

PROTECTED RESOURCES COMMITTEE
Charleston, SC
September 19, 2013

FINAL REPORT

The Protected Resources Committee meeting commenced with an update from Jennifer Lee, SERO Protected Resources Division, on two ongoing formal consultations for fisheries managed by the South Atlantic Council. Currently a formal consultation is underway for the Coastal Migratory Pelagics (CMP) fishery, triggered by the listing of the Carolina and South Atlantic distinct population segments (DPSs) of Atlantic sturgeon as endangered under the ESA in 2012. The biological opinion is in progress and additional information will be available on the biological opinion at the December 2013 meeting. Additionally, there is an ongoing consultation for the Southeast Shrimp Fisheries (including both Gulf and South Atlantic regions) to examine the effects of skimmer trawls without Turtle Excluder Devices (TEDs). The analysis for this biological opinion is the same as for the 2012 biological opinion, and the draft biological opinion is under review. These briefings were provided in accordance with a request from the South Atlantic Council in June 2013 for SERO Protected Resources Division to provide the Committee with an update on any ongoing formal consultation and record input from Committee members for consideration during the consultation.

Next, the Committee received a presentation from Barb Zoodsma (SERO Protected Resources Division) on North Atlantic right whale biology, behavior and other biological information used in right whale protection and determining entanglement risk from fisheries. Following, Jessica Powell (SERO Protected Resources Division) provided a presentation on the Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Plan. The presentation included information about current and proposed gear regulations, and details about the co-occurrence model used by the Take Reduction Team and NMFS Protected Resources Division to determine specific gear regulations intended to reduce risk of entanglements.

Council staff provided a brief presentation on the ESA Working Group, a joint working group to make recommendations on increasing transparency and improving confidence in ESA consultations on fishery management plans. Final recommendations from the Working Group are expected to be available in October 2013 and will be presented by staff to the Committee in December 2013.

The Committee was briefed on additional items of interest. Jennifer Lee (SERO PRD) informed the Committee on the outcome of the status review of river herring, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service staff provided an update on the status review for American Eel, proposed designation of critical habitat for loggerhead turtles, and the Atlantic sturgeon stock assessment in progress through the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC).