



Snapper Grouper • Coastal Migratory Pelagics • Dolphin Wahoo

# Updating Distributions & Essential Fish Habitat

## Resilient Fisheries Project Overview

### Description

Understanding and predicting environmentally driven shifts in species distribution is important for effective fisheries management. This project aims to improve our understanding of how ecosystem change affects where key fish species are found in the Southeastern United States. Using state-of-the-art spatiotemporal modeling techniques this project will explore indicators of environmental change in the spatial distribution and habitat associations for the fish and fisheries managed under the SAFMC's Snapper-Grouper, Coastal Migratory Pelagics and Dolphin Wahoo FMPs. The updated species distributions and Essential Fish Habitat descriptions will inform Council decision-making for more resilient fisheries management and governance. Project outcomes will also inform evaluations of existing governance structures, including cooperative and interjurisdictional governance approaches.

### Progress Updates

- The project team continued gathering and reviewing available data sources to inform the development of the single-species and joint-species models.
- The Project Oversight Team (OT) met in November to receive a project update and provide feedback on project progress, including data collection and planned analysis.
- The contractors are developing single-species models for snapper-grouper and pelagic species. The initial results will be presented to the OT at their next meeting in Feb. 2026 for feedback.
- Following a period of revision and continued development, the models will be reviewed at the Oct. 2026 SSC meeting.

### Project Team

*Contractors:* Jie Cao, NCSU (Co-PI); Janet Nye, UNC IMS (Co-PI), Seungyeon Jade Hong, UNC IMS

*Oversight Team:* Kathleen Howington, Myra Brouwer, Tori Kentner (MAFMC), Simen Kaalstad (ASMFC), Chip Collier, Lara Klibansky

### Project Timeline

**2024**

- ✓ **Oct.** - Request for proposals released.
- ✓ **Dec.** - Proposals reviewed and contractor selected.

**2025**

- ✓ **Jan.** - Project Oversight Team formed
- ✓ **Mar.** - Begin quarterly Project Oversight Team meetings with contractors
- ✓ **Apr.** - Begin data gathering, processing and model development

**2026**

- Feb.** - Project Oversight Team review of initial models
- Oct.** - SSC review of spatiotemporal models

**2027**

- Feb.** - Presentation to Habitat and Ecosystem AP
- Mar.** - Presentation to Council; Submit final report

Implementation will begin with the Council reviewing and considering the approval of project outcomes and recommendations.