



Chip Collier
SAFMC Staff



Spawning Special Management Zones (SSMZ) Evaluation Progress

March 2026 Update



SSMZs in Amendment 36

Purpose and Need

- Protect important spawning habitatto enhance spawning.
- Reduce bycatch and bycatch mortality ... including speckled hind and warsaw grouper.
- Prevent overfishing and achieve optimum yield (National Standard 1).
- Achieve conservation goals while minimizing to the extent practicable negative social and economic effects.



Credit: FWC

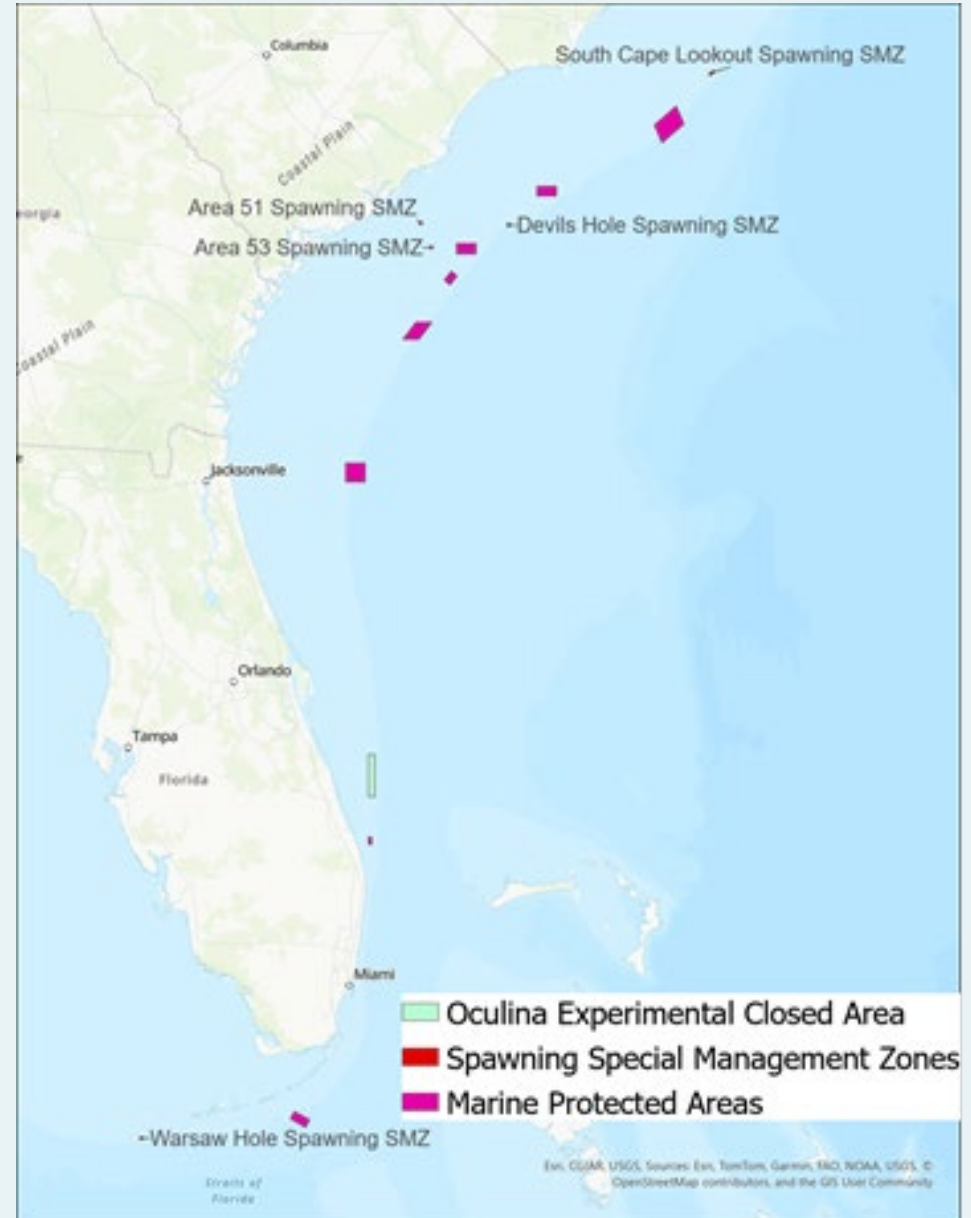
SSMZ Regulations

- Prohibit fishing for, harvest of, and/or possession of Snapper Grouper Species
- Transit provisions:
 - Allows possession if gear stowed properly
 - No anchoring by fishing vessels
- Sunset clause for natural reefs



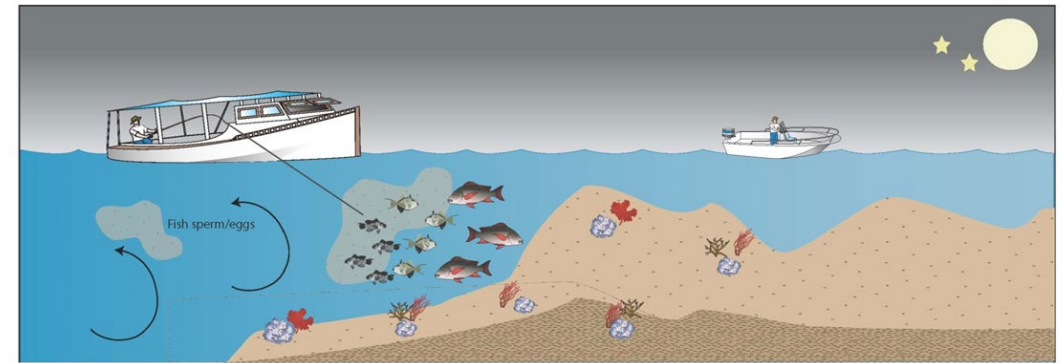
SSMZ and Locations

- Relatively small protected areas ~5 sq miles or less
- Natural Reefs
 - South Cape Lookout
 - Devils Hole/Georgetown Hole
 - Warsaw Hole
- Artificial Reefs
 - Area 51
 - Area 53



Site Information

- Natural Sites
 - Multi-species spawning areas
 - Target promontory locations
- Artificial Reefs
 - Designed as protected areas in application
 - Created before in SSMZs were regulated
 - Sandy areas prior to reef placement
- All areas have been mapped

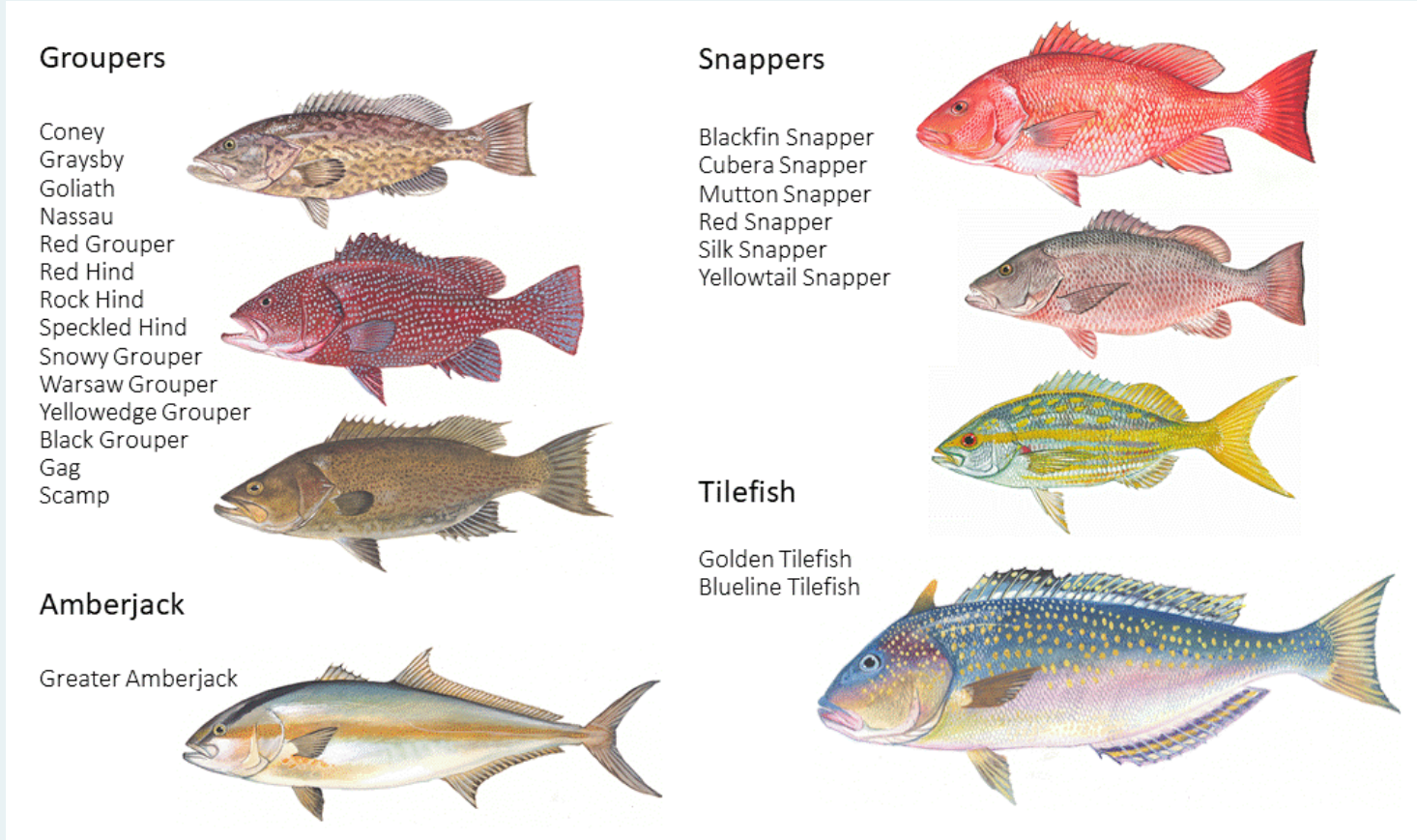


Spawning Aggregations & Larval Transport around Specific Lunar Cycles



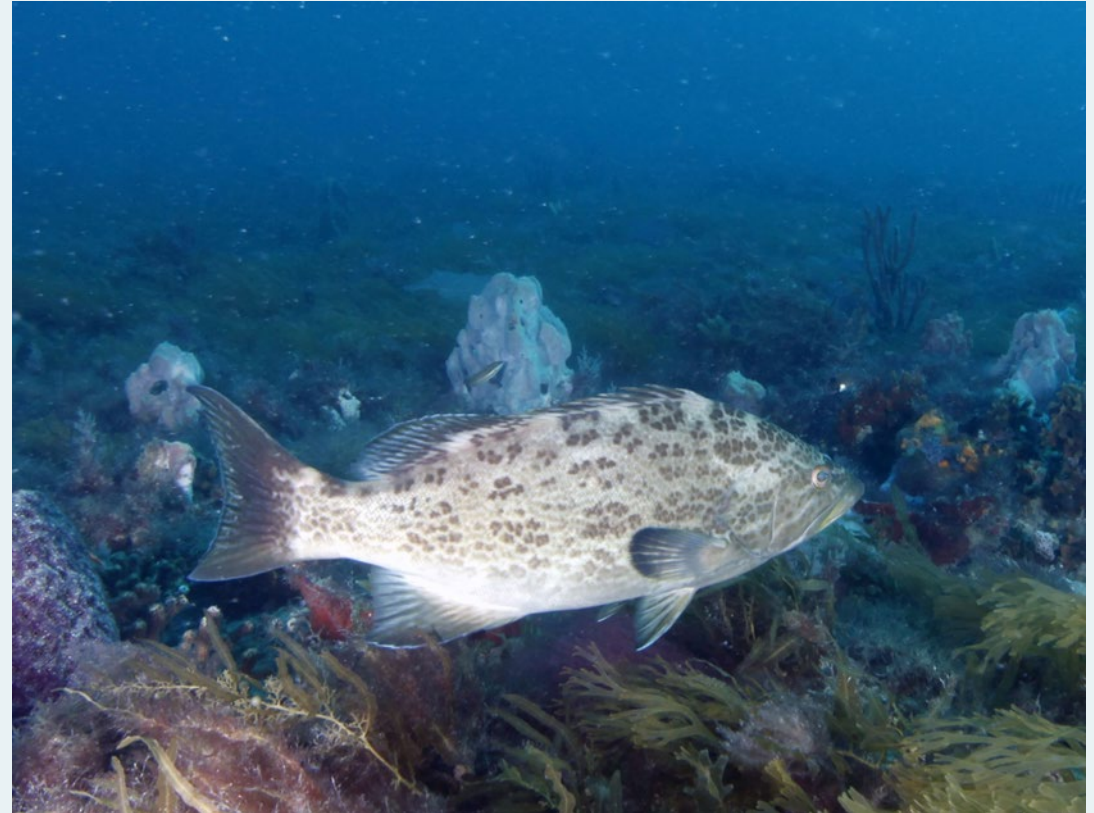
Focal Species

- Groupers (14)
- Snappers (6)
- Tilefish (2)
- Greater Amberjack (1)



Recent Research and Monitoring

- Connectivity through larval dispersal models – Brothers et al
- Biological samples during spawning – TNC/LGL
- Artificial reef monitoring – SC Aquarium
- Southeast Reef Fish Survey – SEFSC/SC DNR



Evaluation of the SSMZ

- Conducted by System Management Plan Workgroup
 - Designed to gather input from a diverse group
- Gather input from Advisory Panels
 - Habitat and Ecosystem - done
 - Law Enforcement - done
 - Snapper Grouper
 - SSC?
- Evaluate if management should
 - Keep areas as is
 - Modify areas
 - Move
 - Change size
 - Change regulations



Hockings, M., S. Stolton, F. Leverington, N. Dudley, J. Courrau. 2006. Evaluating Effectiveness: A framework for assessing management effectiveness of protected areas. 2nd Edition. IUCN, Gland, Switzerland and Cambridge, UK. 105pp.

SSMZ Evaluation

- Staff designed an evaluation tool with input from SEP, SSC, and Workgroup
- Develop tools:
 - Workgroup
 - Directed AP feedback
- Feedback will be incorporated into an evaluation report to the Council on the SSMZs.
- Provide the Council with a document with workgroup and AP comments and the workgroup's recommendation.



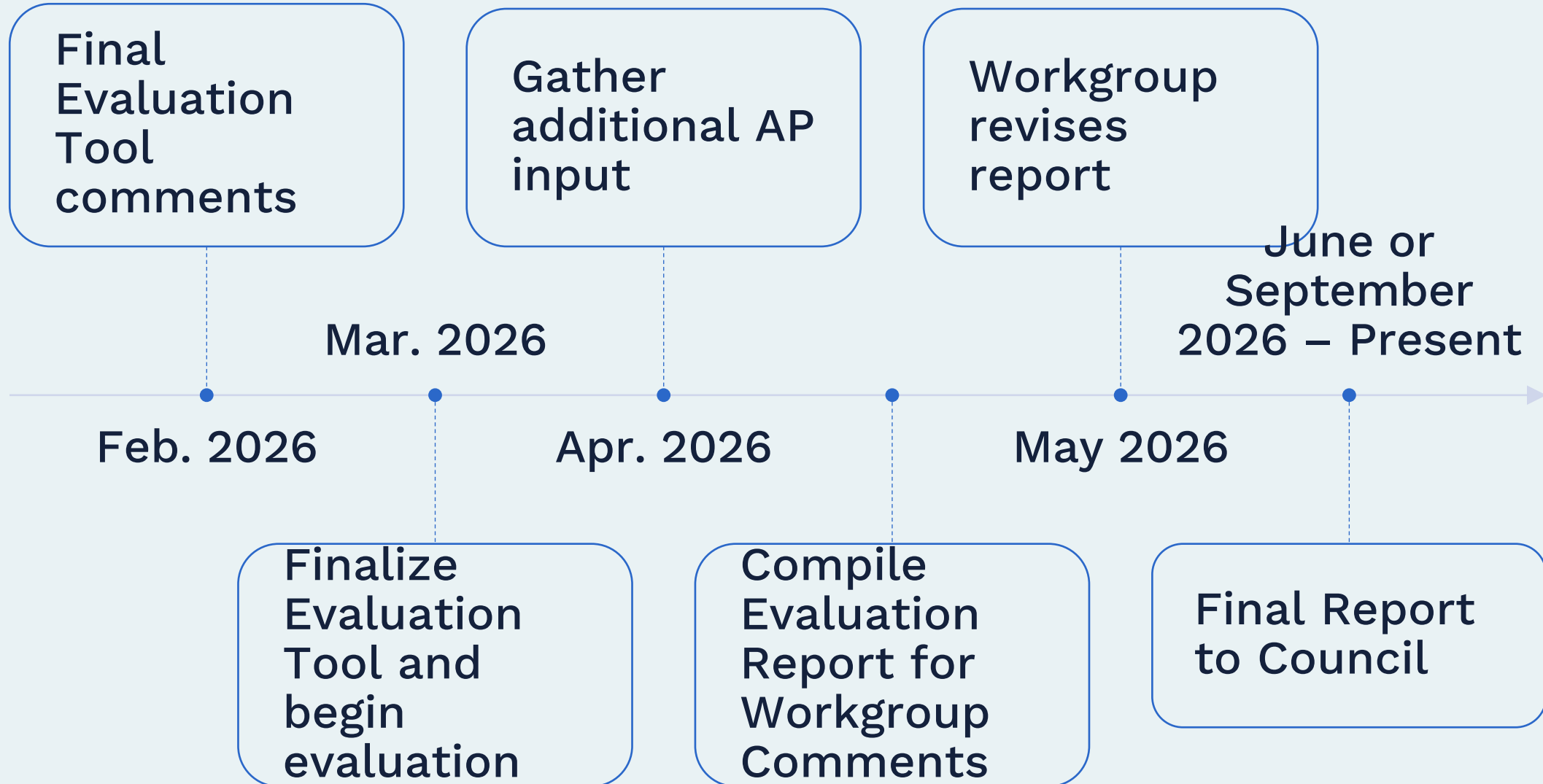
Credit: SC Sea Grant Consortium

Evaluation Tool Components

- Planning
- Area Inputs
 - South Cape Lookout
 - Area 51
 - Area 53
 - Devil's Hole
 - Warsaw Hole
- Cross Area Comparisons
 - Successes
 - Improvements



Timeline





Additional Resources

- [Amendment 36](#)
- [System Management Plan for Amendment 36](#)
- [Connectivity - Brothers et al](#)
- Biological Sampling –
 - [Natural Reefs - TNC/LGL](#)
 - [Artificial Reefs - SC Aquarium](#)
 - [SERFS](#)