



THE SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

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Habitat and Ecosystem Advisory Panel Agenda

Stacie Crowe, Chair | Paul Medders, Vice Chair

Doubletree by Hilton North Charleston Convention Center

5264 Internation Blvd., North Charleston, SC 29418

July 15-17, 2025

Other than the starting and ending times of the meeting, times indicated on the agenda are approximate, and the order of business may be adjusted as necessary to accommodate the completion of agenda items. Interested parties should be aware that discussions may start earlier or later than indicated.

Public comment will be solicited at the beginning and at the end of the meeting. Those wishing to comment should indicate such in the manner requested by the Chair, who will recognize individuals to provide comment in-person or on the webinar.

Tuesday, July 15, 1:00 pm – 5:00 pm

- Welcome and Introductions
- Approval of Agenda
- Approval of Minutes ([October 2024](#))
- Public Comment
- Habitat and Ecosystem Committee Chair Remarks – Trish Murphey

1. Integration of Revised Food Webs and Connectivity Policy Information into EFH designations– Kevin Spanik, South Carolina Department of Natural Resources (*Attachment 1*)

- a) Discussion and Recommendations

2. **Revision of the Alterations to Riverine, Estuarine, and Nearshore Flows policy to address impacts from freshwater discharges and impediments to river flow – Matt Kenworthy, Florida Fish and Wildlife (*Attachment 2*)**
 - a) Discussion and Recommendations
3. **Space industry activity impacts on habitat (*Attachment 3*)**
 - a) Summary of recent events and future steps – Kathleen Howington
 - b) Discussion and Recommendations

Wednesday, July 16, 8:30 am – 4:30 pm

4. **Habitat Conservation Division (HCD) Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) consultations and information on beneficial use of dredging material projects (*Attachments 4a- 4c*)**
 - a) Review HCD consultations for 2024 – Anne Deaton HCD, NOAA
 - b) Presentation on beneficial use of dredging material projects – Jenny Davis, National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science (NCCOS)
 - c) Summary of knowledge on beneficial use of dredging material projects – Kathleen Howington
 - d) Discussion and Recommendations
5. **Coastal Virginia Offshore Wind (CVOW) update on habitat created by wind farms and fish mortality during construction – Brian Hooker, Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) (*Attachment 5*)**
 - a) Discussion and Recommendations
6. **Telecommunication subsea fiber cables – Rita Melo, Morgan Paris, and Laura Cherney, AECOM Technical Services, Inc. (AECOM; infrastructure engineering and professional services consulting firm) (*Attachment 6*)**
 - a) Discussion and Recommendations
7. **Resilient Fisheries projects overview and EFH project update – Lara Klibansky, SAFMC contractor (*Attachment 7*)**
 - a) Discussion and Recommendations
8. **Loss of Changing Ecosystems and Fisheries Initiative (CEFI) – Matthew McPherson, NMFS SEFSC – No Attachment**
 - a) Discussion and Recommendations

Thursday, July 17, 8:30 am – 1:00 pm

9. **2029 EFH 5-year review – Kathleen Howington (*Attachment 8*)**
 - a) Review managed species' life history information and discuss how to integrate the information into the SAFMC's EFH designations.

- b) Review information on managed species' abundance and discuss how to integrate the information into the SAFMC's EFH designations.
- c) Integrated Ecosystem Assessment – HEAP uses, goals and objectives
- d) Discussion and Recommendations

**10. SAFMC Habitat Blueprint items to be addressed – Kathleen Howington
(Attachment 9)**

- a) Review Progress on the Habitat webpages.
- b) Habitat Program Outreach and Communication Strategy: Review the Habitat FAQs and recommend future outreach plans.

11. Review HEAP workplan 2025-2028 and Future Meetings (Attachments 10a and 10b)

12. Other Business

Public Comment

Adjourn

Attachments:

Attachment 1: Integration of Revised Food Webs and Connectivity Policy Information into EFH designations Presentation

Attachment 2: Alterations to the Riverine, Estuarine, and Nearshore Flows Policy Presentation

Attachment 3: Space Industry Activity Impacts on Habitat Presentation

Attachment 4a: Review of HCD Consultations for 2024 Presentation

Attachment 4b: Impacts of Beneficial Use of Dredging Material Projects Presentation

Attachment 4c: Summary of Knowledge on Beneficial Use of Dredging Material Projects Presentation

Attachment 5: Central Virginia Offshore Wind (CVOW) Project Presentation

Attachment 6: Telecommunication Subsea Fiber Cables Presentation

Attachment 7: Resilient Fisheries Projects Overview and EFH Project Presentation

Attachment 8: 2029 EFH 5-year Review Presentation

Attachment 9: Outstanding Habitat Blueprint Tasks Presentation

Attachment 10a: HEAP Workplan 2025 - 2028 and future meetings Presentation

Attachment 10b: HEAP Workplan 2025-2028

Overview

Habitat and Ecosystem Advisory Panel

The Advisory Panel will approve the minutes from the [October 2024 HEAP meeting](#) and the agenda for the current meeting. Trish Murphey, NCDMF, Chair of the Habitat and Ecosystem Committee and SAFMC Chair, will make opening remarks

1. Integration of Revised Food Webs and Connectivity Policy Information into EFH designations (*Attachment 1*)

Description: The working group assigned to determine how to integrate prey habitat use information into the existing [Food Web and Connectivity Policy](#) has met once since the March 2025 Council meeting. AP members will discuss plans for integrating prey habitat use information into the designations of EFH for managed species, as well as the potential issues that may occur.

Work group volunteers: Wilson Laney, Kevin Spanik, Chip Collier, Laurent Cherubin, and Lauren Gentry

AP Action: Comment on the proposed integration process and recommend which species to apply the proposed process.

2. Revision to Alterations to Riverine, Estuarine, and Nearshore Flows Policy to address impacts from freshwater discharges and impediments to river flow (*Attachment 2*)

Description: During the October 2024 HEAP meeting, the HEAP recommended that the [Alterations to Riverine, Estuarine, and Nearshore Flows Policy](#) (Flow Policy) be updated to address impacts from freshwater discharges and impediments to river flow. In December 2024, the Council approved moving forward with the update. Since then, the Flow Policy working group has met three times to discuss edits. The HEAP will review the proposed revisions.

Work group volunteers: Wilson Laney, Stacie Crowe, David Web, Anne Deaton, and Matthew Kenworthy

AP Action: Discuss additional edits for the policy. Decide if the Flow Policy is ready for submission to the Council for approval.

3. Space industry activity impacts on habitat (*Attachment 3*)

Description: Council staff will summarize information on the space industry's activities based on presentations that the HEAP has received in the past, the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request submitted by the SAFMC, and comment letters submitted on proposed projects in the South Atlantic region. Staff will also review the potential consequences of space launches off the east coast of Florida and the upcoming development proposed by SpaceX. The HEAP will discuss what the long-term and short-term impacts could be on habitat and the surrounding fisheries.

AP Action: Make recommendations on how to gather information on space activity impacts on the surrounding habitat and any other appropriate next steps.

4. Habitat Conservation Division (HCD) Essential Fish Habitat consultations and information on beneficial use of dredging material projects (*Attachments 4a-4c*)

Description: Anne Deaton, NMFS Habitat Conservation Division (HCD), will review EFH consultations that HCD submitted in 2024. Then, the HEAP will receive a presentation on impacts on the surrounding habitat from beneficial use of dredging material projects from Jenny Davis, NCCOS staff. Finally, Council staff will review information gathered on site selection and best practices of beneficial use projects for use by HCD.

AP Action: Discuss possible recommendations for HCD consultations involving beneficial use of dredging material projects. Discuss upcoming projects that may be of concern.

5. Central Virginia Offshore Wind (CVOW) update on habitat created by wind farms and fish mortality during construction (*Attachment 5*)

Description: Brian Hooker, Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, will give a presentation on the impacts of offshore wind development on the surrounding habitat and the fish mortality incident that occurred in 2024 during construction of the CVOW project.

AP Action: Discuss and make recommendations for potential revisions to the SAFMC Energy Policy as appropriate.

6. Telecommunication subsea fiber cables – Rita Melo, Morgan Paris, and Laura Cherney, AECOM Technical Services, Inc. (*Attachment 6*)

Description: In October 2024, the HEAP received a presentation on wind farm footprints. The HEAP determined that there was very little knowledge on bioaccumulation and habitat impacts from cables and concrete mattresses. The HEAP requested a presentation on subsea fiber cables, since they have been in existence in the South Atlantic longer than wind farms. Information on the impacts of cables on habitat could be useful relative to the development of offshore wind farms. Rita Melo, Morgan Paris, and Laura Cherney from AECOM will review site selection, materials used, decommissioning details, bioaccumulation, and known long-term habitat impacts of subsea telecommunication cables.

AP Action: Discuss and make recommendations as appropriate.

7. Resilient Fisheries Projects overview and EFH project update (*Attachment 7*)

Description: In 2024 the Council received funding for projects to promote resilient fisheries. One of these projects' goals was to update the spatial distributions and habitat associations for species managed under the [Snapper Grouper](#), [Dolphin and Wahoo](#), and [Coastal Migratory Pelagics](#) Fishery Management Plans. Lara Klibansky will give a detailed update on this project and a brief summary of the other [Resilient Fisheries](#) projects.

AP Action: Provide recommendations and suggestions as appropriate.

8. Loss of Changing Ecosystems and Fisheries Initiative (CEFI)

Description: In 2024 the SEFSC received funding for the Climate and Ecosystem-Fisheries Initiative. Under the current U.S. administration these projects, which had been progressing, have lost financial and staff support. Matthew McPherson, NMFS SEFSC, will give a verbal review the SEFSC plans for CEFI projects and the future of climate readiness for the SEFSC.

AP Action: Discuss projects that would be appropriate to add to the 2025-2029 SAFMC Research and Monitoring Plan.

9. 2029 EFH 5-year review (*Attachment 8*)

Description: The HEAP will discuss how to integrate new life stage information to EFH designations under each FMP. The HEAP will also discuss how to integrate abundance information into the EFH designations. In so doing, the current EFH designations would move from level 1, which is based only on presence/absence, to level 2, which is based on the species' density. The HEAP will also discuss how to make use of an Integrated Ecosystem Assessment if one were to be developed by SEFSC. What should be the goals and objectives of an integrated ecosystem assessment to be most useful in the South Atlantic region?

AP Action: Review information and discuss how it can be integrated into the EFH designation by FMP.

10. Update on Outstanding Habitat Blueprint Tasks (*Attachment 9*)

Description: In December 2023, the HEAP was restructured and its role clarified with the approval of the Habitat Blueprint. The Habitat Blueprint also included a list of items for the HEAP to focus on, including an update of information presented on the website and the development of an outreach and communication plan. Kathleen Howington will review progress on the webpage for the Habitat Program. The Panel will review and provide feedback on the draft FAQ.

AP Action: Provide feedback on the FAQs.

11. Review HEAP Workplan 2025-2028 and future meetings (*Attachments 10a and 10b*)

Description: The Panel will discuss the short- and long-term goals for the HEAP.

AP Action: Approve the revised HEAP work plan for submission to the Council.
Approve the next meeting dates and methods.

12. Other Business

Public Comment

Adjourn