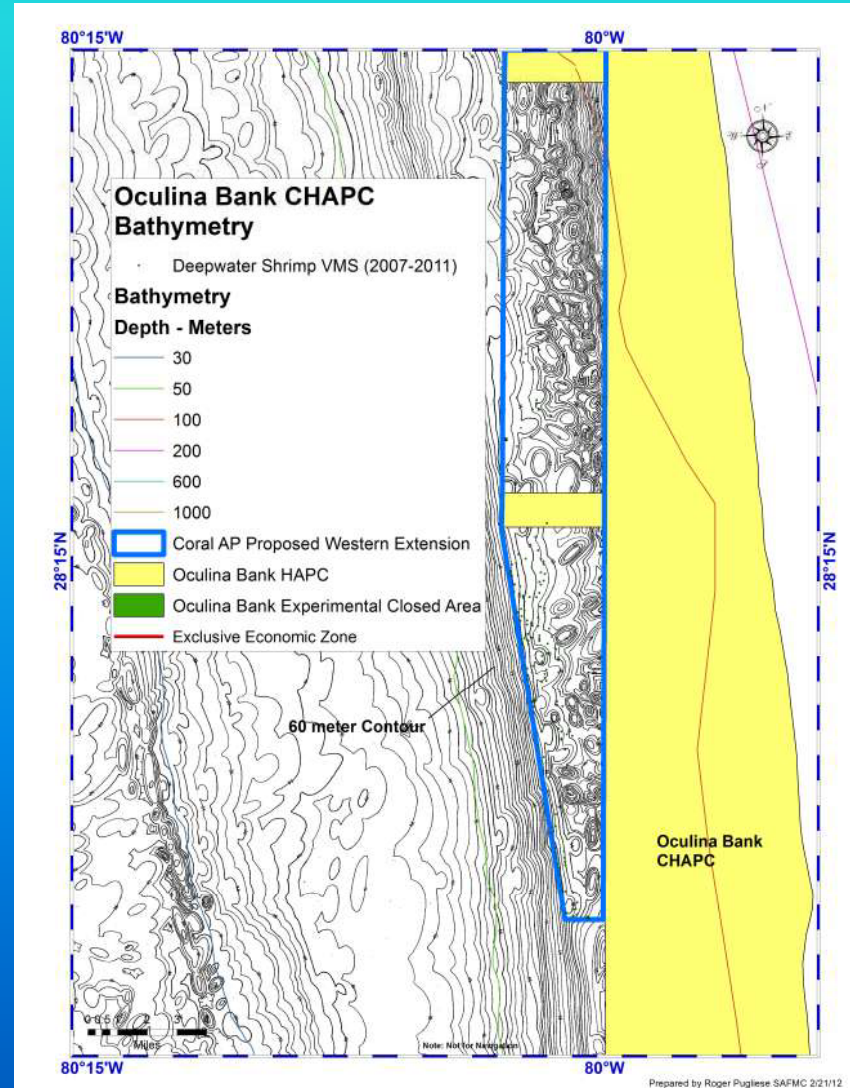
Recommendations and Motions

WESTERN BOUNDARY OF OCULINA HAPC (Action 1-Alt 3)

Amendment-4 of the Coral FMP (1998) established the extension of the Oculina Bank C-HAPC. Based on regional knowledge and experience in interpretation of bathymetric information, extensive areas of *Oculina* habitat are shown east of the existing western boarder of the C-HAPC. The C-AP's recommended alternative protects these fragile DSCE habitats.

Motion 3.

Recommend Alternative 3, as depicted in Figure 5 (in "CEBA-3 Decision Document", with draft list of coordinates) as the preferred action for modification of the western Boundary of the Oculina C-HAPC. Approved unanimously.



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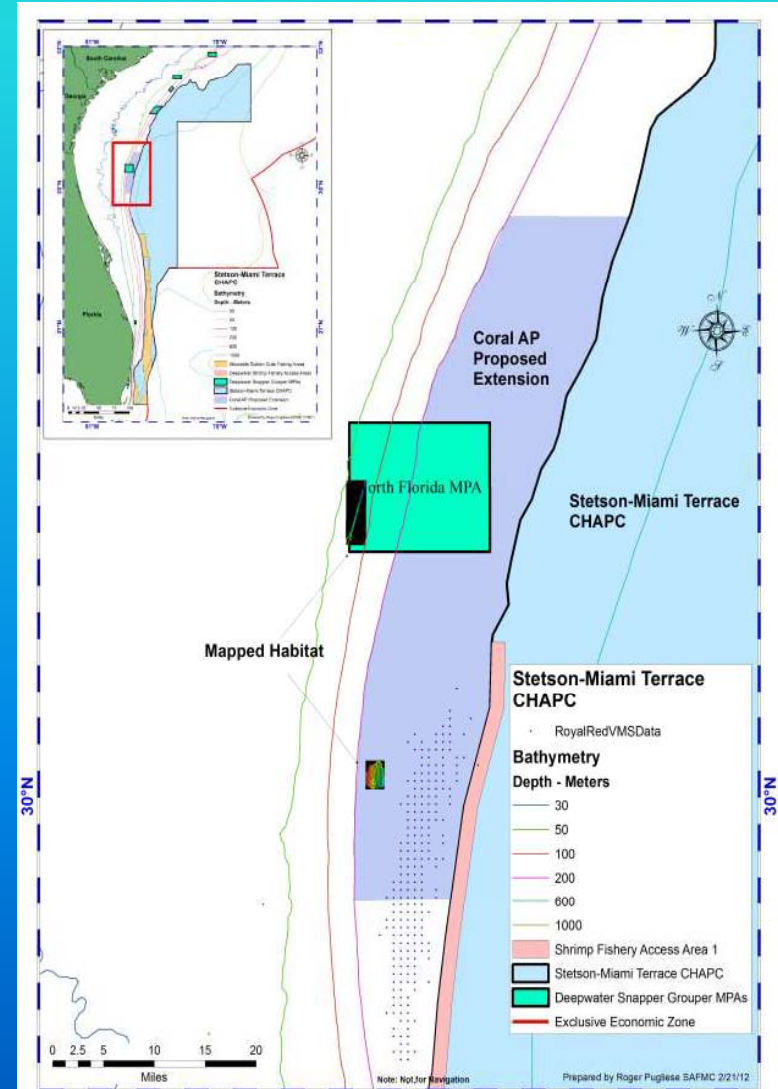
Recommendations and Motions

WESTERN BOUNDARY OF THE STETSON-MIAMI TERRACE C-HAPC (Action 2):

Recent multi-beam mapping has shown significant *Lophelia* and hard-bottom habitats west of the northern boundary of the existing CHAPC between 30°45.0' & 29°52.0'. The Coral AP originally proposed a western extension to the 200m isobath.

- The Deepwater Shrimp AP (DWS-AP) noted active fishing areas of the southern/southeastern portion of the proposed area.
- The DWS-AP proposed a modified 'extension' boundary that excluded known fishing areas

Based on the side-scan and multi-beam surveys the Coral AP modified their proposed expansion area to include mapped areas of deepwater coral and benthic habitat, and exclude areas where habitat has not been identified.

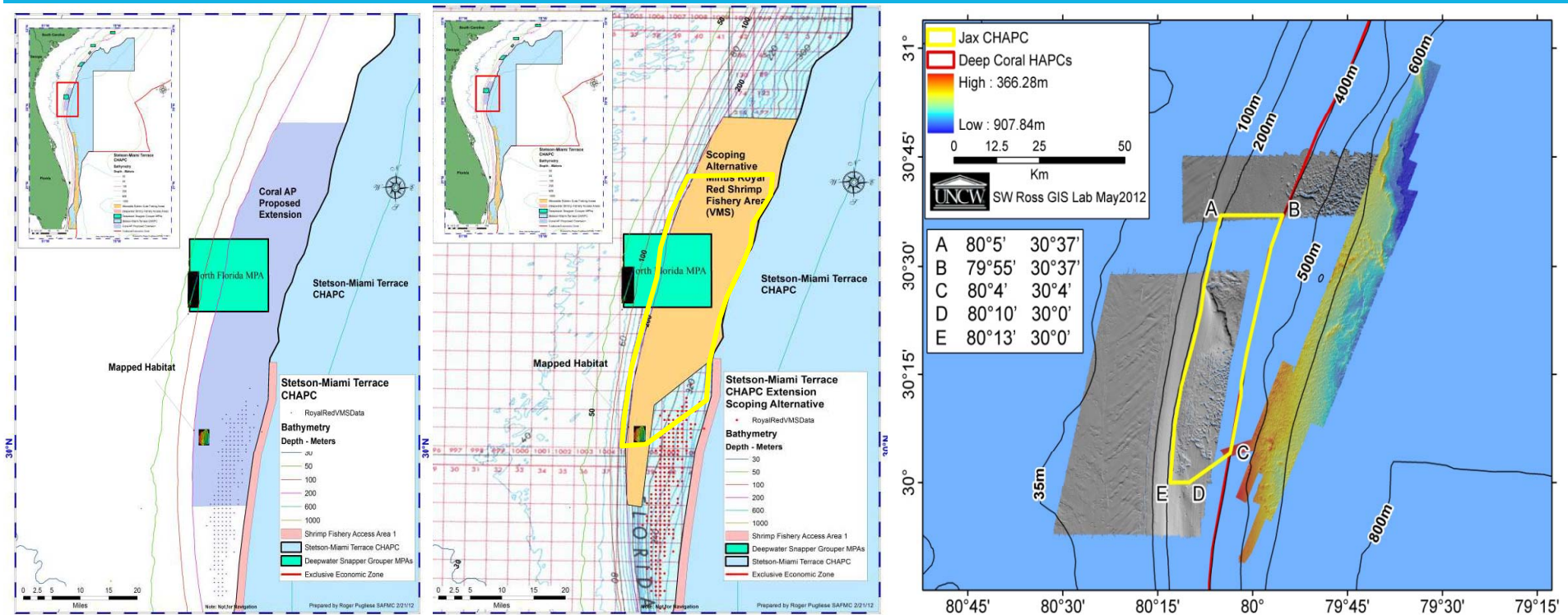


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Motion 4.

Recommend a modification of Alternative 2 with the northern boundary reduced to 30° 37.0' N latitude, and the southern limit modified to be bound by the following coordinates: 30° 0.0' N; 80° 13.0' W, then east to 30° 0.0' N; 80° 10.0' W, then northeasterly to 30° 4.0' N; 80° 4.0' W. (CEBA-3 Decision Document; Figure 9), These modifications are made to include known (mapped) benthic habitat, and exclude those areas where habitat has not been found. The western limit of the expanded zone remains as stated in Alternative 2 (the 200m contour). *Approved unanimously.*



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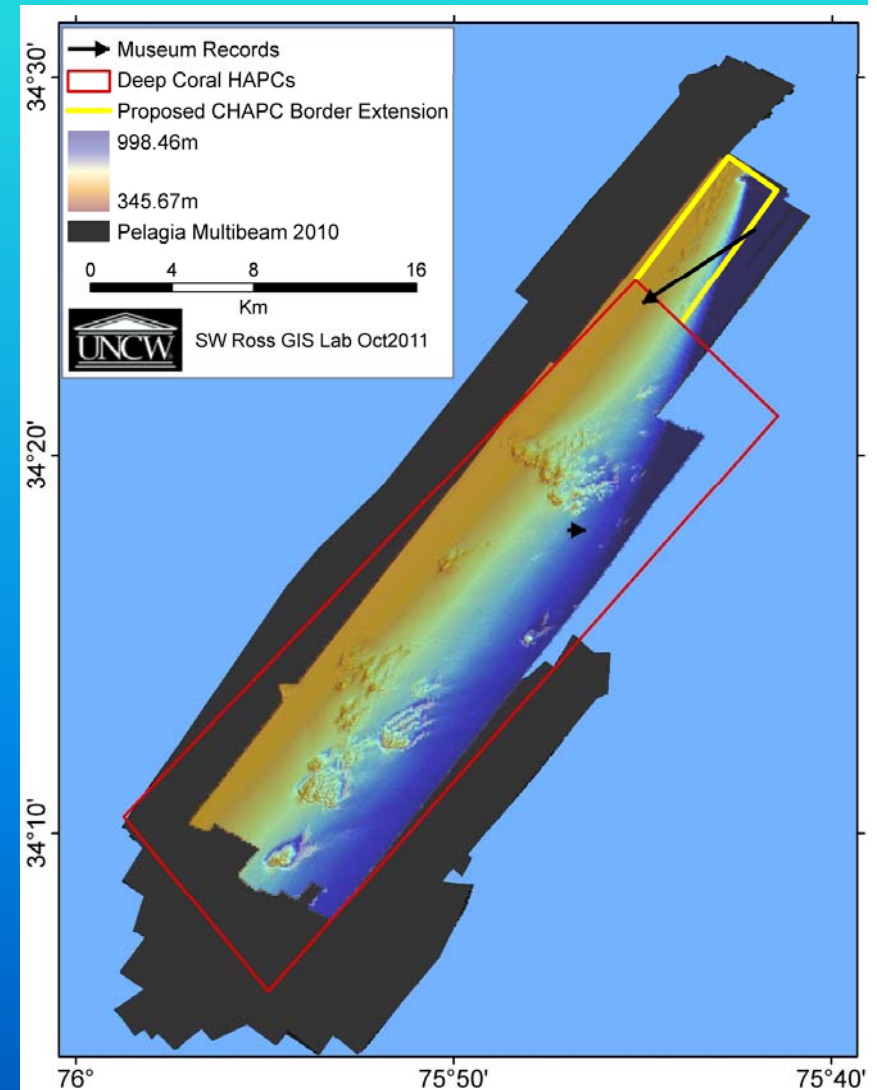
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CAPE LOOKOUT HAPC:

Recent multi-beam mapping showed significant *Lophelia* and hard-bottom habitats north of the northwestern boundary of the existing CHAPC. Based on the new information the AP supported expansion of the HAPC to include these areas of significant habitat. Alternative 2 (of Action 3) extends the northern boundary to encompass these DSCE habitats.

- Motion 5.

Recommend selection of Alternative 2 (with referenced coordinates) for Action 3 (*CEBA-3 Decision Document; Figure 10*) from the as the preferred action. *Approved unanimously.*



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Recommendations and Motions

SUMMARY (continued)*

Measures included in Comprehensive Ecosystem-Based Amendment 3 (CE-BA 3) pertaining to expansion and boundary modifications of Coral Habitat Areas of Particular Concern (C-HAPCs).

- Action 1: Alternative 2a: Northern Expansion of Oculina HAPC – ((60m – 100m) Simplified Polygon and Draft List of Coordinates; Figure 1)
- Action 1: Alternative 3: Western Extension of existing Oculina HAPC – (Simplified Polygon and Draft List of Coordinates; Figure 5)
- Action 2: Revised Alternative 2: Expand Stetson-Miami Terrace Coral HAPC to incorporate the 'Jacksonville *Lophelia* Site' (Simplified Polygon and List of Coordinates; Figure 9)
- Action 3: Alternative 2: Expand Cape Lookout Coral HAPC with coordinates provided, and as depicted in Figure 10.

* Figures referenced are found in the CEBA-3 Decision Document for Amendment 7 to the South Atlantic Coral FMP and Amendment 10 to the south Atlantic Shrimp FMP

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Recommendations and Motions

SUMMARY

For the Spiny Lobster Amendment 11, submitted for Secretarial Review in March 2012. Recommendations for:

- Suggest periodic (5-year) review of closure areas;
- Request for States to initiate similar conservation efforts in State waters

Regarding the pre-project/proposal assessment procedures for proposed 'bottom-tending' activities within C-HAPCs . Recommendations

- Draft a policy for environmental assessment protocols within C-HAPCs
- Prepare comment letter to BOEM regarding suitability of Lease Areas for bottom tending equipment (specifically anchoring of hydrokenetic test/pilot equipment

For Inclusion/exclusion of exotic coral species within the FMP

- Exclude species of the Genus *Tubastraea* from the FMP to allow for possible control/eradication measures

THANK YOU

QUESTIONS?

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