

FINAL
SUMMARY REPORT
HABITAT PROTECTION AND ECOSYSTEM BASED MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

Kitty Hawk, North Carolina
December 4, 2018

The Habitat Protection and Ecosystem Based Management Committee approved the agenda and minutes from the December 2018 meeting.

Atlantic Coast-Wide Discussions: How to address species expansion northwards?

The three Atlantic coast Councils agreed that a group comprised of each Council's Chair, Vice-Chair, and Executive Director would meet periodically to coordinate on an approach to address stocks as they expand northwards. Due to the rescheduled timing of the meeting as a result of Hurricane Florence, representatives from the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (MAFMC) were unable to attend due to a conflict with their meeting. Council staff briefly revisited potential avenues previously discussed to address species shifts and in response to guidance provided during the October meeting, provided updated summarized landings of snapper grouper and coastal migratory pelagic species in the Mid-Atlantic and New England regions. Staff was provided guidance on materials to be prepared in advance of the February 2019 CCC meeting to support more refined SAFMC review in advance of the joint South Atlantic, Mid-Atlantic and New England session during the South Atlantic Council's March 4-8, 2019 meeting in Jekyll Island, Georgia.

Habitat and Ecosystem Tools, Model Development and Regional Partner Coordination

In lieu of a presentation, staff provided additional comments and detail during the Advisory Panel meeting report which highlighted coordination and collaboration with habitat and ecosystem partners in the region.

Council Actions on Habitat and Ecosystems and AP Report

Anne Deaton, NC DMF, Chair of the Habitat and Ecosystem Based Management Advisory Panel provided the Committee an overview and summary of the November 2018 fall AP meeting which included the following topics: NOAA Fisheries EBFM Activities for the South Atlantic Region, National Fish Habitat Activities- Regional Partnerships, Ecosystem Considerations: Prey supporting Dolphin Wahoo Fisheries, South Atlantic State Natural Events of 2018, Navy's Atlantic Fleet Testing and Training Area, Fishery Independent Research Supporting EBFM and Developing South Atlantic Ecosystem Model, Deep Water Ecosystem Characterization - NOAA Office of Ocean Exploration and Deep Sea Coral Research and Technology Program, Energy Development Activities in the South Atlantic, South Atlantic Landscape Conservation Cooperative (SALCC) Conservation Blueprint, and the South Atlantic Ecopath Model. Members and Invited Participants also engaged in a roundtable session on: Enhancing EFH information, its presentation and availability to enhance NEPA and permit review addressing non-fishing threats; and enhancing presentation of and linkages to ongoing research efforts including NOAA Ocean Exploration Program and NOAA Ship Okeanos Explorer mapping and characterization of deep-water ecosystems. A second Committee session covered renewable energy development with Will Waskes, BOEM providing the Committee an overview of BOEM renewable energy activities and Craig Poff, Kitty Hawk Offshore Wind providing an

introduction to wind power generation and the initiation of industry evaluation of the Kitty Hawk Wind energy lease area. The Committee and invited participants discussed the real opportunity early coordination provides the Council in providing guidance in the survey and evaluation of the habitat, fish and fishery operations associated with the lease area which will start in 2019.

Other Business

Dr. Wilson Laney briefed the Committee on recent NMFS issuance of MMPA authorization permits for seismic testing on the Atlantic coast. Staff provided a brief overview of Council policy and previous comments on Energy and Council position on seismic testing (noted below) which can be found in online comments to BOEM Path Forward which highlighted Council comments on the 2019-2024 OCS:

http://safmc.net/download/Briefing%20Book%20Habitat%20AP%20Nov18/A18_SAFMCOOnlineComments_BOEM%20Path%20Forward%20for%20Renewable%20Energy%20Combined.pdf

Therefore, the Council supports the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management's (BOEM) past denial of geophysical and geological permit applications to conduct airgun seismic surveys in the Mid and South Atlantic Planning Areas of the Atlantic Ocean and re-iterates its previous request to remove the Atlantic Program Area from the Outer Continental Shelf Oil and Gas Leasing Program now in the 2019–2024 National OCS Oil and Gas Leasing Draft Proposed Program. We draw attention to former BOEM Director Abigail Ross Hopper's position that "... we believe that the value of obtaining the geophysical and geological information from new airgun seismic surveys in the Atlantic does not outweigh the potential risks of those surveys' acoustic pulse impacts on marine life,..." The Council, in an attempt to avoid the negative effects of offshore oil and gas development, has worked closely with BOEM, NOAA Fisheries, and state partners, to highlight regional research needs and avoid impacts on EFH and managed fisheries through cooperative development of alternative energy capacity, specifically offshore wind energy, in the region.

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. ADOPT THE FOLLOWING TIMING AND TASK(S):

1. Prior to February CCC meeting staff will prepare the following support information to inform and support SAFMC input during the joint session during the March Council meeting:
 - a. Table of recreational and commercial species in the Snapper Grouper and Coastal Migratory Pelagic Management Units for MA/NE regions in pounds caught including identification of management jurisdiction, to include non-managed species
 - b. Table of management and coordination alternatives available to the Council to address species change in distribution and movement north
 - c. Pros and cons on permits
 - d. Tables of ACL for managed species
2. Coordinate with MAFMC and NEFMC to re-schedule the joint session on species expanding north for the March 2019 SAFMC meeting.

3. Others??

APPROVED BY COUNCIL