

**SUMMARY REPORT
PROTECTED RESOURCES COMMITTEE**

**Myrtle Beach, SC
September 15, 2016**

The Protected Resources Committee was presented updates by Jennifer Lee, National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) Protected Resources Division, Dr. Wilson Laney, United States Fish and Wildlife Service, and Bob Beal, Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission.

NMFS Updates and Agenda Items

NMFS responded to a request to list the lesser electric ray under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) in a 12-month finding. NMFS found the request did not meet listing requirements for the ESA; specifically the NMFS did not find evidence of a declining population size or of any of the ESA listing factors contributing to endangerment of the species. NMFS is working on a proposed rule/Draft Environmental Impact Statement to require turtle excluder devices in skimmer trawls. The proposed rule is scheduled to be published in the Federal Register by December 15 2016. For the 2017 MMPA List of Fisheries NMFS is proposing to add the Florida Keys stock of bottlenose dolphins to list of stocks incidentally killed or injured in the Category III Florida spiny lobster trap/pot fishery, but there are no proposed reclassifications for South Atlantic Region. The critical habitat designation for Atlantic sturgeon will potentially be completed late May or early June 2017, and Alabama shad should have a 12-month listing finding completed in January 2017. The snapper grouper biological opinion is in review and should be finalized in the next two to three weeks. Nassau grouper were listed as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act due to decline in the population abundance, targeting the species at spawning aggregations (not in US), and limited enforcement in some foreign countries. Next steps include determining whether and where critical habitat should be designated and if a 4(d) rule is needed.

Atlantic Sturgeon Update

The stock assessment for Atlantic sturgeon is on schedule to be completed in 2017. A new type of model that uses acoustic tagging data is being used to assess Atlantic sturgeon. The model will include three different levels: coastwide, distinct population segments (DPS), and river system. The data will include information through 2015. The stock assessment for Atlantic sturgeon should be completed prior to the 5-year review of the sturgeon listing.

Red Knot Critical Habitat

Red knot critical habitat is currently scheduled to be completed in September 2017 although the schedule may change due to the filing of two notices of intent, if potential litigation is forthcoming.

The Committee did not vote on any motions as recommendations to the Council:

DIRECTION TO STAFF:

There were no directions to staff.

DRAFT

DRAFT Timing and Task Motion: