



THE SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

Habitat and Ecosystem Advisory Panel January 2026

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Chair
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Integration of Revised Food Webs and Connectivity Policy Information into EFH designations

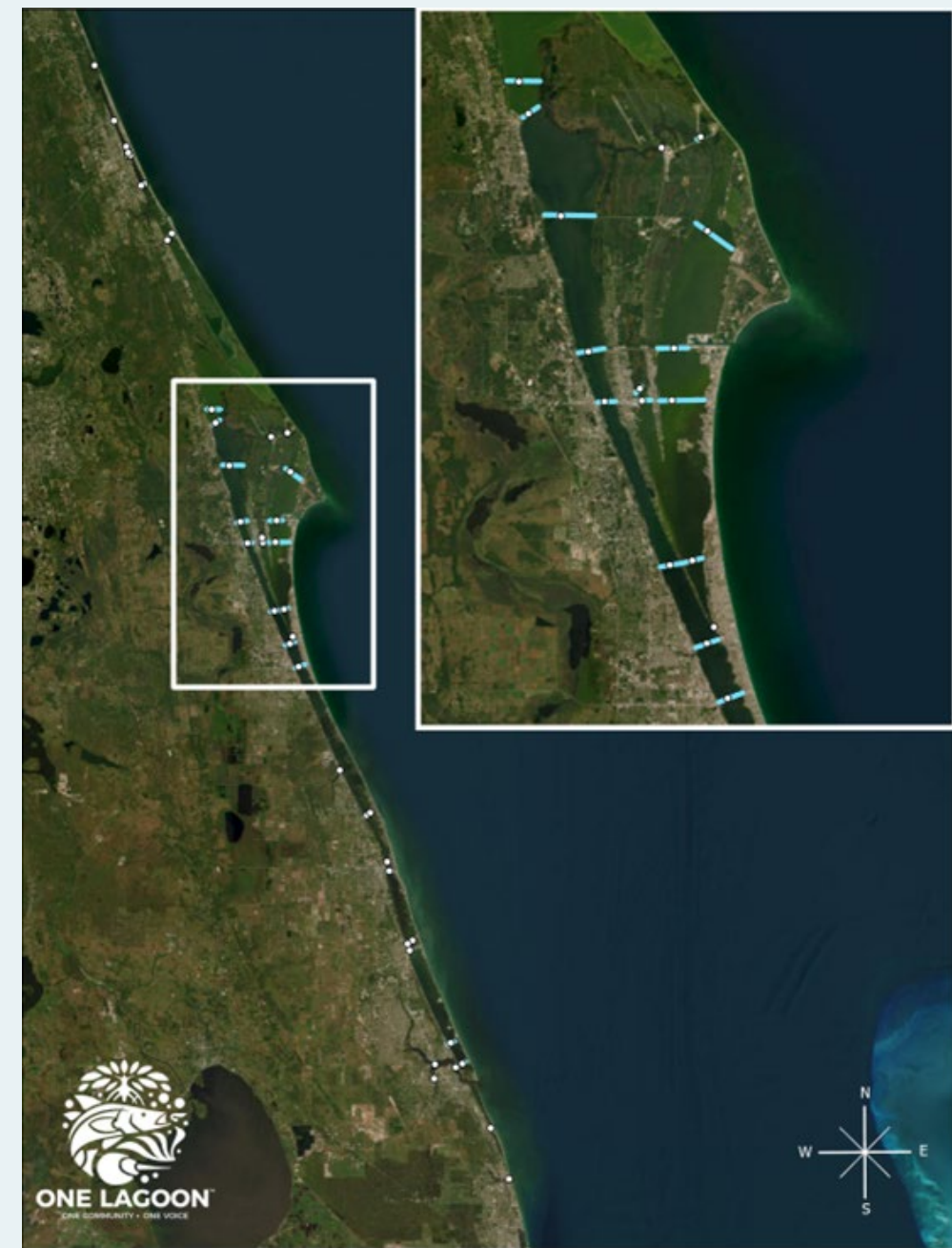
- The working group met in the fall of 2025.
 - The working group encountered an issue deciding how to separate prey data that are utilized in the Ecopath/Ecosim model.
 - Lauren Gentry (FLFWC staff) is working on the issue and will report back to staff once she finishes her analysis.
- Additionally, the most recent Food Web Policy and Climate Policy don't integrate the updates included in the Fisheries Ecosystem Plan (FEP) II document.
 - The Climate policy was updated on the website since no alternate versions exist
- AP Action: The AP approved that the food web working group meet and integrate the 2018 Food web policy into the 2025 version.
- A subgroup will work on a plan for the prey habitat information, and then the whole working group will meet to work through the test species approved by the Council in September 2025.

Revisions to the “Alterations to Riverine, Estuarine and Nearshore Flows” policy to address threats to the Indian River Lagoon

- The working group met six times in 2025
- Edits and additions are complete
- The updated policy will be sent to water quality state representatives to get feedback before finishing specific policies

AP Action:

- The group recommended subject matter experts to forward the policy for review
- Staff will send out the policy for external review in Spring 2026
- The policy should be complete in Summer 2026



45 bridge - causeway or bridge corridors
Most of the earthen causeways in Brevard county

Space Industry Impacts on Habitat

- Staff reviewed the information gathered from space regulations, EIS's, EA's, peer-reviewed documents, and many other sources that were recommended by the HEAP
- The HEAP is not against space exploration, KSC or space activities
- The HEAP wants to make sure that unintentional negative impacts to EFH are mitigated
- Current regulations are inadequate
- The AP recommended additional sources of information
- The AP will decide what to recommend to the Council regarding Space Program habitat impacts during the Summer 2026 meeting

SAFMC Citizen Science program updates

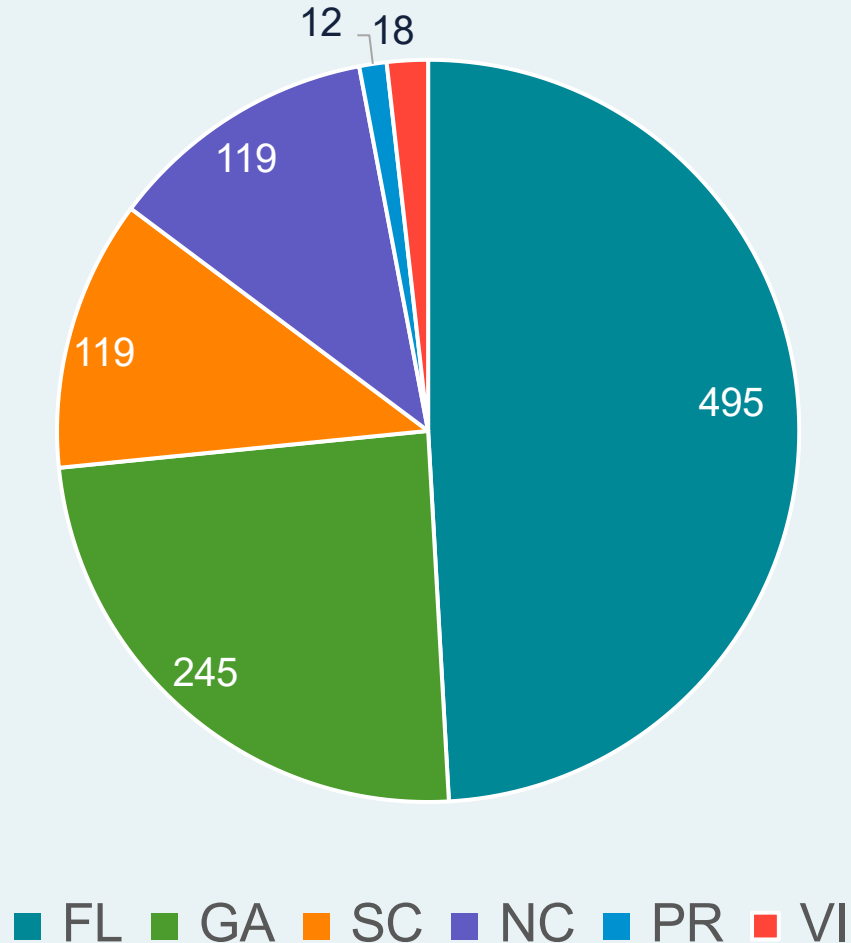
- Julia Byrd, Council staff, provided an update on SAFMC Citizen Science Program activities and advisory groups
- AP Discussion: The AP thinks this program is awesome and recommended some additional funding sources, also an additional photo source for staff to research
- AP Action: Kevin Spanik volunteered for the Citizen Science AP



Review of Upcoming projects that require EFH consultations



NMFS Consultations Received By State, FY 2025



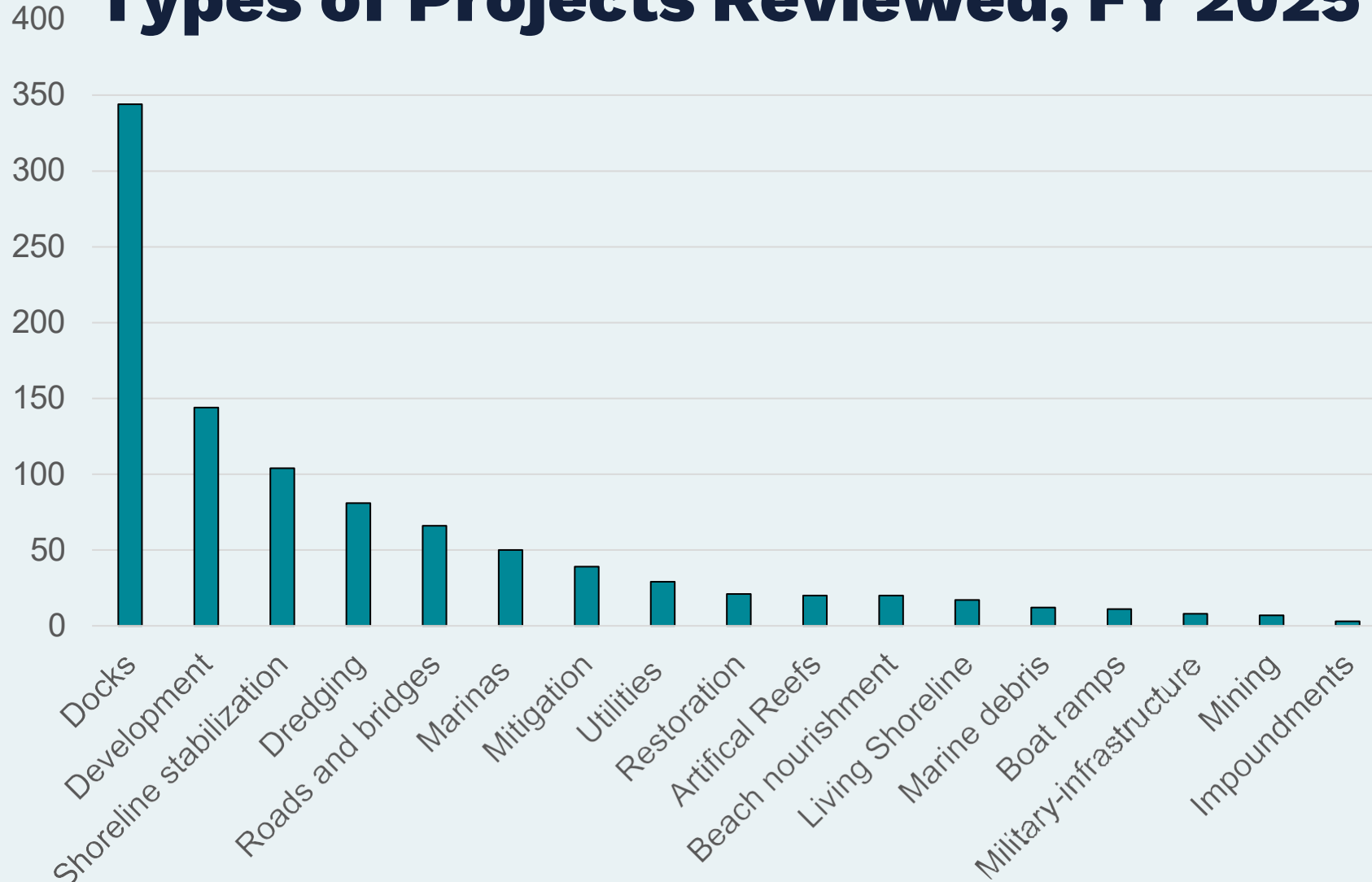
South Atlantic Region FY 2022- 2025

FY	Total
2022	832
2023	960
2024	849
2025	1010

Review of Upcoming projects that require EFH consultations



Types of Projects Reviewed, FY 2025



Spawning Special Management Zones

Working Group Report



- The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council established five Spawning Special Management Zones (SSMZs) in 2017, three that have a sunset provision
- To evaluate the SSMZs and other protected areas, the Council established the System Management Plan (SMP) Workgroup and Council staff developed a questionnaire for the Habitat and Ecosystem Advisory Panel (HEAP)
- Staff presented a summary of SSMZs and the findings from the questionnaire
- AP Action: The HEAP recommends that the Council retain all SSMZs management actions which would extend the current closures beyond the sunset date of 2027
- The AP also recommends improved monitoring, enforcement, and outreach commitments



Resilient Fisheries Projects

- Lara Klubansky gave a summary of the Council's resilient fishery projects
- The AP is excited about integrating :
 - Ecosystem indicators into the request for an integrated ecosystem assessment
 - Updated spatial distributions and habitat associations into their EFH definitions

Annual Habitat Report

The report is
in your briefing
book.



Communication Strategy



- Staff reviewed issues with a draft FAQ list, acronyms, and graphics
- The HEAP recommended additional acronyms and questions to be added to the list
- This draft FAQ list will go to the Council's Outreach and Communication staff
- Once developed, the Outreach and Communications Advisory Panel will have an opportunity to review





Meeting dates and methods

- The AP approved the next meeting as an in-person meeting to be held the week of June 22 or 29, 2026, in Charleston.
- The AP is planning a Habitat informational webinar series.
 - Approved by the council for exploration in September 2025
 - The first subject will be the Port Everglades Deepening project after the BiOP is released, Spring 2026
 - More information will be shared as available

Workplan

x	Future to be decided at the meeting
x	
x	

	Activity	Notes	Summer 2026	Winter 2027	Summer 2027	Winter 2028
Reoccurring Habitat AP ACTIVITIES	Communication strategy development	Currently developing FAQs	x	x	x	x
	Workplan update		x	x	x	x
	Annual report			x		x
	Citizen science updates		x		x	
	EFH Consultations updates	Anne Deaton		x		x
Council and AP requests	Space program impact on habitat		X			
	Revise the Flow policy		x			
	Deepsea mining - university of hawaii presentation	Brendan contact	x			
	Resilient Fisheries	Lara Klibansky (as needed)	x	x	x	x
	Expand Deepwater CHAPCs			x		
	Integrated Ecosystem Assessment - goals and objectives	Requesting presentation from Gulf and Mid	x			
Projects with Potentially high habitat impact	Offshore energy and development updates	BOEM	X			
	Manomet - thin layer placement and beneficial use: identifying locations		x			
	Midatlantic IRA EFH Project		x			
	Subsea transmission cables - could be habitat seminar	Sea Risk Solution	x			
EFH 5 Year Review (complete December 2029)	Identify Higher abundance locations and (improving EFH tier structure)	Work Starting fall 2025	x	x	x	x
	Implement 2024 EFH Recommendations (food web working group)	Work Starting Jan 2025	x	x	x	x
	additional life stage information for EFH clarification in each FMP	Work Starting Fall 2025	x	x	x	x
ITEMS PER MEETING:			15	9	7	8

An underwater photograph of a coral reef. In the foreground, a large, mottled brown and green fish is swimming towards the right. The reef is covered in various types of coral, including large, pinkish, porous structures and smaller, more colorful corals. The water is clear and blue, with some light filtering through from above. The text "Thank you" is overlaid in the center of the image.

Thank you