

FINAL
SUMMARY REPORT
HABITAT AND ECOSYSTEM COMMITTEE

Charleston, South Carolina
September 12, 2023

The Committee approved transcripts from the June 2023 meeting and agenda.

SAFMC Habitat Blueprint

Council staff highlighted the workgroup activities and reviewed the Draft SAFMC Habitat Blueprint, the Habitat Advisory Panel Job Description, and the Blueprint workplan. There was a question regarding Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institute and Florida Atlantic University as private institutions serving on the AP and it was clarified they serve as a NOAA Research Institute and agency seat having been partnering with the Council providing technology and research supporting deep water coral and managed species characterization. There was a question regarding including the Army Corps of Engineers on the AP and it was noted that this had been considered over the years, but it was concluded that action may complicate discussions when Habitat Conservation Division is working directly with Corps on EFH comments and would complicate having them at the table to get consensus recommendations on policies. Council Members addressed Lake Okeechobee discharges impacting habitats for fisheries, artificial reef loss, and supported the Council requesting research on the impacts to those habitats.

DIRECTION TO STAFF: ADD APPROVAL OF WORKPLAN FOR HEAP TO DECEMBER COUNCIL AGENDA. SUGGESTION TO MAKE WORKPLAN INTO A SPREADSHEET. ADD DISCUSSION OF LAKE OKEECHOBEE DISCHARGES AND LOSS OF ARTIFICIAL REEFS TO WORKPLAN FOR HEAP.

The following motions were approved:

MOTION 1: APPROVE THE SAFMC HABITAT BLUEPRINT
APPROVED BY COMMITTEE
APPROVED BY COUNCIL

MOTION 2: APPROVE THE JOB DESCRIPTION AS WRITTEN.
APPROVED BY COMMITTEE
APPROVED BY COUNCIL

Habitat and Ecosystem Advisory Panel Report

Stacie Crowe, SCDNR (Acting AP Chair) reviewed the May 2023 Habitat and Ecosystem Advisory Panel Report.

The following motions were approved:

MOTION 3: APPROVE THE REVISED 2023 BEACH RENOURISHMENT AND LARGE-SCALE OCEAN ENGINEERING POLICY STATEMENT
APPROVED BY COMMITTEE
APPROVED BY COUNCIL

Coral Management

Dr. Jeff Buckel, SSC Chair provided members a summary of the SSC review of the [Deep Sea Coral Modeling Product](#). SSC deemed the model adequate to inform management and consistent with BSIA. It was noted that this modeling product can both provide guidance for future mapping of deepwater coral ecosystems. Additionally, when combined with the recent years extensive mapping and characterization, it would provide a baseline for consideration of a boundary extension of CHAPC to encompass these newly discovered deep water coral ecosystems primarily on the Blake Plateau.

Agenda Items for Habitat Protection and Ecosystem Based Management Advisory Panel Fall Meeting

Council staff reviewed a draft list of potential agenda items noted below to be covered during the fall Habitat and Ecosystem AP meeting:

List of Agenda Items for Fall Habitat and Ecosystem AP (November 1-3, 2023)

- NOAA Fisheries HCD EFH Consultation Update
- NOAA Fisheries EFH 5 Year Review (Subcommittees Reports)
- Update: SECAS and Conservation Blueprint
- US Navy Atlantic Fleet Training and Testing EIS
- Offshore Wind Activities in South Atlantic Region
 - Update on BOEM Research and Energy Development Activities
- EFH Policy Statement on Energy
- SAFMC Habitat Blueprint
 - Review the Habitat Blueprint and Input on the Blueprint Workplan
 - Develop a plan to prepare the initial Habitat Annual Report at the Spring 2024 meeting
 - Policy considerations and priorities (e.g., flow and artificial reef)
- Update on the South Atlantic Salt Marsh Initiative
- Space Operations off Florida

MOTION 4: APPROVE LIST OF AGENDA ITEMS FOR NOVEMBER 2023 HABITAT AND ECOSYSTEM AP MEETING

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

Other Business

Note: Council staff drafts the timing and task motion based on Committee action. If points require clarification, they will be added to the draft motion. The Committee should review this wording carefully to be sure it accurately reflects their intent prior to making the motion.

Timing and Task(s)

MOTION 5: ADOPT THE FOLLOWING TIMING AND TASKS:

1. Habitat and Ecosystem AP fall meeting planning incorporating approved agenda items.
2. Confirm and coordinate with presenters for the fall AP meeting.
3. Prepare Habitat Blueprint Workplan for review in December 2023
4. Add discussion of Lake Okeechobee discharges to workplan for HEAP
 - a. Intent is to focus the discussion on impacts to Oculina reef off Florida and impacts to the deepwater shrimp fishery

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

