

Final Summary Report
Protected Resources Committee
March 4, 2014
Hilton Savannah DeSoto
Savannah, GA

Members

David Cupka, Chair
Wilson Laney, Vice-Chair
Anna Beckwith
Michelle Duval
LT Morgan Fowler
John Jolley

The agenda was adopted, and the minutes of the December 2013 meeting were approved.

Ongoing ESA Consultations

The Committee received an update from Andy Herndon, SERO Protected Resources Division, on two ongoing formal consultations for fisheries managed by the South Atlantic Council. Currently 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 draft biological opinion is in the last round of internal review, and will tentatively be finalized at the end of March 2014. Additionally, 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 currently in progress. 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.

ESA Working Group Update

Council staff provided a brief presentation on the final report and recommendations from the ESA Working Group, a joint working group to make recommendations on increasing transparency and improving confidence in ESA consultations on fishery management plans. The recommendations were reviewed by the Marine Fisheries Advisory Committee (MAFAC) in December 2013 and by the Council Coordination Committee (CCC) in February 2014. The Working Group recommends that NMFS Headquarters provide guidance to the Regional Administrator and Councils on agreements for Council involvement in the consultation process. Council staff will keep the Committee updated on status of HQ guidance and next steps in the process.

Status Review for American Eel

Dr. Wilson Laney, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) and FWS Southeast Region representative on the Status Review Core Team, provided an update on the Status Review for American Eel. The American Eel Status Review is being conducted by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), and is

due by September 30, 2015. The FWS has assembled a Core Team of staff from all the FWS regions where American Eel occurs (Regions 2, 3, 4 and 5; see the FWS national web site for the map of Regions) to conduct the review. At present, no workshops are planned in association with the Status Review; rather the Core Team is reaching out to those with expertise on the American Eel migration and marine habitat issues. However, workshops will be considered for new climate change information and how that may impact the American Eel spawning grounds. Dr. Laney provided contact information for the status review.

Atlantic Sturgeon Stock Assessment

Dr. Laney provided an update to the Committee on the Atlantic Sturgeon stock assessment being conducted by the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC). The ASMFC Atlantic Sturgeon Technical Committee has appointed a Stock Assessment Subcommittee (SAS) to conduct the benchmark stock assessment. The ASMFC held a data workshop in 2013 to discuss the Atlantic Sturgeon data sets which are available and would be useful for conducting the assessment. Terms of reference for the benchmark assessment were drafted, reviewed by the Technical Committee, and approved by the ASMFC Sturgeon Management Board at their February 6, 2014 meeting. Dr. Laney provided contact information for the stock assessment.

Red Knot Listing Proposal

The Committee received an update on the proposed listing for Red Knot by Dr. Wilson Laney. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service proposed listing the Rufa Red Knot September 30, 2013, as threatened. Comments on the proposed rule were due by November 29, 2013. As of March 3, 2014, there were 563 comments received on the Proposed Rule and the FWS is in the process of reviewing them. The FWS anticipates that Proposed Critical Habitat for the species will be published in late spring or early summer. The Final Rule needs to publish by September 30, 2014. The FWS Northeast Region has the lead for this species. Dr. Laney provided contact information for the listing proposal.

Sea Turtle Critical Habitat (terrestrial beach)

The Committee received an update on the proposed critical habitat for loggerhead sea turtles from Dr. Wilson Laney. The economic analysis of the proposed Critical Habitat was completed and was made available for review, with comments due by September 16, 2013. A total of 398 comments had been received/posted on the proposed Critical Habitat and/or the economic analysis as of March 3, 2014. Final Critical Habitat for the NW Atlantic Loggerhead should be published by July 1, 2014. Dr. Laney provided contact information for the proposed critical habitat.

The Protected Resources Committee did not approve any motions.