



THE SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

Habitat and Ecosystem Advisory Panel July 2025

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Chair
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Integration of Revised Food Webs and Connectivity Policy Information into EFH designations

- The top ten prey were identified for each FMP during the Food Web Policy Update.
- How do we integrate that information into the EFH definition of the user's guide?
- The workgroups plan is to identify 5 species to use as test cases:
 - Review literature for each species
 - Identify the top prey for those species,
 - Identify the habitat used by prey,
 - Identify the habitat used by predator (and if its different from the current definition)
 - Write up a draft prey dependency paragraph. (similar to the Gulf's EFH)
 - Develop best practices for other species and/or FMPs.

AP Action:

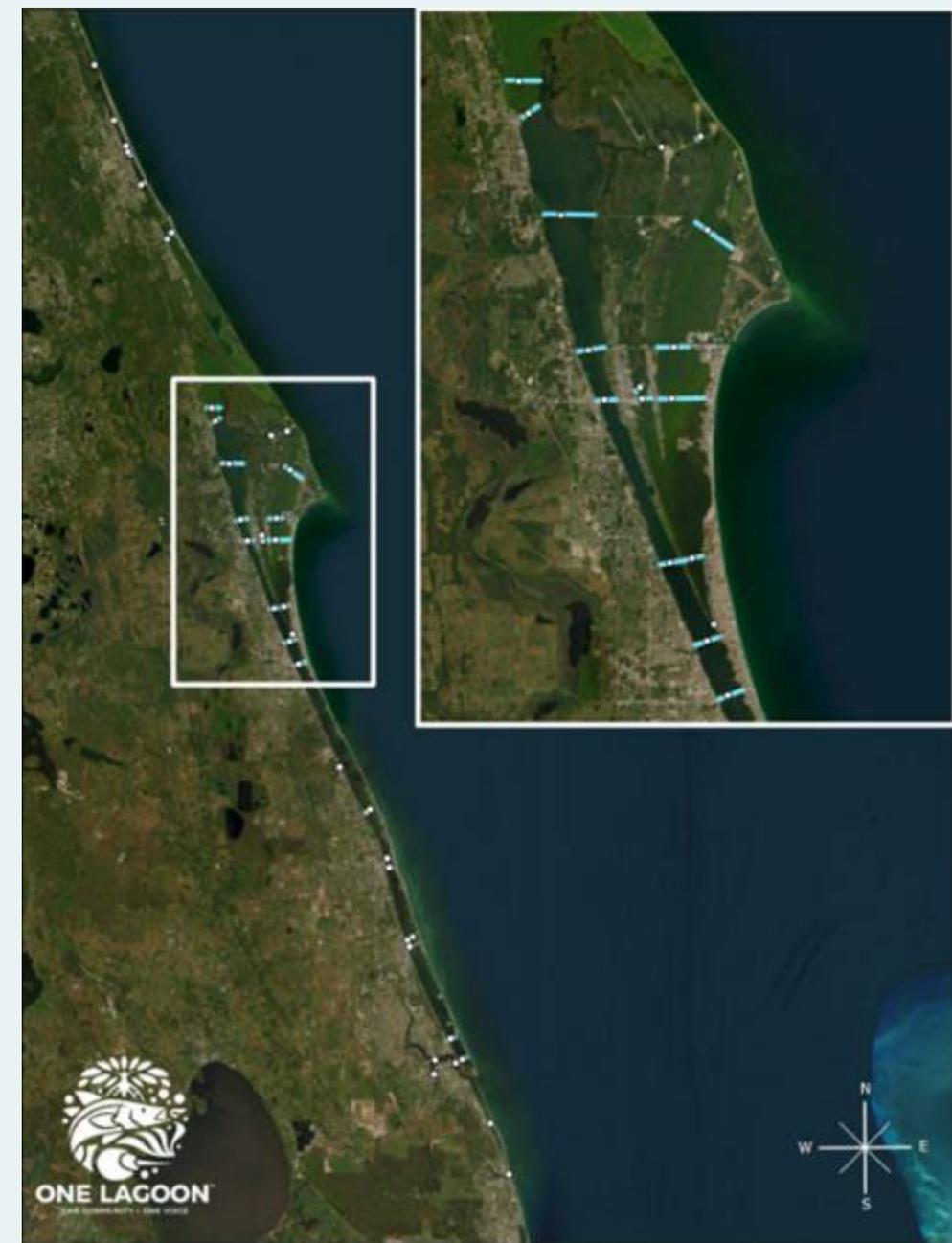
- The AP approved the proposed working plan and identified the following species to work with: Gray Triggerfish, Red Snapper, Dolphinfish, Golden Crab, and Gag Grouper.
- Additionally, Erin Spencer volunteered to join the working group.

Revisions to the “Alterations to Riverine, Estuarine and Nearshore Flows” policy to address threats to the Indian River Lagoon

- The working group has met three times in 2025
- Edits and additions are ongoing
- The plan is to clean up the draft policy in the Fall of 2025 and send out that version to the AP and water quality state representatives to get feedback before finishing specific policies.

AP Action:

- The group recommends adding in:
 - interbasin transfers of water,
 - redirection of water,
 - storm water outfall,
 - storm water collection/flow from development,
 - municipal wastewater discharge,
 - thermal discharge from wind farms,
 - salinity impacts from shallow water dredging.
- Stacie will write up the tide gate policy section. Wilson volunteers to write up the irrigation section. Cameron will address the stormwater conveyance and volunteered for the working group.



45 bridge - causeway or bridge corridors
Most of the earthen causeways in Brevard county

Space Industry Activity Impacts on Habitat

Given the current difficulty in attaining data on space debris, launches, and the impacts of the space industry on the surrounding region.

Staff reviewed all presentations, comment letters, and the FOIA associated with the council.

Staff requested recommendations for where more information could be gathered.

The AP recommended the following potential data sources for staff to reach out to:

- Wharf study project
- Previous biological opinions for other space developments
- Previous comment letters submitted by entities like USFWS and Florida State agencies
- California state records for Vandenberg Air Force Base
- Previous EAs for Cape Canaveral
- MMPA permits for launches for Vandenberg CA
- HBOI, Marine extension people from the University of Florida or Florida Tech
 - Dr. Cherebin may be a good contact
- Point Nemo
 - 1500 miles in South Pacific used for controlled deorbiting issues
 - Currents are slow
 - It's a remote location
 - We could review why this location was selected; could inform some points to consider
 - There should be an international agreement to be reviewed
- Florida DEP contacts for water management districts
- A literature review in the Indian River Lagoon on the impacts of pollutants
- Southern Environmental Law Center
- Erik Linstrum is a contact who worked for NASA – Paula will contact
- Could the council ask fishermen for known debris information
- Historical rocket/military monitoring in NC too
 - Wallops Island, Virginia, do they have any monitoring? – Brenden can reach out
 - The site used to have blast testing with permanent closures, similar to military operations
- SpaceX South Padre Island in Texas
- Cumberland Island, GA was going to get a spaceport until comment letters shut down development
- Water quality monitoring observational networks in the Indian River Lagoon
- Lisa Havel

Space Industry Impacts on Habitat

Additional topics of discussion:

- The AP highlighted that the propellants used are gelatinous and must be detonated during launch failures. This causes the pollutants to be spread everywhere and enter the ground and the surrounding water.
- The AP wants to analyze the number of failed launches and the detonation zone.
- The AP recommends adding maps, emphasizing the economic impacts, the potential impact for recreational fishermen who don't receive the Notice to Mariners (NOTMAR), and the large environmental impacts to comment letters.

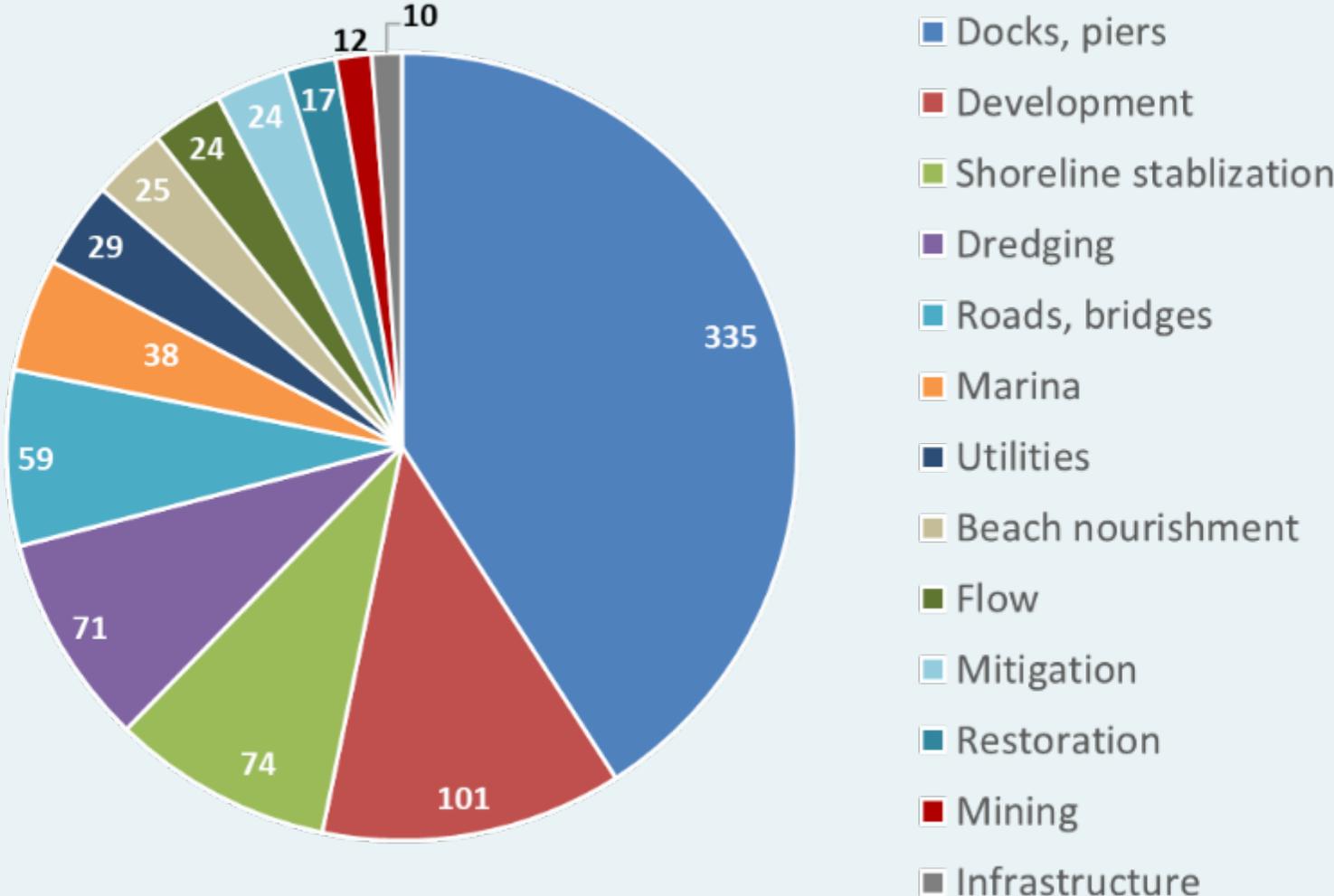
AP Action:

- The AP recommends that the SAFMC approve the gathering of data and the creation of a working group to analyze the data related to the frequency of launches, hazard zones, and space debris and their impacts on local fisheries.
- This could potentially lead to the development of a Policy on Space Developments in the South Atlantic Region.
- If it is determined that a policy is appropriate, then the AP would recommend involving the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC), Gulf of America Council, and Caribbean Councils

Review of Upcoming projects that require EFH consultations



Types of Projects Reviewed, FY 2024



South Atlantic Region FY 2022- 2024

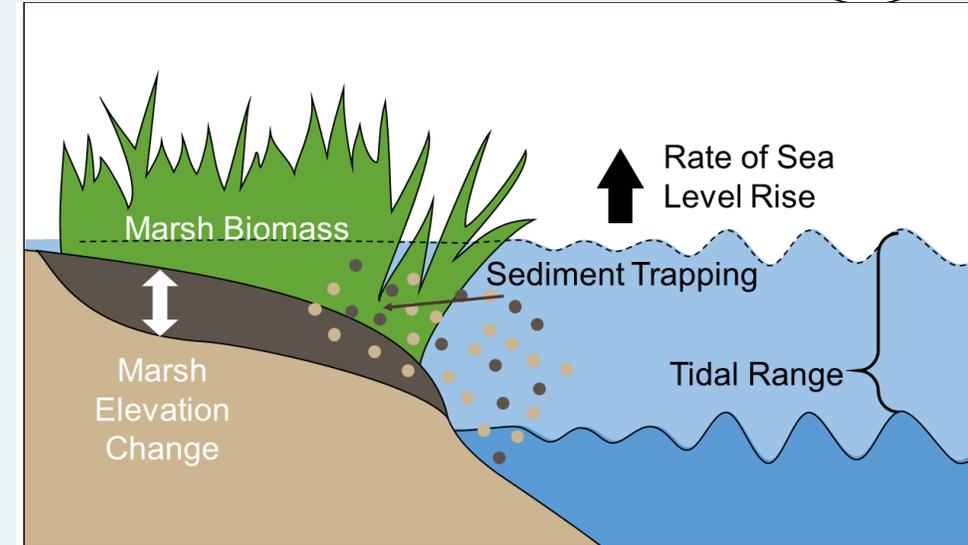
FY	Total
2022	832
2023	960
2024	849
2025	776

Beneficial Use of Dredging Material Projects

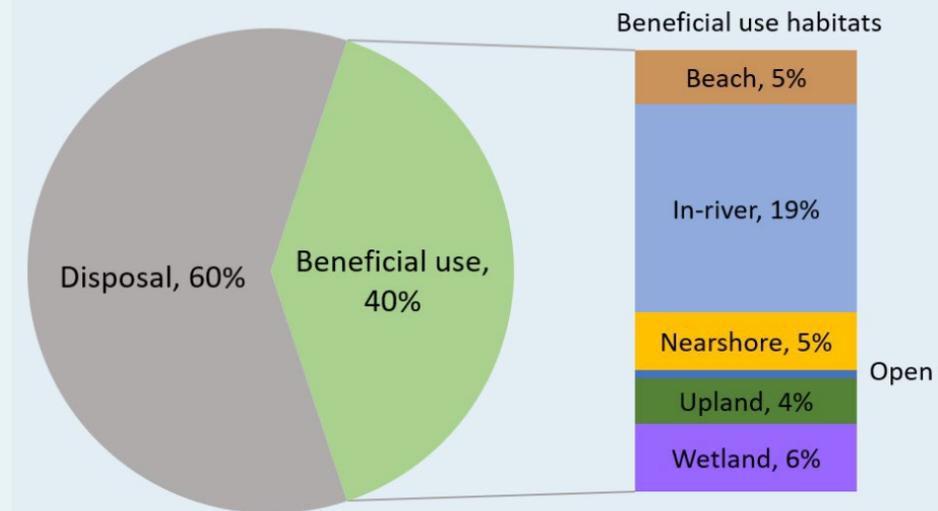


The AP received a presentation on impacts on the surrounding habitat from beneficial use of dredging material projects from Jenny Davis, National Center for Coastal Ocean Science (NCCOS) staff.

- These types of projects are increasing in number
- These projects can utilize permanent fixtures as well as temporary ones to add dredged sediment to areas where material has been lost
- Containment of the sediment needs to be thought through when creating these projects
- These projects have a good record of helping SAV habitats reestablish themselves
- Locations where these projects occur have fauna that is impacted
 - The organisms that are there before sediment addition are buried and lost, but colonization is rapid
 - The Fish and Wildlife Service has been tracking bird usage
- Beneficial use is a nature-based solution, but not necessarily a living shoreline
- The addition of sediment should not go over a certain threshold or height that is communicated to applicants
- There is a Manomet effort that was an Army Corps-supported effort to find good candidate sites for thin-layer placement
- There is a large effort to put out the spatially comprehensive map to identify good locations where marshes are struggling the most



US ACE dredge material placement, 1998-2021



Beneficial Use of Dredging Materials Projects

- In October 2024 HCD staff requested help gathering information on how to determine suitable project sites for beneficial use projects.
- Staff gathered the recommended sources and summarized the accumulation of information that had been gathered.
- The NC Coastal Habitat Protection update on thin layer placement should be a paper that HCD could assist with to help with consultations
 - Charlie Deaton will reach out to Anne at HCD for collaboration which should meet the goal of this request.
- The AP is concerned about limiting beneficial use to thin-layer placement. Beneficial use is an umbrella term and should stay that way. This should be noted during future conversations.

AP Action:

- Staff will reach out to Jocelyn and Xaymara Serrano about a presentation on the Port Everglades project and Manomet about a presentation on their projects.

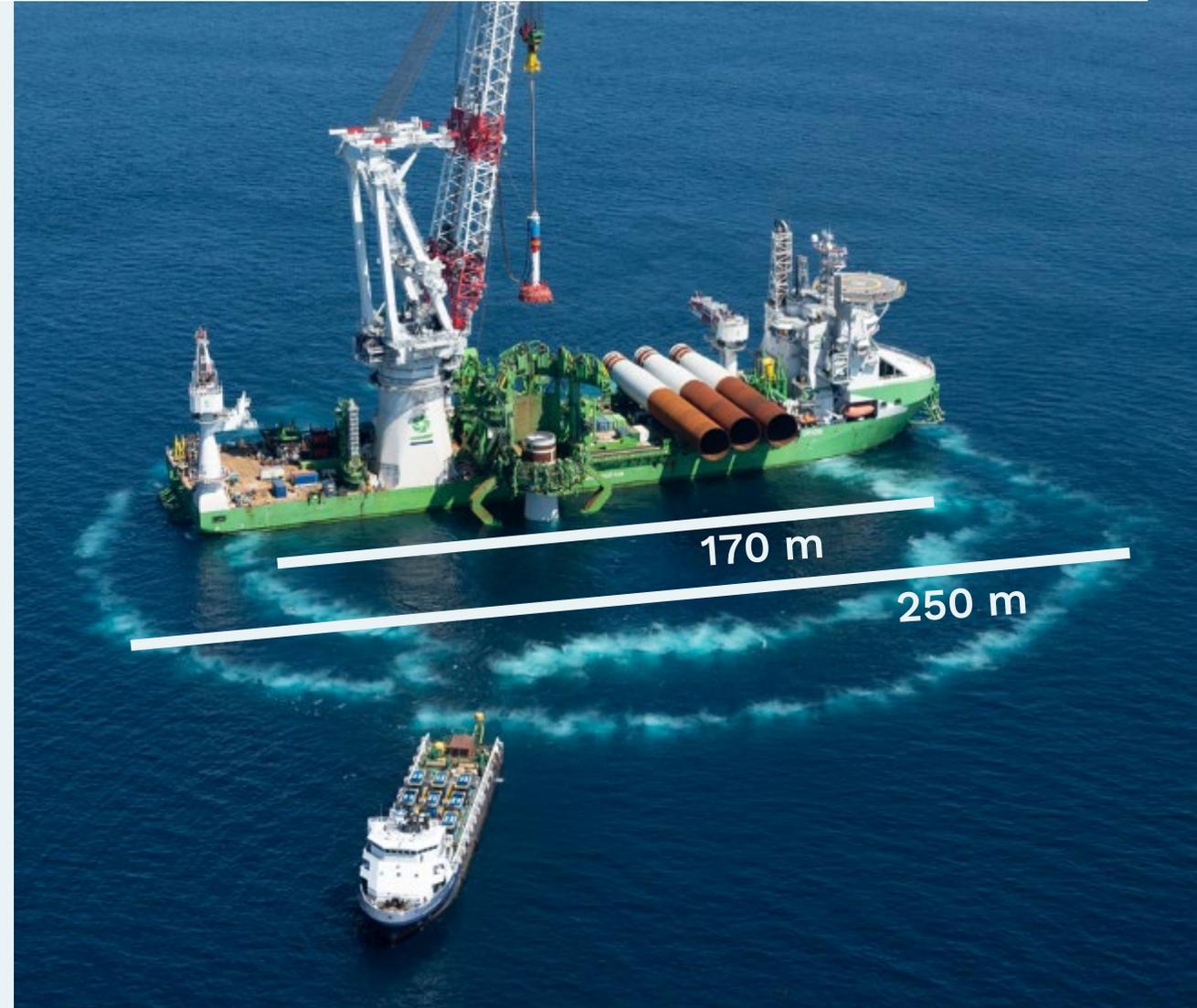


Central Virginia Offshore Wind (CVOW) update on habitat created by wind farms and fish mortality during construction

- Fish are getting caught in the bubble curtain, causing barotrauma and death.
 - It could also be explosions of bubbles because of construction.
- Fish without swim bladders could also be impacted.
- Currently, the most impacted species is croaker:
 - The swim bladder and the noise generation could be the issue
- What level is of concern? – Minimal since it's not all construction, It's just on the occasion when a bubble curtain is meant to be used and it seems to be highly seasonal
- Lots of uncertainty with ongoing development and experimenting with projects
- Laura Busch will have a pile driving study from the Navy in March 2026

AP Action:

- The AP recommends that BOEM investigate male versus female differences in Croaker death and try to identify ways to scare fish away before turning on bubble curtains full blast.



Telecommunication subsea fiber cables

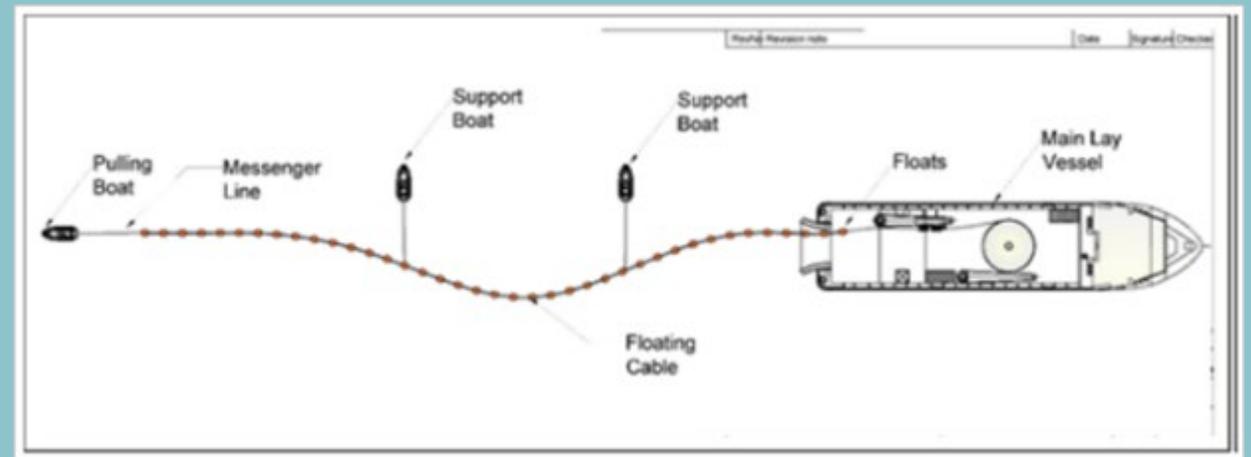
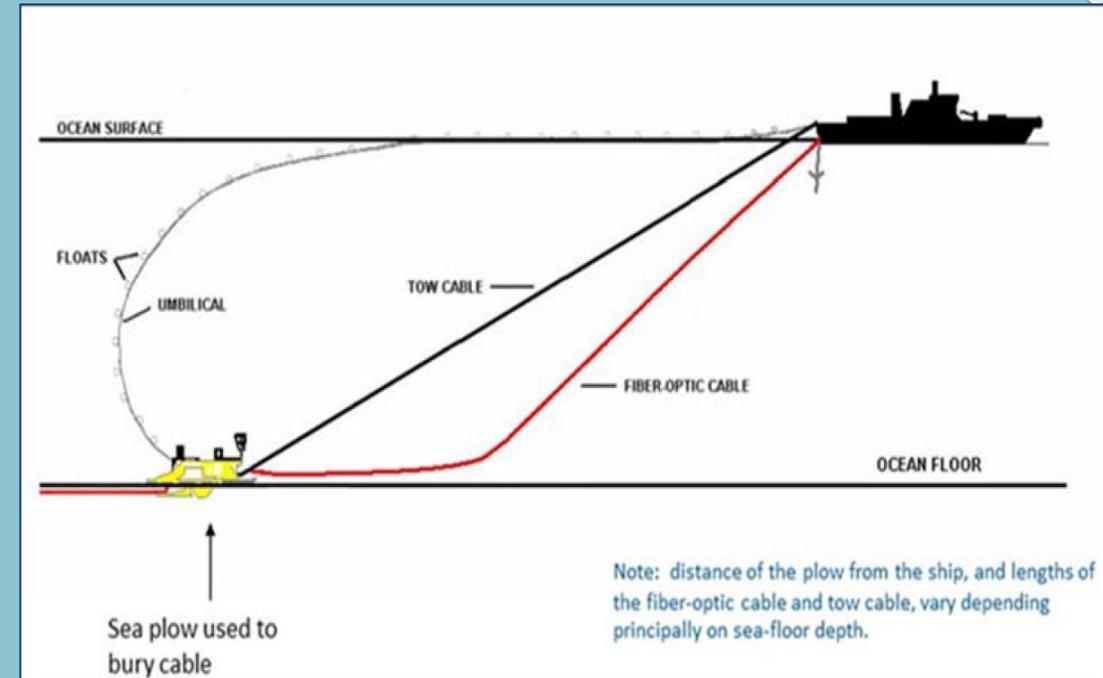
- The HEAP thought that information on the impacts of cables on habitat could be useful relative to the development of offshore wind farms.
- Currently, there is very little data on wind farm cables, but telecommunication cables could have more.
- Rita Melo, Morgan Paris, and Laura Cherney from AECOM, a consulting firm that lays down cables, reviewed site selection, materials used, decommissioning details, bioaccumulation, and known long-term habitat impacts of subsea telecommunication cables.

AP Discussion

- The AP was interested in the cable impacts on habitat and how they avoided hardbottom when laying cable. AECOM uses cameras, maps and plots to lay cables. They try to utilize existing routes and avoid hard-bottom.

AP Action:

- AP recommends that staff review the energy policy and the policies recommended in the presentation to make certain all are included.



Resilient Fisheries Projects

- Lara Klibansky gave a summary of the Council's resilient fishery projects
- One of these projects' goals is 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

AP action:

- The AP recommends adding a review of project 3 to the work plan.
- The AP recommends adding the analysis of smaller-sized fish trends and non-stationarity of populations and growth ranges to the research and monitoring list.

Timelines and Next Steps

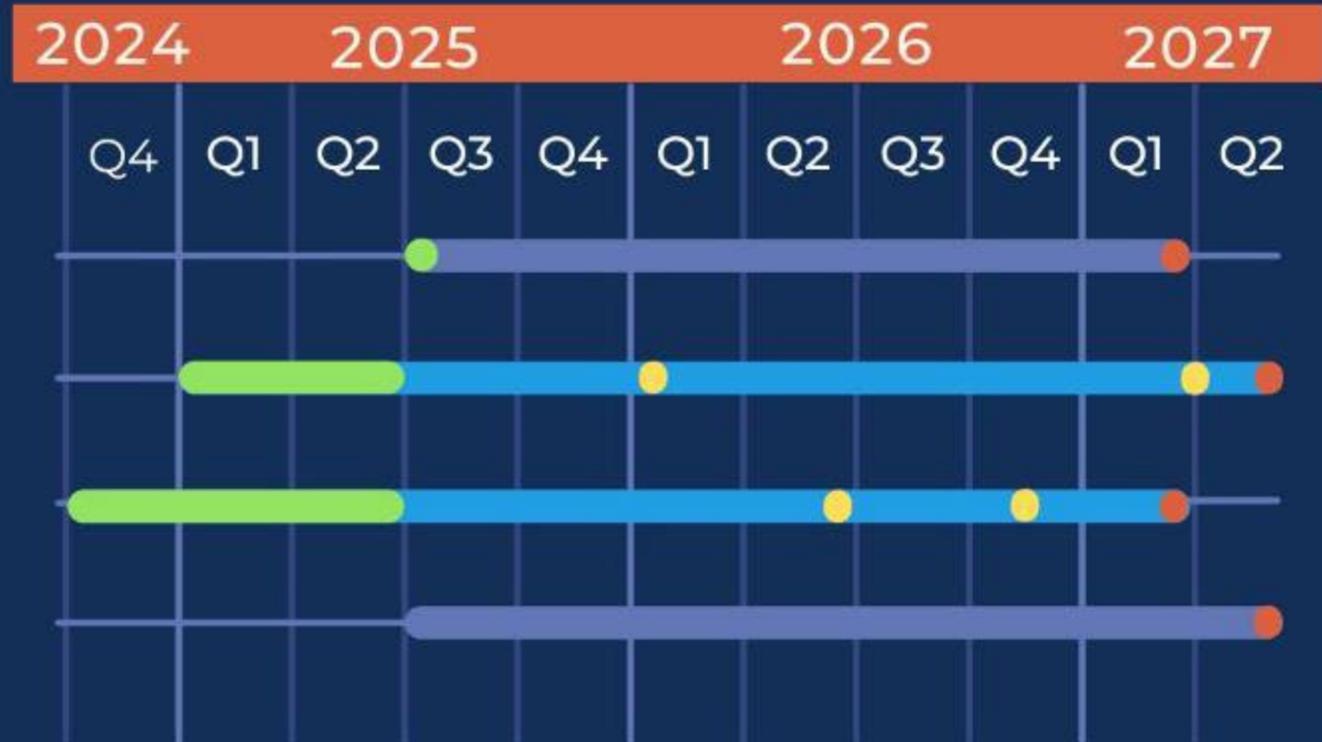
PROJECT

1: Readiness Review

2: Data-Limited Fishery

3: Distribution and EFH

4: Fishing Communities



- Project Progress
- SSC or AP Input
- Presentation to SAFMC
- Anticipated Timeline
- Established Timeline

Loss of Changing Ecosystems and fisheries Initiative Projects

- Matthew McPherson, NMFS SEFSC reviewed the CEFI projects and their status:
 - The downscale climate models are still being created.
 - Snapper grouper recruitment – they are trying to recover some work with limited staff.
 - Dolphin Management Strategy Evaluation – This is still ongoing; however, the future scenario enhancements will not be continuing.
 - Ecosystems status reports for all three regions – These will still progress just much slower. The ETA for the South Atlantic update is 2027.
 - Shrimp futures – This is still a priority but will occur more slowly. The future scenarios and stakeholder workshops will be scaled down.
 - Habitat-related work for coral bleaching has been discontinued
 - They have lost expertise in supporting ecosystem modeling for ecopath/ecosim at the Fish and Wildlife Research Institute.
- No Action: These projects are all underway or in the research and monitoring document



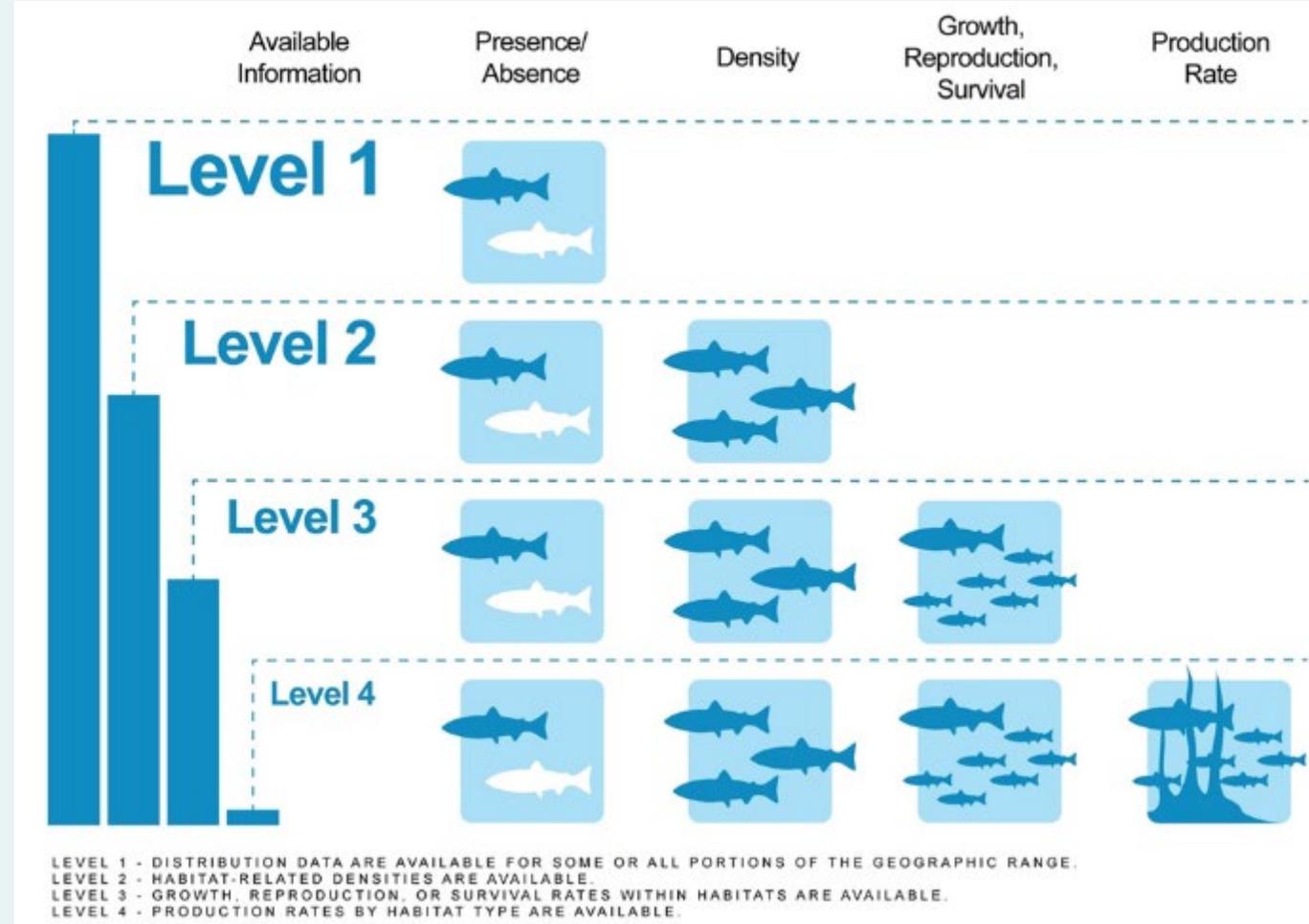
EFH 5 Year Review

EFH 5-year review plan:

- update life history by FMP,
- integrate findings from the resilient fisheries project 3,
- contact data providers for abundance data
- Use identified important habitats from the life history and food web updates, and collected data, to try and update EFH definitions to at least level 2

AP Action:

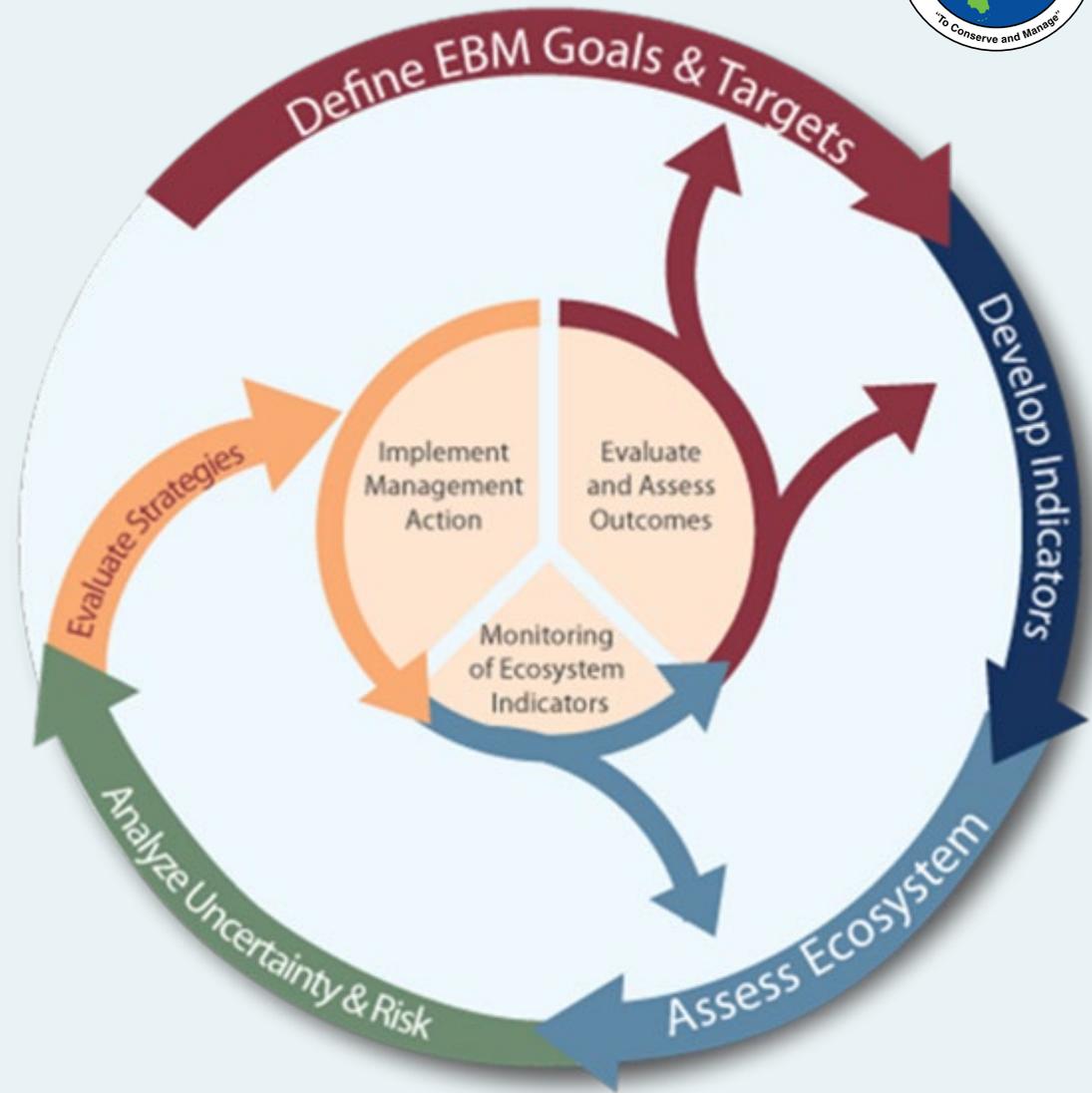
- First step is updating life history:
 - Matt Kenworthy will try to update the information listed in the user guide for the Shrimp FMP.
 - Cameron Luck will update Spiny Lobster.
 - The AP recommended reaching out to the Golden Crab and Spiny Lobster APs to help update the others.
 - A list of data providers will be created and forwarded to the HEAP for approval.



EFH Five-Year Review



- In October 2024 the HEAP requested that the SEFSC conduct an Integrated Ecosystem Assessment (IEA) for the South Atlantic Region
- In March of 2025 the SEFSC requested that the HEAP clarify what the goals and objectives of the IEA would be
- Staff reviewed how other regions have tackled an IEA and how it was integrated into management
- AP Action: Staff will request presentations for NE and Gulf Councils on the process of creating indicators, objectives, and outputs for an IEA.
- The AP also recommends reaching out to Chris Kelble with the IEA office.

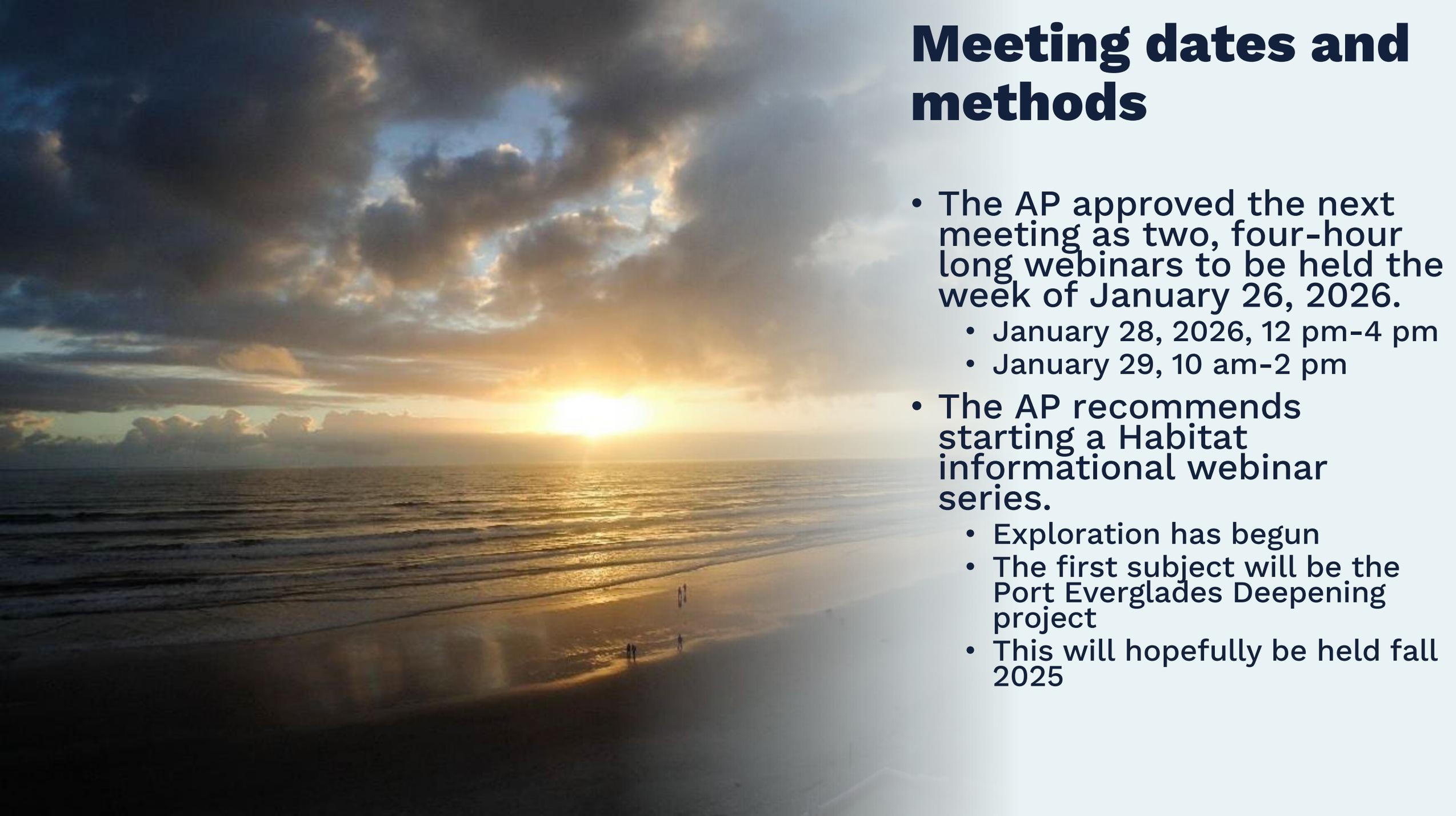


Communication Strategy

Staff reviewed issues with webpage development and the Frequently Asked Questions document.

- The HEAP discussed how best to add partner links to the website and approved moving forward with alphabetical links separated by sector.
- The FAQ question list should start with questions like:
 - The definition of habitat versus ecosystem
 - What is EFH?
 - Why is EFH identified?
 - What does EFH do?
 - How is EFH designated?
 - What habitats are EFH?
 - How is the council involved?
- The goal of the FAQ should be to take a person who is unfamiliar with habitat through a linear EFH crash course.
- The AP also recommends adding a list of common acronyms, linking to other websites for succinctness, and showing ways for the public to follow up with additional resources.





Meeting dates and methods

- The AP approved the next meeting as two, four-hour long webinars to be held the week of January 26, 2026.
 - January 28, 2026, 12 pm-4 pm
 - January 29, 10 am-2 pm
- The AP recommends starting a Habitat informational webinar series.
 - Exploration has begun
 - The first subject will be the Port Everglades Deepening project
 - This will hopefully be held fall 2025

Workplan

x	Future to be decided at the meeting
x	Underway
x	Finished

	Activity	Notes	Winter 2026	Summer 2026	Winter 2027	Summer 2027
Reoccurring Habitat AP ACTIVITIES	Communication strategy development	Currently developing FAQs	x	x	x	x
	Workplan update		x	x	x	x
	Annual report		x		x	
	Citizen science updates			x		x
	EFH Consultations updates	Anne Deaton and Manomet	x		x	
Council and AP requests	Space program impact on habitat: reaction to FOIA? Next steps?	Need information		X		
	Revise the Flow policy		x			
	Spawning SMZ working group report - could be habitat seminar	Chip Collier	x			
	Resilient Fisheries	Lara Klibansky (as needed)	x	x	x	x
	Integrated Ecosystem Assessment - goals and objectives	Requesting presentation from Gulf and Mid		x		
Projects with Potentially high habitat impact	Offshore energy updates	BOEM		X		
	Subsea transmission cables - could be habitat seminar	Sea Risk Solution?		x		
EFH 5 Year Review (complete December 2029)	Identify Higher abundance locations and (improving EFH tier structure)	Work Starting fall 2025		x	x	x
	Implement 2024 EFH Recommendations (food web working group)	Work Started Jan 2025	x	x	x	x
	additional life stage information for EFH clarification in each FMP	Work Starting Fall 2025		x	x	x
ITEMS PER MEETING:			8	11	8	7

Other business

Reef Keepers documentary was brought to the attention of the AP.

It focuses on three scientists' efforts to conserve and restore corals in southern Florida.

The council will schedule a seminar for 2026.



An underwater photograph of a rocky reef. In the foreground, a large, mottled brown and green fish is swimming towards the right. The reef is covered in various corals and sponges in shades of pink, orange, and white. The water is clear and blue. The text "Thank you" is overlaid in the center in a white, bold, sans-serif font.

Thank you