



Citizen Science

Citizen Science Program Update

SAFMC Habitat & Ecosystem AP
January 2026

Program Activities



CitSci Research Priorities



Project Updates



Citizen Science Advisory
Panels

CitSci Research Priorities



Guide the projects the Program develops and supports



Narrow focus from many data needs to tangible ideas important to South Atlantic fishermen, scientists, managers



Share with other groups interested in developing or collaborating on citsci projects

SAFMC Citizen Science Research Priorities 2025-2027



Citizen Science

Topic	Data Needed	Potential Outcome
Age Sampling	Otolith & fin clip (future) collection	Characterize the age of catches, age/growth
Discard Information	Species, length, depth, quantity, discard reason, devices used, terminal gear, disposition, observation of depredation	Characterize the size of discards, improved discard removal estimates, help characterize effort
Genetic Sampling	Fin clips	Stock identification, Species ID, Ageing (still developing)
Historical Fishing Photos	Digitized images	Length compositions, improved historical info, potential for index development
Fishery Oral Histories & Historic Logbooks	Fishermen interviews, digitized logbooks	Improved understanding of changes in fishery over time
Oceanographic & Environmental Conditions	Various environmental data including bottom temperature and weather	Database of climate and changing conditions, fishery patterns
Shifting, Rare or Data Limited Species Observations	Point observations of data limited or rarely encountered species, length info for data limited species	Baseline for species shift, increased info for data limited species, observations of invasive species, inform essential fish habitat
Observations in Managed Areas	Species, length, depth, videos, photos, effort, edge effects	Species composition, occurrence of spawning, info on compliance
Movement & Migration	Species, location, length, tag details, supporting existing tagging programs	Movement and migratory patterns
Shark & Mammal Depredation	Observations of depredation, location, species, photo, DNA swab	Document depredation observations
Habitat Characterization	Photos, videos - focus on essential fish habitat live bottom	Ground truth bathymetry data
Spiny Lobster Data	Catch, effort, length, sex, presence of eggs, presence/absence, movement	Characterize fishery in FL and GA north (more data limited)



SMILE Project



- Partner with divers to collect length info on data limited species
- Laser-mounted Olympus underwater cameras
- 3 year pilot project wrapping up; additional year of funding secured
- Presented methodology to SSC at April 2025 meeting
- Survey conducted to better understand demographics, motivations, and barriers of recreational divers
- [SMILE presentation](#) – SAFMC Oct Seminar Series





FISHstory



Project Findings To Date



Over 2,300+ photos have been digitized & archived from the South Atlantic from the 1940s-1990s
Looking for more photos from the Carolinas



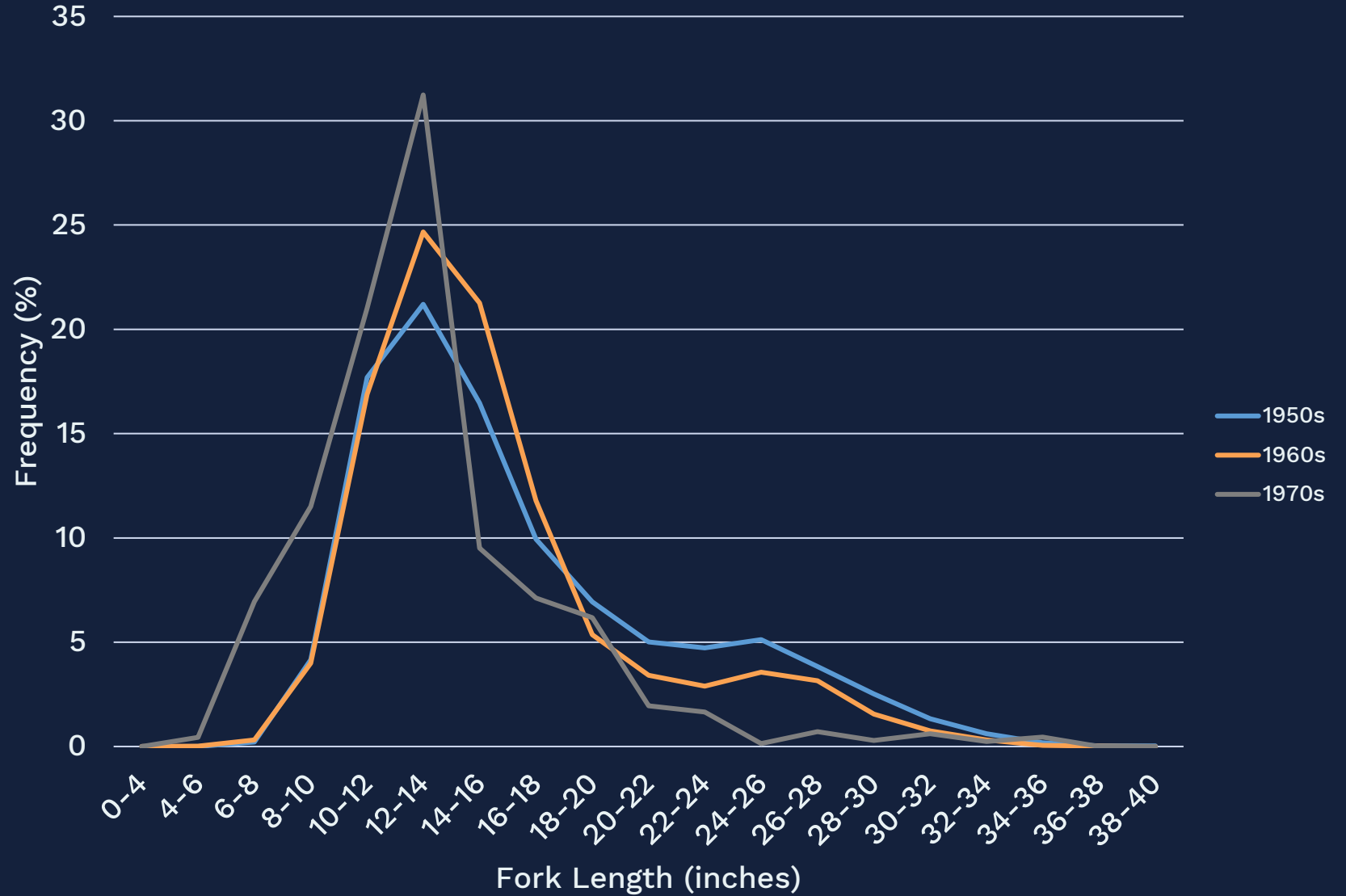
Over 4,000 volunteers analyzed 1,950 photos in Zooniverse
Validation Team reviewed 250 photos
Analysis underway by NC State analytical team



All King Mackerel & Red Snapper measured in current photo archive
Red Snapper length compositions were recommended for use by SEDAR 90 (South Atlantic Red Snapper) Data Workshop Panel
King Mackerel length compositions are being updated & will be presented at next SEDAR South Atlantic King Mackerel assessment



Red Snapper
FISHstory
length
compositions
by decade





SAFMC Release



Updates



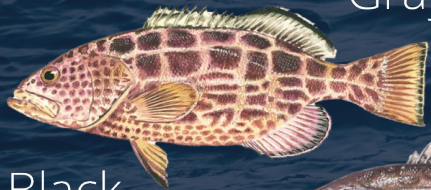
Red Snapper



Scamp



Graysby



Black



Yellowmouth



Gag



Rock Hind



Yellowfin



Red Hind



Red



Coney

Participants recording released shallow water grouper and Red Snapper in SciFish app

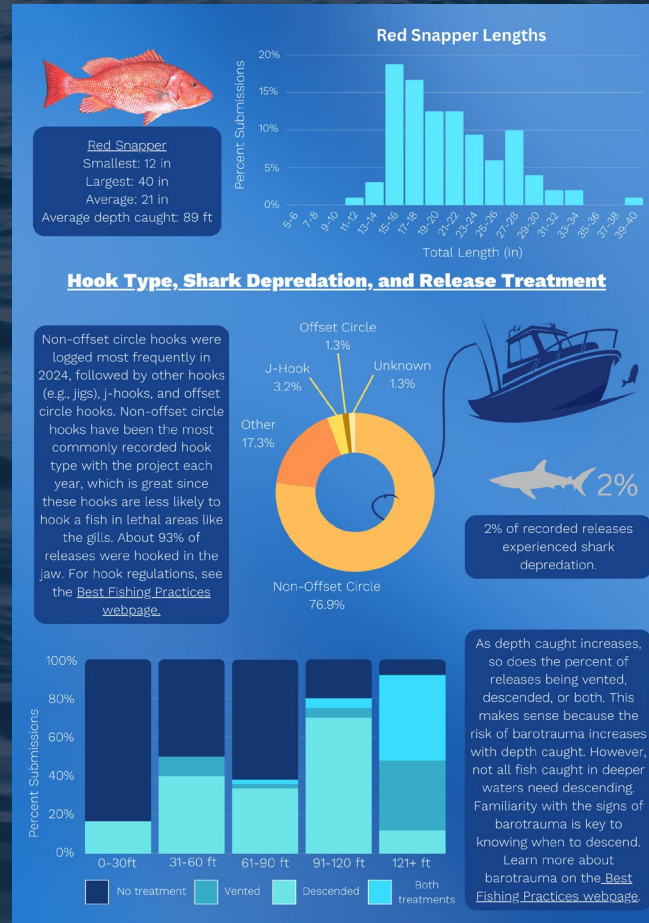
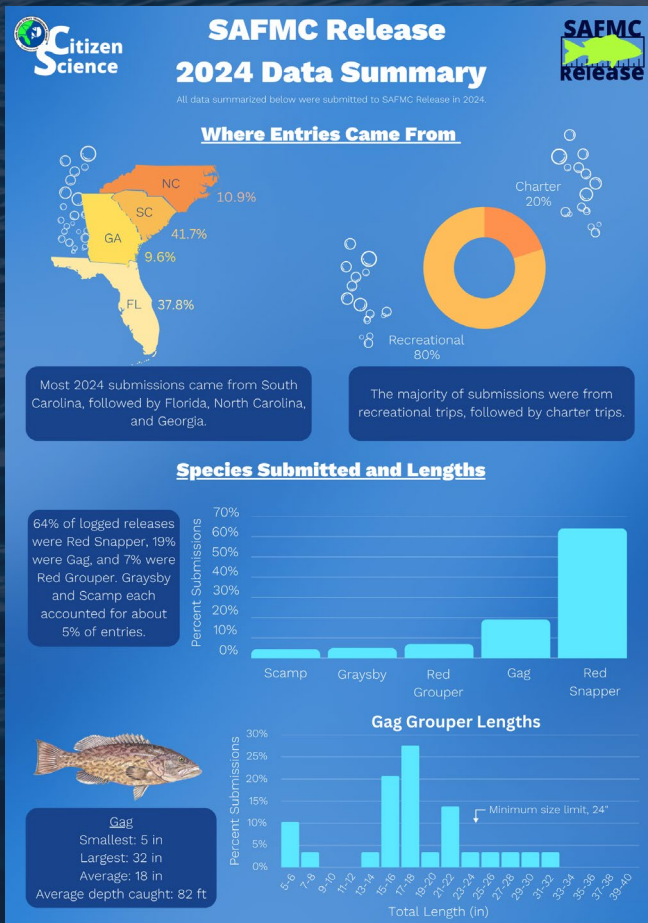
Continued outreach & new content

Data summary & SEDAR 90 Data Workshop

Sea Grant South Atlantic Release Rodeo



2024 Data Summary



Summary includes:

- Release submissions by state & fishing sector
- Species submitted
- Length compositions
- Release treatment by depth
- Shark depredation
- Hook type & location
- 2024 Participant Recognition Milestones



Sea Grant South Atlantic Release Rodeo



Sea Grant wants best fishing practices gear in fishermen's hands



SAFMC Release wants more entries that can be used for validation

Rodeo Structure



May - July



4 entries/month



8 entries/month if include ruler



2 names drawn by Sea Grant/month!



Sea Grant South Atlantic Release Rodeo: Outcomes



When comparing SAFMC Release submissions to challenge months during an average of previous years (2023 & 2024)



28% increase in submissions



Number of submissions with photos doubled



Number of submissions with photos that can be used for length validation almost tripled



Sea Grant South Atlantic Release Rodeo: Outcomes



Best fishing practices gear distributed by Sea Grant to randomly select participating fishermen



Positive feedback from fishermen on challenge & Sea Grant giveaways



Built meaningful relationships with fishing community members

Citizen Science Advisory Panels

- Participants members of the [CitSci Pool](#) and/or be a member of another Council AP



Operations Committee

Programmatic guidance

3-5 year terms

Meet 2 times per year

Appointments will be made in
Dec 2023



Projects Advisory Committee

Research priorities, volunteer
engagement, etc.

Members of other Council APs

Term dependent on AP tenure

Meet 1 time per year



Ad-hoc Committees

Typically serve as review for
program components

Currently no active ad-hoc
committees

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**Need Habitat AP
representation**

Keep up with projects & the Program!
safmc.net/citizen-science-program/



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