



Snapper Grouper • Coastal Migratory Pelagics • Dolphin Wahoo

Updating Distributions & Essential Fish Habitat

Resilient Fisheries Project Overview

Description

Understanding and predicting environmentally driven shifts in species distribution is important for effective fisheries management. This project aims to improve our understanding of how ecosystem change affects where key fish species are found in the Southeastern United States. Using state-of-the-art spatiotemporal modeling techniques this project will explore indicators of environmental change in the spatial distribution and habitat associations for the fish and fisheries managed under the SAFMC's Snapper-Grouper, Coastal Migratory Pelagics and Dolphin Wahoo FMPs. The updated species distributions and Essential Fish Habitat descriptions will inform Council decision-making for more resilient fisheries management and governance. Project outcomes will also inform evaluations of existing governance structures, including cooperative and interjurisdictional governance approaches.

Progress Updates

- The core methods work for the project is largely complete, and the team can now combine survey types into a single, reliable picture of reef fish distribution and abundance.
- Attention has shifted to broadening the approach to more species and finalizing the remaining products.
- The Project Oversight Team (OT) met in August and received an overview of the initial modeling results and provided feedback.
- The project teams efforts are now focused on preparing for the October 2026 SSC meeting, where the SSC will review the model development process, final model selection and initial findings.

Project Team

Contractors: Jie Cao, NCSU (Co-PI); Seungyeon Jade Hong, UNC IMS; Janet Nye, UNC IMS (Co-PI)

Oversight Team: Myra Brouwer, Chip Collier, Kathleen Howington, Simen Kaalstad (ASMFC), Tori Kentner (MAFMC), Lara Klibansky

Project Timeline

2024

- ✓ **Oct.** - Request for proposals released.
- ✓ **Dec.** - Proposals reviewed and contractor selected.

2025

- ✓ **Jan.** - Project Oversight Team formed
- ✓ **Mar.** - Begin quarterly Project Oversight Team meetings with contractors
- ✓ **Apr.** - Begin data gathering, processing and model development

2026

- ✓ **Feb.** - Project Oversight Team review of initial models

Oct. - SSC review of spatiotemporal models

2027

Feb. - Presentation to Habitat and Ecosystem AP

Mar. - Presentation to Council; Submit final report

Implementation will begin with the Council reviewing and project outcomes and recommendations.