

PR-Related Updates for September 2014 SAFMC Council Meeting

ESA-Listed Species

Petition to List Nassau Grouper Under the ESA

- A proposed rule to list Nassau grouper as a Threatened under the ESA published September 2, 2014 (79 FR 51929).
- NMFS determined listing was appropriate because spawning aggregations have been reduced in size and number due to fishing pressure and existing management measures are inadequate to protect these aggregations.
- There is a 120-day comment period that ends on December 31, 2014.
- During the comment period NMFS is seeking information on spawning aggregations, threats to the species, and conservation efforts aimed at protecting Nassau grouper.

Petition to List Queen Conch Under the ESA

- NMFS is conducting a status report for the queen conch
- A determination on whether or not listing is warranted will be completed by November 3, 2014.
- If proposed listing is warranted, a 60 day comment period would follow and Public Hearings would be held to solicit information.

Atlantic Sturgeon

- ASMFC, in cooperation with the NMFS and states, is initiating a stock assessment for Atlantic sturgeon that is anticipated to be complete in 2017.

Atlantic Sturgeon Critical Habitat

- NMFS has made preliminary determinations regarding Atlantic sturgeon critical habitat and is now evaluating the potential economic impacts of a critical habitat designation.
- NMFS is working with the Department of Defense and the U.S. Coast Guard to evaluate any national security impacts related to Atlantic sturgeon critical habitat designation.
- The Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) and the Delaware Riverkeeper Network sent us a 60-day Notice of Intent to sue for failure to designate Atlantic sturgeon critical habitat. We are currently in discussions with NRDC to determine if we can come to a mutual agreement outside of the litigation process.

North Atlantic Right Whale Critical Habitat

- NMFS has prepared a proposed rule to revise North Atlantic right whale critical habitat. The draft Federal Register notice is in the clearance process.

Loggerhead Sea Turtle Critical Habitat

- NMFS designated critical habitat for loggerhead sea turtles in marine waters on July 10, 2014 (79 FR 39855). Fisheries managed by the SAFMC fall within the geographic scope of the Northwest Atlantic loggerhead distinct population segment (NWA DPS).
- The critical habitat includes 5 different habitat types: nearshore reproductive, winter, breeding, constricted migratory, and Sargassum habitat. NMFS examined whether reinitiation of existing consultations for federal fisheries will be required as a result of this critical habitat designation (including those managed

wholly or jointly by the SAFMC: Coral, Coral Reef, and Live/Hardbottom; Dolphin Wahoo; Golden Crab; Snapper Grouper; Shrimp; Coastal Migratory Pelagics; and Spiny Lobster). It does not appear that those fishery activities will adversely affect any of the critical habitat features identified for the designated critical habitat.

Marine Mammals

2015 List of Fisheries (LOF)

- MMPA 2015 LOF was published. The comment period closes on 9/24/2014. No major changes proposed for SE fisheries.

Pelagic Longline Take Reduction Team (PLTRT)

- The PLTRT convened a webinar in June 2014 to discuss new research, changes in fishing practices, and other related updates. An in-person meeting was recommended by the PLTRT for late winter/early spring 2015.

Bottlenose Dolphin Take Reduction Plan and Team (BDTRP/T)

- The BDTRP proposed rule to amend the BDTRP to reduce bottlenose dolphin serious injuries and mortalities in Virginia pound net gear published on April 17, 2014. The comment period closed on June 2, 2014; NMFS is drafting the final rule.
- NMFS is planning to convene the BDTRT for a webinar meeting in Spring/Summer 2015 to discuss conservation measures needed to help the BDTRP meet its mandated goals

Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Plan (ALWTRP)

- The vertical line reduction final rule for trap/pot fisheries under the ALWTRP published on June 27, 2014. Gear marking requirements and gear modifications applicable in the Southeast are effective as of November 1, 2014.