

FINAL
SUMMARY REPORT - PROTECTED RESOURCES COMMITTEE
March 3, 2015
St Simons, GA

Members

Wilson Laney, Chair
Anna Beckwith
Michelle Duval

LT Morgan Fowler
Ben Hartig
Jessica McCawley

The Committee adopted the agenda and approved the minutes of the December 2014 meeting.

Update from SERO Protected Resources Division

Jennifer Lee of the Protected Resources Division briefed the Committee on protected resources-related topics in the South Atlantic, including an update on the status of the Section 7 Consultation underway for the Coastal Migratory Pelagics (CMP) fishery. The final biological opinion is under review and expected to be finished by the June 2015 meeting. Additionally, Dr. Wilson Laney noted that the GARFO has drafted critical habitat for the northern three DPSs of Atlantic sturgeon, which should be published soon. The draft is being reviewed by the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission's Atlantic Sturgeon Technical Committee.

Comment on Advanced Notice of Rulemaking and Request for Information on Corals

On January 13, 2015, NMFS published an advanced notice of rulemaking and request of information on corals. Council staff reviewed the notice and provided a draft comment letter to submit on behalf of the Council to note existing management measures in place that serve as conservation actions, and to highlight the Council's proactive role in coral protection. Council members can submit edits to the draft letter to Kari MacLauchlin by Wednesday, March 11, 2015. The deadline to submit comments on the notice and request is March 16, 2015.

ESA/MSA Integration Agreement

In January 2015, NMFS released a policy directive on ESA/MSA Integration that includes guidance on how to improve the involvement of regional management councils in the ESA section 7 consultation process. Council staff provided an overview of the policy directive on ESA/MSA Integration and a draft list of items to be included in the Integration Agreement. The expected timeline would be to get the agreement in place by the end of 2015. Council staff will continue to work with SERO PRD Staff to develop a draft document for review.

Proposed Modifications to the North Atlantic Large Whale Critical Habitat

On February 20, 2015, NMFS published a proposed rule to revise the critical habitat for North Atlantic Right Whales. Barb Zoodsma, PRD staff, reviewed the proposed modifications to the critical habitat in the South Atlantic region. The modified critical habitat is proposed in response to new information and to improve protection of calving grounds.

Marine Mammal Authorization Program

Monica Smit-Brunello (NOAA GC) addressed a question that came up during Habitat Committee about how NMFS issues Incidental Harassment permits to federal agencies but not to commercial fishing operations. Fishing operations fall under the Marine Mammal Authorization Program (MMAP), under which the black sea bass pot fishery is listed as a Category II. Marine mammal takes in fisheries are managed through the MMAP.

American Eel

Dr. Wilson Laney briefed the Committee on the USFWS status review of American Eel. USFWS have finished the review and drafted the findings. The final outcome is under review and should be released soon. USFWS Regions and NMFS staff have been briefed.

The Committee did not pass any motions.