SAFMC Habitat Program Goals and Objectives

Strawman

Purpose

***To support the identification, monitoring, and protection of the habitats required by the species managed by the South Atlantic Council to preserve their ecosystem function and ensure their long-term sustainable use*.**

Goals and Objectives

Goal 1. Comply with the habitat mandates of the MSA and its amendments.

- Describe and identify essential fish habitat (EFH) for the fishery as required in Council FMPs.
- Provide information for use in FMP development to minimize, to the extent practicable, adverse effects on such habitat caused by fishing.
- Identify other actions to encourage the conservation and enhancement of such habitat.
- Provide information to support the Council's role in mandatory EFH reviews.
- Provide information to support Council comments on activities by Federal or State agencies that may impact the habitat of the resources managed by the Council.

Goal 2. Provide information to support Council communication on habitat issues.

- Provide habitat research needs for consideration in Council Research and Monitoring Plans.
- Provide habitat research needs and Council habitat priorities to inform regional planning and research efforts.
- Provide information to support Council responses to habitat related requests for information.
- Provide information to support Council outreach activities on habitat issues.

Table A. Fishery management plans and amendments that designated or revised Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) and Habitat Areas of Particular Concern (HAPC) for fisheries under the jurisdiction of the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council. EFH Level pertains to guidance on the various levels of EFH designation (https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2002-01-17/pdf/02-885.pdf).

Fishery Management Plan	EFH Designations	Additional EFH or EFH-HAPC Designations	SMZ or MPA Designations (Snapper Grouper)	EFH Level
Coral, Coral Reefs, and Live/Hard Bottom Habitats	Comprehensive EFH Amendment (1998)	CEBA 1 (2009) Spatial Representations of EFH CEBA 2 (2011) Designate Coral HAPCS as EFH-HAPCs		2
Pelagic Sargassum Habitat	CEBA 2 (2011)			2
Shrimp Fishery of the South Atlantic Region	Comprehensive EFH (1998)	CEBA 1 (2009) Spatial Representations of EFH		2
Snapper Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region	Comprehensive EFH Amendment (1998)	CEBA 1 (2009) Spatial Representations of EFH CEBA 2 (2011) Designated the Deepwater MPAs as EFH-HAPCs and Designations for EFH-HAPCs for golden and Blueline Tilefish	Special Management Zones (SMZs): Regulatory Amendment 3 (1989) Regulatory Amendment 5 (1992) Regulatory Amendment 7 (1998) Amendment 8 (2000) Regulatory Amendment 34 (2021) Type II MPAs: Amendment 14 (2007) Spawning SMZs: Amendment 36 (2016)	2
Golden Crab Fishery of the South Atlantic Region	Comprehensive EFH Amendment (1998)	CEBA 1 (2009) Spatial Representations of EFH		2
Dolphin and Wahoo Fishery of the Atlantic	Comprehensive EFH Amendment (1998) Initial designation of EFH for Dolphin	Fishery Management Plan for Dolphin and Wahoo (2003) CEBA 1 (2009) Spatial Representations of EFH		2
Coastal Migratory Pelagics of the Gulf of Mexico and Atlantic Region	Comprehensive EFH Amendment (1998)	CEBA 1 (2009) Spatial Representations of EFH		2
Spiny Lobster Fishery of the Gulf and South Atlantic Region	Comprehensive EFH Amendment (1998)	CEBA 1 (2009) Spatial Representations of EFH		2

Note: Comprehensive Ecosystem-Based Amendments (CEBA) included amendments to multiple FMPs.

Table B. SAFMC policies addressing non-fishing threats identified for the South Atlantic region.

	SAFMC EFH Policy Statements									
	Food Web Connectivity	**Climate Variability**	**Marine Aquaculture**	**SAV**	**Beach Nourishment**	**Energy Exploration**	**Flows**	**Invasive**	**Artificial Reefs**	
Non-fishing Threat										**Total Policies Addressing Threat**
Navigation	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	8
Hydrologic Alterations	X		X	X	X		X	X	X	7
Natural Events and Climate Change	X	X	X	X			X	X	X	7
Urban/Suburban Development	X			X	X	X	X	X	X	7
Offshore Mining, Beach Dredge and Fill	X		X		X			X	X	5
Oil and Gas			X		X	X		X	X	5
Transportation (roadways and bridges)	X			X	X		X	X		5
Alternative Energy Technologies			X		X	X		X		4
Dredged Material Disposal	X			X	X			X		4
Industrial/ Commercial Activities			X			X		X	X	4
Non-native or nuisance species			X	X				X	X	4
Agriculture	X			X			X			3
Aquaculture			X	X				X		3
Artificial Reefs			X					X	X	3
Dams, Impoundments, Barriers to Passage	X						X	X		3
Inshore Mining			X		X			X		3
Marine Debris			X					X	X	3
Nonpoint-source Pollution			X	X						2
Silviculture										0

Table C. Summary of SAFMC policies and threats addressed by each.

SAFMC EFH Policies	What is addressed
South Atlantic Food Webs and Connectivity Developed - Dec 2016	Assess potential threats and impacts to managed species EFH and EFH-HAPCs and the South Atlantic ecosystem associated with changes in food webs and connectivity and processes that could improve those resources or place them at risk. • Incorporate into management strategies the potential indirect effects of fisheries on food web linkages and identify unintended consequences; • Use food web models to simulate the ecosystem, understand food web linkages, inform single species assessment and management, generate reference points and ecosystem-level indicators to enhance ecosystem stability and resilience.
South Atlantic Climate Variability and Fisheries Developed - Dec 2016	Assess potential threats and impacts to managed species EFH and EFH-HAPCs and the South Atlantic ecosystem associated with climate variability or change and processes that could improve those resources or place them at risk. • Develop indicators to track ecological, social, and changing fisheries trends that appear to be due to changing ocean environmental conditions; • Consider tradeoffs and necessary responses to account for predicted and realized increases or decreases in productivity; • Apply the precautionary approach and careful scientific and management evaluation as new fisheries develop.
Marine Aquaculture Developed- June 2014	Provide guidance for marine aquaculture development in offshore and coastal waters, riverine systems, and adjacent wetland habitats to protect EFH. • Require effective regulation under MSA and other applicable federal statutes; • Require at least a 10-year permit with annual reporting, operational and option for revocation; • Require only drugs, biologics, and other chemicals approved for aquaculture by the FDA, EPA, or USDA be used; • Allow only native species for aquaculture in federal waters of the South Atlantic and prohibit use of genetically modified organisms unless approved by FDA; • Require applicant to provide all information necessary to thoroughly evaluate the suitability of potential aquaculture sites; • Require applicant/permit holder to develop environmental monitoring plans for projects authorized under MSA and have adequate funds committed to ensure removal of organisms and decommissioning of facilities; • NOAA Fisheries specify conditions of use and outline process to repeal, modify or revoke permits.
Marine Submerged Aquatic Vegetation In Comprehensive EFH Amend (1998) June 2014	Protect remaining habitat and support actions to restore SAV in locations where they have occurred in the past. • Develop a comprehensive adaptive management strategy to address SAV decline; • Adopt a reliable status and trend survey methodology (mapping and monitoring) to verify the location, health, and coverage of SAV at sub-regional and/or local scales.
Beach Dredging and Filling, Beach Renourishment and Large-Scale Coastal Engineering In Comp EFH Amend (1998) Revised March 2015	Avoid, minimize and offset damage to EFH from large-scale dredging and disposal of sediments in the coastal ocean and adjacent habitats. • Require a comprehensive environmental document be prepared for each project; • Specify fill material match the sediment characteristics of the recipient beach as closely as possible; • Limit dredging to bathymetric peaks and the shallowest depths possible to reduce the likelihood of infilling with fine-grained sediments.

Table C (Cont.). Summary of SAFMC policies and threats addressed by each.

SAFMC EFH Policies	What is addressed
Energy Exploration, Development, Transportation and Hydropower Re-Licensing **In Comp EFH Amend (1998)** **Revised June 2005** **Revised December 2015**	Provide guidance for energy exploration, development and transportation in offshore and coastal waters, riverine systems and adjacent wetland habitats. Avoid and minimize impacts to EFH and EFH-HAPCs and optimize benefits from these activities. • Use best available, least damaging technologies to avoid, minimize, and offset damage to EFH, EFH-HAPCs and avoid intersection or overlap with allowable fishing areas within the Deepwater Coral HAPCs; • Design energy exploration activities and facilities to avoid impacts on coastal ecosystems and sand sharing systems. • Comply with existing standards and requirements regulating domestic and international energy transportation including regulated waste disposal and emissions. • Avoid open-loop LNG processing facilities in favor of closed-loop systems with water intake minimized and establish baseline studies and project monitoring. • Recommend that pilot scale projects not occur in areas where full-scale efforts are predicted to be environmentally unacceptable (e.g., MPAs, CHAPCs, and Spawning SMZs).
Alterations to Riverine, Estuarine and Nearshore Flows **June 2014**	Avoid, minimize, and offset damage to EFH and EFH-HAPCs, diadromous fishes, state and federally-listed species, Federal critical habitat, and State Critical Habitat Areas (CHAs) caused by alteration of flows in southeast rivers, estuaries and nearshore ocean habitats. • Provide detailed impact analyses, assessments of potential unavoidable damage to EFH and other marine resources; • Avoid impacts, require compensatory mitigation for unavoidable impacts, and account for the cumulative impacts in the same watershed; • Recommend that projects meet state and Federal water quality standards, include baseline monitoring, and establish on-going maintenance and repair programs; • Recommend that construction not coincide with spawning migrations or early development of sensitive species; • Avoid impingement and entrainment of sensitive species at water intakes and provide detailed requirements for developing the intake design; • Natural flow regime should be altered as little as possible; • Hydropower projects implement ramping rate restrictions and a non-peaking window during the critical reproductive and rearing periods.

Table C (Cont.). Summary of SAFMC policies and threats addressed by each.

SAFMC EFH Policies	What is addressed
South Atlantic Marine & Estuarine Ecosystems from Non-Native and Invasive Species **Developed 2014**	Prevent invasive species from impacting marine and estuarine habitats in the South Atlantic region. • Remove species from the FMU to allow control or eradication strategy to be implemented; • NOAA Fisheries remove invasive species as a compensatory mitigation measure and require plant materials be obtained through local nurseries; • Grant funding to promote research and education and outreach efforts targeting invasive species; • National Aquatic Nuisance Species Task Force support developing management plans for potentially invasive species in South Atlantic waters; • Develop novel gears and invasive species harvest, eradication, and/or removal strategies/programs which do not impact South Atlantic habitats and ecosystems and encourage removal from areas of high ecological/economic importance; • Integrate monitoring of invasive species into existing fishery-independent and dependent programs; • Require inspection/surface cleaning prior to placement of Fish Attracting Devices; • Discourage use of non-indigenous species in aquaculture in the SA region and ensure compliance with existing regulations; • Energy infrastructure permits require monitoring the settlement and dispersal of non-indigenous species; • Regional partners develop regulations controlling ballast water and research and development to advance treatment technology.
Artificial Reefs **Developed 2017**	Protection and mitigation (avoidance, minimization, and compensatory mitigation) of EFH and EFH-HAPCs related to artificial reef development, placement, and maintenance. • Defines uses of ARs: recreational and commercial activities, spawning, breeding, feeding, and refuge for growth to maturity; • Support state requests to designate specific ARs as SMZs; • Provide a more standardized comparison for scientific investigations; • Managers consult with stakeholders prior to siting in order to reduce user conflict and maximize the value of ARs as EFH; • Properly site ARs to connect life stages of target species, do not impact right whales/Atlantic sturgeon or hazards to navigation; • Require the use of environmentally safe, long-lasting materials for reef construction; • Consider impacts of decommissioning structures on a case-by-case basis; • Mitigation measures be specified if the function of an AR is lost.