

FINAL
SUMMARY REPORT
HABITAT PROTECTION AND ECOSYSTEM BASED MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE
SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

Ponte Vedra, Florida
June 13, 2017

The Committee approved minutes from the March 2017 meeting and agenda.

Habitat and Ecosystem Advisory Panel Report

Council staff presented a summary report of the May 24-25, 2017 Habitat Protection and Ecosystem Based Management Advisory Panel. The Advisory Panel is further refining the Artificial Reef EFH Policy Statement to provide additional information, edits and a final draft for Committee consideration and approval at the September Council meeting. The Panel also approved a motion to “Recommend the Council send a letter of endorsement of the Waccamaw Partnership Project National Coastal Wetland Grant.”

The Committee approved the following motion:

MOTION 1#. COUNCIL SEND A LETTER OF SUPPORT FOR THE WACCAMAW PROJECT.

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

Note: The project proposal by the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission in partnership with the North Carolina Coastal Land Trust is to apply to the National Wetlands Conservation Grant Program to purchase the 3,000 acre Waccamaw River Partnership Tract along 7.5 miles of the Waccamaw River in Columbus County, North Carolina.

Fishery Ecosystem Plan II

Council staff reviewed and Committee provided input on core sections and a support document for FEP II (South Atlantic Food Webs and Connectivity, South Atlantic Climate Variability and Connectivity, SAFMC Managed Species Summaries and SAFMC/NMFS EFH User Guide). In addition, staff reviewed a completion timeline for FEP II Section and link development, a proposed FEP II Implementation Plan Development process, and observed a conceptual FEP II Webpage demonstration highlighting the structure and online living nature and of a fully operational FEP II.

MOTION 2#. ADOPT THE FEP II IMPLEMENTATION PLAN “DEVELOPMENT” PROCESS AND CORE TEAM MEMBERSHIP.

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

Habitat and Ecosystem Tools and Model Development

Council staff provided highlights of a May 2017 South Atlantic Ecosystem Modeling Workgroup meeting to advance development of the next generation Ecosystem model (Ecopath) by October 2017. Howard Townsend, NOAA Fisheries ecosystem modeling lead, joined the workgroup to help guide model structure and development, and alignment with NOAA Fisheries guidance supporting conservation and management. Staff also noted the SSC will be engaged early in

development with an initial presentation of the model and example issues during their October 2017 meeting. This is intended to initiate discussion on resulting products, capabilities and tools for evaluation which support assessment and management. Staff noted this is a partner funded effort through the South Atlantic Landscape Conservation Cooperative (SALCC) which is also refining and enhancing the marine component and indicators in the SALCC Conservation Blueprint, and enhance our understanding of connectivity with estuarine and rivers systems along the South Atlantic.

International Sargassum Conservation

Dr. David Freestone, Executive Secretary of the Sargasso Sea Commission, made a presentation on International Sargassum / Sargasso Sea conservation efforts that have arisen following Council management and conservation efforts and past ICATT resolutions. The presentation concluded with a request that the Council consider changing the total allowable catch to zero in the Fishery Management Plan for Pelagic Sargassum Habitat and investigate other opportunities for engagement in international conservation into the Sargasso Sea. NOAA General Counsel noted a provision in the Magnuson-Stevens Act essential fish habitat guidelines identifying avenues to potentially encourage conservation of habitat essential to Council managed species in waters outside U.S. jurisdiction.

Timing and Task(s)

MOTION 3. ADOPT THE FOLLOWING TIMING AND TASK(S):

Staff will:

- 1) Refine draft FEP II Sections and incorporate edits provided during and subsequent to the Committee meeting.
- 2) Initiate development process for FEP II Implementation Plan contact and confirm participation on core team, refine outline and begin preparation of preliminary draft of FEP II Implementation Plan for review during the September 2017 Council meeting.
- 3) Work with Habitat Protection and Ecosystem Based Management Advisory Panel to complete Draft Artificial Reef EFH Policy Statement for review and approval during September 2017 Council meeting.
- 4) Work with South Atlantic Ecosystem Modeling Workgroup to complete a first iteration of the next generation Ecopath model completed for presentation during October SSC meeting.
- 5) Initiate development of a white paper on the issue of *Sargassum* conservation.
- 6) Work with FWRI on process to further expand detailed information presented in the EcoSpecies online system supporting FEP II. In addition, continue to refine format, evaluate capabilities and operationalize FEP II online system.

APPROVED BY COUNCIL