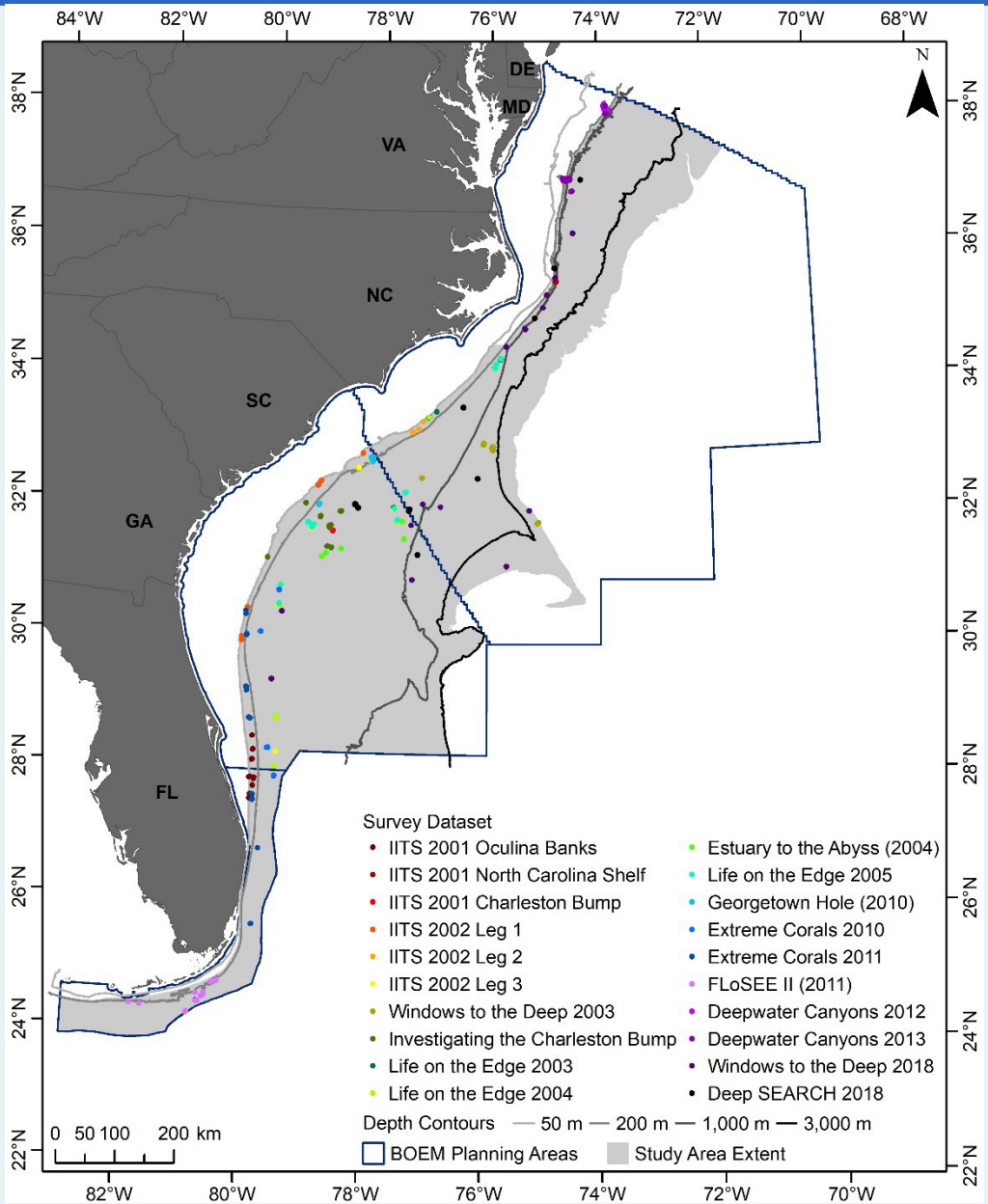
THE SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

Deepwater Coral Management

Kathleen Howington
Kathleen.howington@safmc.net
843-725-7580

Coral Deep Water Mapping

Deep water Coral Predictive Modeling



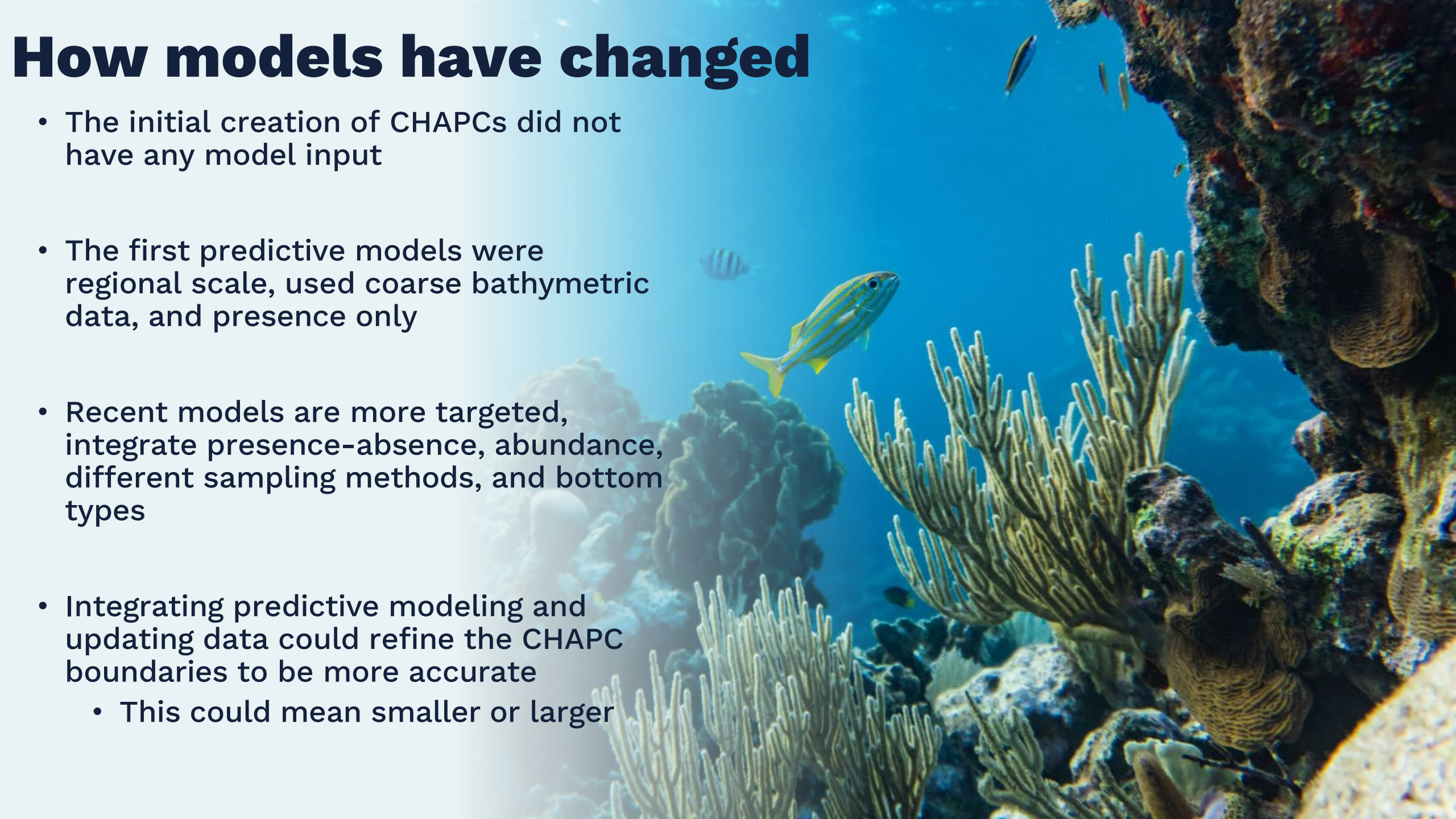
September 2023 – The Council received a report from SSC Chair Jeff Buckel on "Modeling the distribution of deep-sea corals offshore of the southeastern United States to guide efficient discovery and protection of sensitive habitats," reviewed by the SSC in July 2023.

- The SSC deemed the model was consistent with BSIA and adequate to inform management.
- It was noted that this modeling product can provide guidance for the 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.**

December 2023 – Council directed staff to add the potential revision of Coral HAPCs to the workplan for June 2024

How models have changed

- The initial creation of CHAPCs did not have any model input
- The first predictive models were regional scale, used coarse bathymetric data, and presence only
- Recent models are more targeted, integrate presence-absence, abundance, different sampling methods, and bottom types
- Integrating predictive modeling and updating data could refine the CHAPC boundaries to be more accurate
  - This could mean smaller or larger



Mapping and Geomorphic Characterization of Cold Water Coral Mounds of the Blake Plateau

Published January 2024: Geomatics

- Mapped what appears to be the most expansive cold-water coral (CWC) mound province thus far discovered.
- Nearly continuous CWC mound features span an area up to 500 km long and 110 km wide
- Synthesized bathymetric data from 31 multibeam sonar mapping surveys generated a standardized geomorphic classification of the region

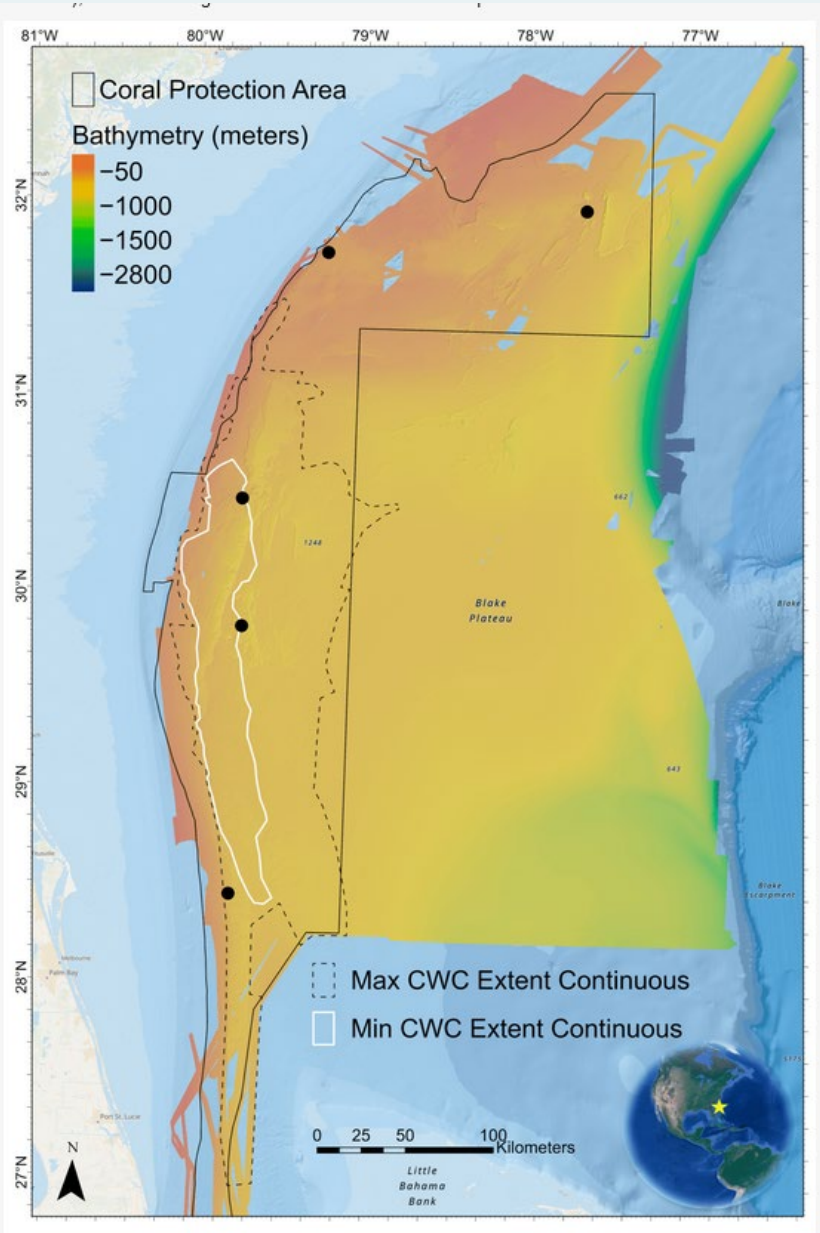


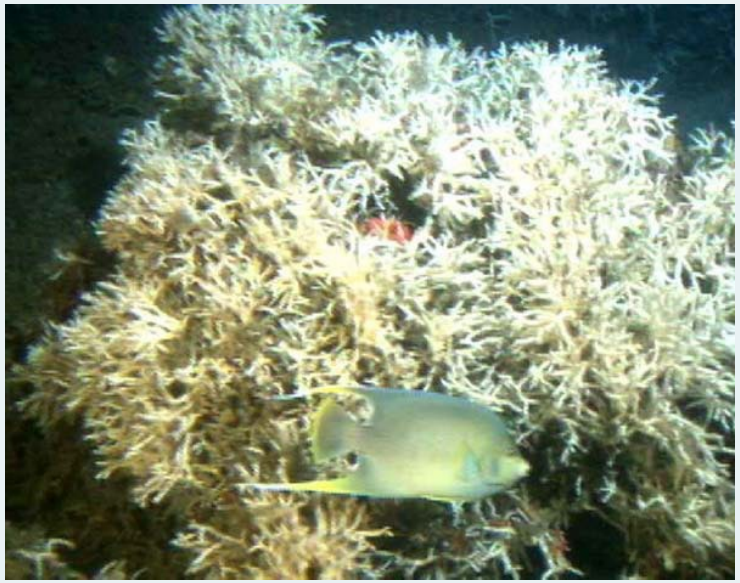
Figure 2. Bathymetric terrain model synthesis grid of the Blake Plateau CWC mound study region from 31 different multibeam sonar surveys. The white polygon represents the minimum extent core area of dense nearly continuous CWC mound features in the largest CWC province on the plateau. The yellow star on the inset map represents the location of the Blake Plateau adjacent to the southeast U.S. coastline. The black dotted line polygon represents the maximum extent of continuous CWC features in the largest province. There are many other subregions on the plateau with CWC mounds. The solid black polygon shows the existing boundaries of the Stetson-Miami Deepwater Coral Habitat Area of Particular Concern. At this scale, individual coral mound features are not discernible. The numbered black point features on the map correspond to the locations of some of the previous study locations described on the Blake Plateau: 1—Stetson Banks [10,11], 2—Savannah Banks [46], 3—Jacksonville Lithoherms [10], 4—St. Augustine [15], and 5—Cape Canaveral Pinnacles [15]. The map projection is WGS 84/UTM zone 18N (EPSG: 32618), and the background is ESRI's ocean basemap.

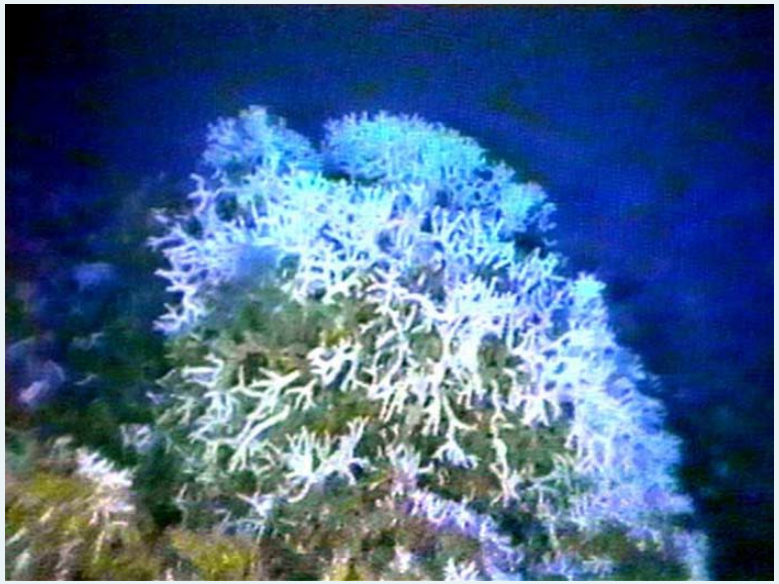
NOAA Deep Sea Coral Research and Technology Program Southeast Deep Coral Initiative (SEDCI) 2016-2019: Final Report

NOAA Technical memo published December 2021 with data from 2016 – 2019

- Detailed the work of the SEDCI
- Coral locations and identified species can be found at: https://www.ncei.noaa.gov/maps/deep-sea-corals/mapSites.htm
- Conducted a habitat suitability study as well

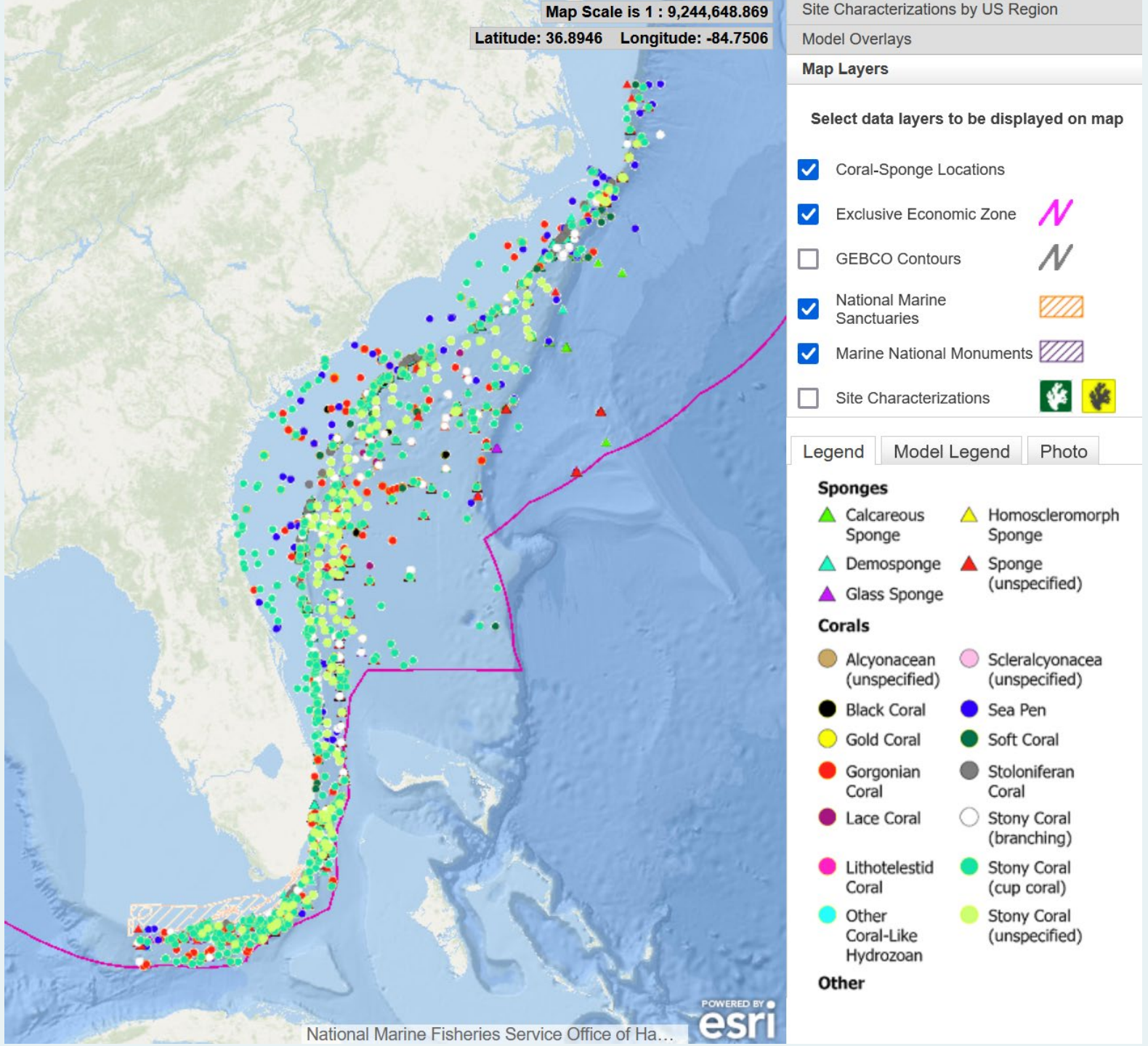
- Starting a new study in 2026
- Have communicated with staff about mapping priorities





National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science (NCCOS)

South East Deep Sea Coral Initiative (SEDCI)



Council Recommendations or guidance?

Amendment or Framework?

- CFR 622.227 Adjustment of management measures.
  - In accordance with the framework procedures of the FMP for Coral, Coral Reefs, and Live/Hard Bottom Habitats of the South Atlantic Region, the RA may establish or modify the following:
  - (a) South Atlantic coral, coral reefs, and live/hard bottom habitats. Definitions of essential fish habitat and essential fish habitat HAPCs or Coral HAPCs.

- Timeline?