

SAFMC Staff Report

September 2026

Outreach Updates

- The Outreach Coordinator (OC) developed a scavenger hunt for the Donuts and Descending Devices event, hosted by FWC and various partners. The voluntary activity encouraged attendees to visit the 10 Conservation Corner booths and either find an educational material or complete an activity at each booth. SAFMC's scavenger hunt item was the *Create Your Own Descending Device* brochure. Many attendees were unaware that descending devices could be created using readily available materials, providing numerous opportunities for staff to share information and educate about descending devices.
- The OC continues to participate in the Descending Device Core Team. The team has begun planning for next year's ICAST event, which will feature a different theme.
- The OC developed two new educational materials to help stakeholders better understand and participate in public comment sessions. The *What to Expect at Public Comment* document explains how public comment sessions operate, while the *Preparing for Public Comment* document provides tips for clearly sharing perspectives during comment sessions. These will be available at public comment sessions, including Council meetings.
- Staff continues to plan for early 2027 outreach events.
- The OC and Citizen Science Project Coordinator visited the Piedmont Sportfishing Club in Greensboro, NC and presented to approximately 40 members on fisheries management 101, best fishing practices, and SAFMC Release. Club members asked questions about the Council process and use of fisheries data and expressed strong interest in descending devices and SAFMC Release.
- Staff attended the South Carolina Aquarium's Good Catch Partner Appreciation Night and connected with industry representatives and other conservation partners.



Sea Grant Reef Fish Extension Fellowship

The Sea Grant Fellowship concluded on May 31, 2026 with the full “Extending Our Reach” grant concluding on July 31, 2026. The South Atlantic Sea Grant programs are continuing the Sea Grant Fellowship for an additional three years in collaboration with the Council. The Outreach Coordinator (OC) will supervise the fellow, who is expected to be hired by the end of the year.

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 being distributed throughout the year:
 - [The SAFMC Citizen Science Program: Powered by People](#)
 - [Bringing Ecosystem Information Into the Decision-Making Process](#)
- Writing and distributing news products (South Atlantic Bite, Feature Articles, News Releases, and Announcements) and POC for regulations and fishermen questions.
- Working with website developers to improve amendment page functionality, search feature, and potential calendar/event updates.
- Participation in June 2026 Caribbean Council Outreach and Education Advisory Panel in San Juan, Puerto Rico.
- Attendance and outreach at ICAST 2026.
- 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.*

Presentations Request Form

After further discussion regarding the usefulness of a presentations request form, Council staff decided it could create additional burden to ensure the form would be applicable to different types of meetings (e.g., Council, SSC, AP). Due to the differences in types of presentations

requested and the timeline for submitting, different forms would likely be needed. Therefore, staff decided not to further pursue this.

Citizen Science Program

The Council's Citizen Science Program has had a busy summer! Key Program and project activities are highlighted below.

The [Citizen Science Program's 2025 Annual Report](#), highlighting key activities and achievements from the year, was completed and is available on the Program webpage.

The Citizen Science team worked with outreach staff to develop a Citizen Science Program feature article, [the SAFMC Citizen Science Program: Powered by People](#), as part of the Council's communication efforts for the 50th Anniversary of the MSA.

The Citizen Science Program in partnership with the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission, the Commercial Fisheries Research Foundation, the Skipper Science Partnership, and the Alaskan Conservation Foundation have continued development of a cross-regional collaborative science proposal. The 'Scaling for Success' proposal aims to build scalable, fishermen-centered approaches for collecting fisheries and oceanographic data that are timely, accessible, and inform management.

Additionally, Citizen Science staff will be presenting on the SAFMC Release project and presenting and participating in a panel focused on integrating collaborative science research into assessments at the annual American Fisheries Society meeting in early September 2026.

SAFMC Release

- Data collection, recruitment, and retention efforts continue for the SAFMC Release project.
- An additional year of SAFMC Release length data (2025) was provided to the SEDAR 90 (South Atlantic Red Snapper) data compilers and analysts.
- SAFMC Release outreach activities included monthly newsletters, social media posts, and one on one communications with participants.
- SAFMC Release outreach done in collaboration with the BFP and Outreach team included:
 - The second year of the Sea Grant [South Atlantic Release Rodeo](#) wrapped up at the end of July 2026. Running from May 1 to July 31, this challenge gave fishermen a chance to win Sea Grant giveaways by submitting information on their released shallow water grouper and Red Snapper to SAFMC Release. A huge thanks to Sea Grant for collaborating on this initiative for a second year!
 - Citizen Science and outreach staff helped plan and man a booth focused on BFP, SAFMC Release, and the Council at ICAST 2026.
 - Citizen Science and outreach staff did a seminar with the Piedmont Fishing Club in Greensboro, NC focused on the Council, BFP, and SAFMC Release in August 2026.
- Citizen science staff, in coordination with state partners, submitted a FY27 ACCSP grant proposal, 'Enhancing Recruitment & Retention for the SAFMC Release Citizen Science

Project'. The proposal will be reviewed at the upcoming ACCSP Operations and Advisors meeting in late September 2026.

FISHstory

- Staff continue to accept new photos for FISHstory analysis and are working to process newly archived photos for analysis.
- The NC State analytical team continues to advance analysis of the Zooniverse dataset to has developed preliminary indices of abundance for Red Snapper and King Mackerel. The team has also continued development of a manuscript describing the analytical methodology developed.
- The Citizen Science Program and NC State were invited to present on FISHstory as part of NOAA Library's citizen science seminar series on August 12. A [recording of the seminar](#) is now available on NOAA Library's You Tube page.
- The FISHstory team is developing outreach materials to share and highlight project findings to date.

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 continues to be made in developing the AI workflow used to automate analysis of SMILE images and video data.
- The SMILE team, led by REEF, submitted a proposal for the FY26 Ruth D. Gates Coral Reef Fishery Management Grant. The proposal will continue and advance the SMILE project in the South Atlantic and includes expansion into the Gulf.