



SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

4055 Faber Place Drive, Suite 201, North Charleston SC 29405

Call: (843) 571-4366 | Toll-Free: (866) SAFMC-10 | Fax: (843) 769-4520 | Connect: www.safmc.net

Trish Murphey, Chair | Jessica McCawley, Vice Chair
John Carmichael, Executive Director

AGENDA

Habitat and Ecosystem Committee

Drury Plaza Hotel North Charleston

2934 West Montague

North Charleston, SC 29418

Tuesday, September 15th, 2026, 8:30 AM – 10:30 AM

Approval of Agenda

1. Habitat and Ecosystem AP Report (June/July 2026) – Stacie Crowe, Outgoing Habitat & Ecosystem AP Chair (*Attachment 1a-1d*)
2. Ecosystem Information Review – Sarah Gaichas, Hydra Scientific, LLC (*Attachments 2a and 2b*)

Other Business

Adjourn

Habitat Committee Members:

Trish Murphey, Chair

Tom Roller, Vice Chair

Robert Beal

Carolyn Belcher

Gary Borland

Amy Dukes

Judy Helmey

Dewey Hemilright

Jimmy Hull

Kerry Marhefka

Jessica McCawley

Lt. John Haksteen

Charlie Phillips

Rob Southwick

Andy Strelcheck

Attachments:

Attachment 1a: Habitat and Ecosystem AP report (June/July 2026)

Attachment 1b: Habitat and Ecosystem AP report presentation

Attachment 1c: Food Webs and Connectivity Policy

Attachment 1d: Alterations to Riverine, Estuarine and Nearshore Flows Policy

Attachment 2a: All Council Ecosystem Data Review Presentation

Attachment 2b: SAFMC Ecosystem Options Presentation

Staff Lead: Kathleen Howington (kathleen.howington@safmc.net)

OVERVIEW

Habitat and Ecosystem Committee

The Committee will approve the agenda for the September 2026 Committee meeting.

1. Habitat and Ecosystem Advisory Panel (HEAP) Report (*Attachments 1a-1d*)

Description: Stacie Crowe, SCDNR, outgoing HEAP Chair, will deliver the June/July 2026 HEAP report addressing revisions to the Council's [Food Webs and Connectivity](#) and [Alterations to Riverine, Estuarine and Nearshore Flows](#) policies, a review of the life stage information updates, future actions regarding space related activities off Cape Canaveral, feedback on the Ecosystem information review report, and recommendations on MAFMC IRA projects that may be of interest to the Council. The Committee will review recommendations for possible goals and objectives of an Integrated Ecosystem Assessment, feedback on offshore developments off the southeast coast, review of a new beneficial use modeling tool produced by SC Sea Grant, and review of the HEAP's communication strategy.

The Committee will also receive recommendations for a future joint Coral and Habitat & Ecosystem Advisory Panels meeting and desk reviews of the Aquaculture and Submerged Aquatic Vegetation Policies.

Finally, the Committee will review draft topics for inclusion in the agenda for the next meeting of the HEAP (January 25-26, 2027), which include the following:

- Review progress on the habitat program communication strategy
- 2026 Essential Fish Habitat Consultations
- Citizen Science Project Updates
- Resilient Fisheries Projects: EFH and Spatial Distributions Updates project
- The HEAP Annual Report
- Discuss potential expansion of Stetson-Miami Terrace Deepwater CHAPC
- [Florida Coastal Mapping Project](#): the collection of high-resolution Florida coastal seafloor data, from the shore to the continental shelf
- Deepsea Mining: University of Hawaii presentation on potential environmental risks associated with deep-sea mining
- EFH assessment on wind farms - HEAP discussion on how to handle decommissioned windfarms/Art Reef/EFH
- Impacts to habitat from space industry activities
- EFH 5-Year review progress
 - Identify higher abundance locations and additional life stage information for EFH clarification in each fishery management plan (improving EFH tier structure)
 - Integrate food web information from food web policy into EFH definitions
- Work plan update

Committee Action: Consider HEAP recommendations on how to support data gathering for the space program around Cape Canaveral, the MAFMC's IRA projects, and the possible goals and objectives for a potential Integrated Ecosystem Assessment. Review and approve

the Food Webs and Connectivity Policy and the Alterations to Riverine, Estuarine and Nearshore Flows Policy. Approve desk reviews of the Aquaculture and Submerged Aquatic Vegetation Policies. Consider approving a Joint Coral and Habitat Advisory Panel meeting to discuss the expansion of Coral Habitat Areas of Particular Concern.

2. Ecosystem Information Review - Sarah Gaichas, Hydra Scientific, LLC (*Attachments 2a and 2b*)

This project aims to strengthen management outcomes by expanding the use of ecosystem information and collaborative research within the South Atlantic region. The first report assesses how all U.S. regional fisheries management councils utilize ecosystem data products and decision-support tools, provides comparative insights, and identifies best practices and strategies for integration into SAFMC management processes.

The second report addresses practical implementation requirements, evaluates opportunities for cooperative data collection, and develops prototype ecosystem indicators tailored to regional needs. Project outcomes and recommendations presented are being coordinated with the SAFMC Fisheries Management Process Review.

The project reports can be accessed here:

[Report 1](#) (pdf [here](#))

[Report 2](#) (pdf [here](#))

Committee Action: Consider recommending that the Council prioritize development of a structured process for ecosystem-based decision-making, as recommended in the Ecosystem Information Review Report, in their Resilient Fisheries Projects implementation plan.

Other Business