



Snapper Grouper • Coastal Migratory Pelagics • Dolphin Wahoo

# Updating Distributions & Essential Fish Habitat

## Resilient Fisheries Project Overview

### Description

Understanding and predicting environmentally driven shifts in species distribution is important for effective fisheries management. This project aims to improve our understanding of how ecosystem change affects where key fish species are found in the Southeastern United States. Using state-of-the-art spatiotemporal modeling techniques this project will explore indicators of environmental change in the spatial distribution and habitat associations for the fish and fisheries managed under the SAFMC's Snapper-Grouper, Coastal Migratory Pelagics and Dolphin Wahoo FMPs. The updated species distributions and Essential Fish Habitat descriptions will inform Council decision-making for more resilient fisheries management and governance. Project outcomes will also inform evaluations of existing governance structures, including cooperative and interjurisdictional governance approaches.

### Progress Updates

- The project team are continuing development of the single-species and joint-species models.
- The Project Oversight Team (OT) met in February and received an update on multispecies-modeling efforts, which include dolphinfish and wahoo, and an initial results from Snapper Grouper single-species modeling efforts.
- Following a period of revision and continued development, the models will be reviewed at the October 2026 SSC meeting.

### Project Team

*Contractors:* Jie Cao, NCSU (Co-PI); Janet Nye, UNC IMS (Co-PI), Seungyeon Jade Hong, UNC IMS

*Oversight Team:* Kathleen Howington, Myra Brouwer, Tori Kentner (MAFMC), Simen Kaalstad (ASMFC), Chip Collier, Lara Klibansky

### Project Timeline

2024

- ✓ **Oct.** - Request for proposals released.
- ✓ **Dec.** - Proposals reviewed and contractor selected.

2025

- ✓ **Jan.** - Project Oversight Team formed
- ✓ **Mar.** - Begin quarterly Project Oversight Team meetings with contractors
- ✓ **Apr.** - Begin data gathering, processing and model development

2026

- ✓ **Feb.** - Project Oversight Team review of initial models
- Oct.** - SSC review of spatiotemporal models

2027

- Feb.** - Presentation to Habitat and Ecosystem AP
- Mar.** - Presentation to Council; Submit final report

Implementation will begin with the Council reviewing and considering the approval of project outcomes and recommendations.



# Stakeholder-Driven AIM for Wreckfish Fishery

## Resilient Fisheries Project Overview

### Description

This project will apply an adaptive management technique called Adaptive Implementable Management (AIM) to guide a stakeholder-driven management development process for the South Atlantic wreckfish fishery. During this process contractors will work directly with managers and stakeholders to develop management recommendations more robust to future uncertainty. Stakeholder engagement is being prioritized throughout the AIM process via interviews and stakeholder workshops planned throughout the project period. Using decision-support tools, the contractors will work directly with stakeholders to explore and compare various management measures and harvest control rules. The resulting recommendations will be presented to the Council for consideration.

### Progress Updates

- The project is on track and progressing as expected. The Project Oversight Team (OT) will meet again in March 2026.
- The contractors gave the first of two presentations to the SSC during their Oct. meeting, updating and receiving feedback on identified data sources and modeling approaches. The SSC will review the completed assessment at their April 2026.
- AIM Stakeholder Workshop was held Nov. 12-14 and introduced stakeholders to the AIM process.
- Using the workshop outcomes, the contractors will continue development and customization of the AIM Harvest Control Rule Design Tool.

### Project Team

*Contractors:* Thomas Remington (PI); Dr. Josh Nowlis, (PI), Dr. Jeremy Collie, Dr. Mateja Nenadovic, and Brian Snouffer

*Oversight Team:* Mike Schmidtke, Christina Curtis, Allie Iberle, Judd Curtis, Nikolai Klibansky (NOAA), Chip Collier, Lara Klibansky

### Project Timeline

2024

- ✓ Dec - Request for proposals released.

2025

- ✓ Jan - Proposals reviewed and contractor selected
- ✓ Feb - Project Oversight Team formed
- ✓ Mar - Begin monthly Project Oversight Team meetings with contractors
- ✓ Oct - SSC review of draft Wreckfish Assessment
- ✓ Nov - AIM Workshop for Stakeholders

2026

- ✓ Jan - Jun - Customize AIM Harvest Control Rule Design Tool based on stakeholder feedback (**Underway**)
- Apr - SSC review of draft Wreckfish Assessment outcomes
- Jul - Stakeholder Management Design Workshops

2027

- Apr - SSC review of draft project report
- Jun - Present to Council; Submit final report
- Implementation begins with the Council reviewing and considering the approval of project outcomes and recommendations.



# SAFMC Fishery Management Process Review

## Resilient Fisheries Project Overview

### Description

This project aims to enhance the Council's responsiveness to changing fisheries and ecosystems by improving regulatory processes and governance structures. It will focus on three objectives: resolving regulatory bottlenecks, optimizing the Council's committee structure and coordination, and developing a more robust risk policy framework. The study includes internal assessments and comparisons with other Councils to ensure recommendations reflect best practices and legal obligations under the Magnuson-Stevens Act, NEPA, and APA. Case studies of recent amendments will help illustrate challenges and opportunities. Stakeholder engagement is central, involving a wide range of Council and industry participants. The outcomes will provide strategies for more adaptive management in evolving ecosystems and regulatory contexts. Project outcomes and recommendations will be coordinated with the Ecosystem Information Review project.

### Progress Updates

- The Project Oversight Team met in December and received updates on progress to date and report summaries.
- In December the Contractors submitted the Process mapping and Case Studies, which was reviewed by the OT.
- In February the contractors submitted a report on bottleneck analysis and NEPA efficiencies, along with revised versions of the Process mapping and Case studies. Updates also continue on the FMP Tracking Tool. All documents will be reviewed by the OT.

### Project Team

*Contractors:* Aaron Kornbluth, Purcie Bennett-Nickerson, and Steve Poland

*Oversight Team:* Myra Brouwer, John Hadley, Michelle Walsh (NOAA SERO), Michelle Bachman (NEFMC), Kiley Dancy (MAFMC), Verena Wang (Gulf Council), Chip Collier, Lara Klibansky

### Project Timeline

#### 2025

- ✓ **Jun** - Request for proposals released.
- ✓ **Jul/Aug** - Proposals reviewed and contractor selected
- ✓ **Aug** - Project Oversight Team formed; Begin Phase 1: Comprehensive Assessment and Analysis
- ✓ **Sept** - Begin quarterly Project Oversight Team meetings; Stakeholder Engagement Strategy and Interview Implementation Guide and Tool Submitted
- ✓ **Oct** - Dashboard to track FMP development
- ✓ **Dec** - Report on Process Mapping and Case Study;

#### 2026

- ✓ **Feb** - Report on Bottlenecks, Benchmarking, and NEPA Efficiency
- Jun** - Report on Committee Structures and Comparison
- Dec** - Report on Risk Policy Framework

#### 2027

- Jan** - Begin Phase 2: Synthesis and Recommendation Development
  - Mar** - Completion of Final Report and Presentation to Council
- Implementation begins with the Council reviewing and considering the approval of project outcomes and recommendations.



# Ecosystem Information Review and Strategy Development

## Resilient Fisheries Project Overview

### Description

This project aims to strengthen management outcomes by expanding the use of ecosystem information and collaborative research within the South Atlantic region. It will assess how all U.S. regional fisheries management councils utilize ecosystem data products and decision-support tools, provide comparative insights, and identify best practices and develop strategies for integration into SAFMC management processes. The project will also address practical implementation requirements, evaluate opportunities for cooperative data collection, and develop prototype ecosystem indicators tailored to regional needs. Project outcomes and recommendations will be presented in coordination with the Management Process Review.

### Progress Updates

- The Project Oversight Team met in December and received updates on progress to date and report summaries.
- The project contractor participated in the SAFMC Ecosystem Data Workshop in Jan./Feb. 2026, including a presentation of Ecosystem Information Use Across All Regional Fisheries Management Councils.
- A revised All Councils Ecosystem Data Products and Approaches was submitted in Jan.
- Next steps are initiation of data acquisition for the development of prototype ecosystem indicators, which will be presented, along with a draft report on pathways for integrating ecosystem indicators, to the SSC in April.

### Project Team

*Contractor:* Sarah Gaichas

*Oversight Team:* Myra Brouwer, John Hadley, Michelle Walsh (NOAA SERO), Michelle Bachman (NEFMC), Kiley Dancy (MAFMC), Verena Wang (Gulf Council), Chip Collier, Lara Klibansky

### Project Timeline

#### 2025

- ✓ **Jun** - Request for proposals released.
- ✓ **Jul/Aug** - Proposals reviewed and contractor selected
- ✓ **Aug** - Project Oversight Team formed. Begin Council document and literature review.
- ✓ **Sept** - Begin quarterly Project Oversight Team meetings; begin summary of Council approaches
- ✓ **Oct** - Interim Report on all Council data products and approaches to POT for feedback and revision

#### 2026

- ✓ **Jan** - Draft Report on all Council data products and approaches
- ✓ **Jan/Feb** - Participation in Ecosystem Data Gaps Workshop
- Apr** - Draft Report on Pathways for Integrating Ecosystem Information/ Prototype Ocean Indicators to SSC
- Jul** - Final Report completed and outcomes shared with Management Review Process project team
- Sept** - Presentation of all project results to Council

#### 2027

Implementation begins with the Council reviewing and considering the approval of project outcomes and recommendations.



# Communities Project Phase I: Place-Based Identification and Characterization of South Atlantic Fishing Communities

## Resilient Fisheries Project Overview

### Description

Phase I of the Communities Project is designed to build on the Council's longstanding history of engagement with fishing communities by strengthening and refining its understanding of who those communities are and how they are affected by management decisions. This phase focuses on the place-based identification and characterization of communities impacted by South Atlantic Fishery Management Council actions, using existing social, economic, and environmental data at a finer geographic scale than currently available. It examines communities' connections to Council-managed species and assesses vulnerabilities related to ecosystem change, such as sea level rise, storm impacts, and shifts in fish distribution. The resulting analysis, data products, and visual tools provide the Council with a clearer, more nuanced picture of fishing communities across the region, creating a strong evidence base to support more targeted outreach, communication, and management efforts in Phase II and beyond.

For more information please see the [Phase I RFP](#).

### Progress Updates

- The Phase I request for proposals was opened on Dec. 5, 2025 and closed on January 16, 2026.
- The proposal review and selection process is now underway and is expected to be complete by early March.

### Project Team

*Contractor:* TBD

*Oversight Team:* TBD

### Anticipated Timeline

2025

- ✓ **Dec-** Request for proposals released.

2026

- ✓ **Jan/Feb -** Proposals reviewed and contractor selected; Project Begins
- Mar -** Project Oversight Team to be formed and quarterly meetings begun

2027

- April -** Draft report presented to Social and Economic Panel
- June -** All reports and presentations completed.

Implementation of project outcomes begins.



# Communities Project Phase II: Stakeholder Outreach and Communication Assessment and Strategic Plan Development

## Resilient Fisheries Project Overview

### Description

Phase II of the Communities Project focuses on turning the community knowledge developed in Phase I into a practical, relationship-driven outreach and communication strategy for the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council. Building on identified fishing communities and their characteristics, this phase conducts a targeted stakeholder outreach and communication assessment to understand how communities prefer to receive information, engage with the Council, and contribute local knowledge. The work culminates in a strategic Outreach and Communication Plan and supporting tools—such as guidance materials, training, and an online communication hub—that help Council members and staff more consistently and effectively integrate community perspectives into management decisions. By emphasizing trust-building, clear communication, and actionable qualitative data, Phase II is designed to strengthen engagement with underrepresented stakeholders and support adaptive, community-informed fisheries management across the South Atlantic region.

For more information please see the [Phase II RFP](#).

### Progress Updates

- The Phase II request for proposals was opened on Dec. 5, 2025 and closed on January 16, 2026.
- The proposal review and selection process is now underway and is expected to be complete by early March.

### Project Team

*Contractor:* TBD

*Oversight Team:* TBD

### Anticipated Timeline

**2025**



**Dec-** Request for proposals released.

**2026**



**Jan/Feb -** Proposals reviewed and contractor selected; Project Begins

**Mar -** Project Oversight Team to be formed and quarterly meetings begun

**Oct -** Draft Stakeholder Assessment report presented to Social and Economic Panel

**2027**



**April -** Draft Outreach and Communication Plan presented to Outreach and Communication Advisory Panel

**Sept -** All final reports presented to Council

Implementation of project outcomes begins.