

SUMMARY REPORT - PROTECTED RESOURCES COMMITTEE

September 15, 2014

Charleston Marriott

Charleston, SC

Members

Wilson Laney, Vice-Chair

Michelle Duval

Anna Beckwith

LT Morgan Fowler

Mark Brown

The agenda was adopted, and the minutes of the June 2014 meeting were approved.

Final Determination for ESA Listings for Coral Species

On September 10, 2014, the final rule was published in the federal register (available at: <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2014-09-10/pdf/2014-20814.pdf>) to list 20 coral species as Threatened under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). The listing will be effective on October 10, 2014. Five species are in the Southeast and Caribbean, in addition to the two *Acropora* species (elkhorn and staghorn coral), which will remain listed as Threatened under this determination.

Jennifer Moore of the Protected Resources Division (PRD) at the Southeast Regional Office (SERO) provided an overview of the listing to the Committee. Due to the variation of threats and environment, the species were analyzed individually to determine each listing. Elkhorn and staghorn coral were listed as Threatened in 2006, and will remain as Threatened under this determination. Three star corals, which are considered framework builders for reefs in the Caribbean, are now listed as Threatened. These include lobed star coral, mountainous star coral, and boulder star coral. Additionally, pillar coral and rough cactus coral are listed as Threatened.

New regulations for conservation and critical habitat may be specified. A draft recovery plan is available as well. The PRD has re-initiated consultation for South Atlantic fishery management plans. Coastal Migratory Pelagics and Snapper Grouper will be informal consultations. The Spiny Lobster consultation will be a formal consultation.

Proposed Threatened Listing for Nassau Grouper

Jennifer Lee of Protected Resources at SERO briefed the Committee on the proposed listing for Nassau Grouper. If the listing goes final, additional regulations in the South Atlantic are not anticipated. The Committee reviewed a draft comment letter responding to the proposed listing and Council members can submit edits and suggestions to Kari MacLauchlin via email. The Committee will finalize the letter over email.

Status Review of American Eel

Wilson Laney, Committee Vice-Chair, provided an update on the American Eel status review and the expected schedule for the review. The biological report on the species is under review by the Status Review Core Team, and a revised report will be sent out for peer review on October 1, 2014. The final biological report is scheduled to be published in early 2015. The deadline for the finding of the status review is September 30, 2015.

There will be a webinar for states, tribes and other interested parties on October 8, 2014, to provide additional input and receive a briefing on the biological report for American Eel.

Atlantic Sturgeon Stock Assessment

Wilson Laney briefed the Committee on the stock assessment of Atlantic Sturgeon by the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission. The assessment has been delayed until 2017 to allow the Stock Assessment Sub-Committee time to analyze the data from acoustically-tagged sturgeon to be included in the assessment.

Discussion on Future Role and Direction for Protected Resources Committee

Council staff provided background and former goals of the Committee, and requested input on committee goals, overlapping topics (e.g., biological opinions), routine information, and other topics/roles for the Committee. The Committee provided direction to staff on current goals of the committee and on future Committee meetings and agenda topics. These included: updates on ongoing formal consultations; moving forward with an MOU for the Council and Regional Office; updates on petitions and status reviews; discussion on new research on protected species genetics or minimizing fishery interactions; and updates on the Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Team activities. Council staff will provide draft committee goals for the next Committee meeting.

The Protected Resources Committee did not approve any motions.