

Coral Amendment 10

Establish a Shrimp Fishery Access Area Along the Northern Extension of the Oculina Bank Coral HAPC

Decision Document

March 2021

South Atlantic Fishery Management Council
4055 Faber Place Drive; Suite 201
North Charleston, SC 29405

Background

Amendment 10 to the Fishery Management Plan for the Coral, Coral Reefs, and Live/Hard Bottom Habitats of the South Atlantic Region (Coral FMP) proposes expanding access to historic fishing areas along the eastern boundary of the northern extension of the *Oculina* Bank Coral Habitat Area of Particular Concern (OHAPC). Rock shrimp fishermen have requested that the area be reviewed to determine if historic trawling areas could be reopened to rock shrimp fishing.

The OHAPC was established through the original Coral FMP in 1982. Anchoring within the area by fishing vessels was prohibited in 1996 and the area was later expanded to include newly discovered *Oculina* coral habitat. With the discovery of extensive deepwater coral ecosystems, the Council added the northern extension of the OHAPC through Coral Amendment 8 in 2014 (**Figures 1 and 2**). Coral Amendment 8 also allowed transit through the OHAPC by fishing vessels with rock shrimp on board, and modified vessel monitoring system (VMS) requirements for rock shrimp fishermen transiting through the OHAPC with rock shrimp on board.

Rock shrimp are harvested by otter trawl, which is a bottom tending fishing gear. Most vessels in the fleet are large and utilize up to four nets at a time. Tow times can last several hours depending on shrimp abundance. The catches of rock shrimp have been variable over the past decade with both high and low years occurring since 2014 (**Table 1**). Storms, abundance of other shrimp, regulations, and other factors have likely impacted rock shrimp landings. During the 1980s and 1990s, rock shrimp catches were occasionally higher than they are today, but the fishery had its best year since 2009 in 2017 (**Table 1**).

Table 1. Landings of rock shrimp off the Atlantic Coast from North Carolina through Florida, 2008-2018. Source: Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program Non-Confidential Data Warehouse.

Year	Pounds (lbs)	Value (\$)
2008	1,875,108	\$3,898,639
2009	3,853,240	\$2,770,940
2010	1,382,142	\$1,960,764
2011	1,260,308	\$1,658,247
2012	238,649	\$499,700
2013	728,127	\$1,961,488
2014	380,012	\$1,136,986
2015	1,054,522	\$1,597,408
2016	285,646	\$780,718
2017	2,768,126	\$4,919,159
2018	928,140	\$1,457,535

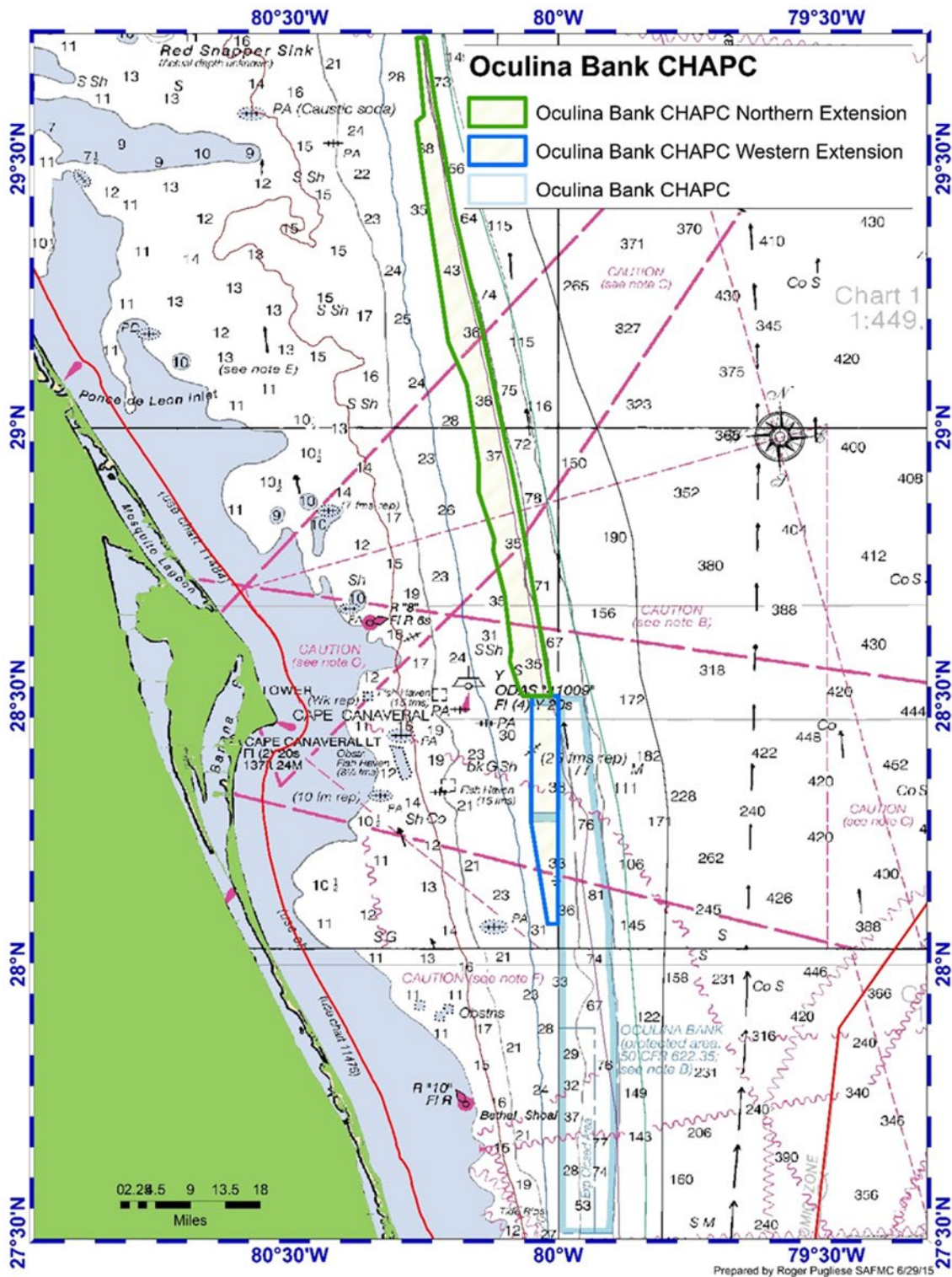


Figure 1. Map of *Oculina* Bank Coral Habitat Area of Particular Concern highlighting Coral Amendment 8 expansions north and west. Source: Roger Pugliese SAFMC Staff.

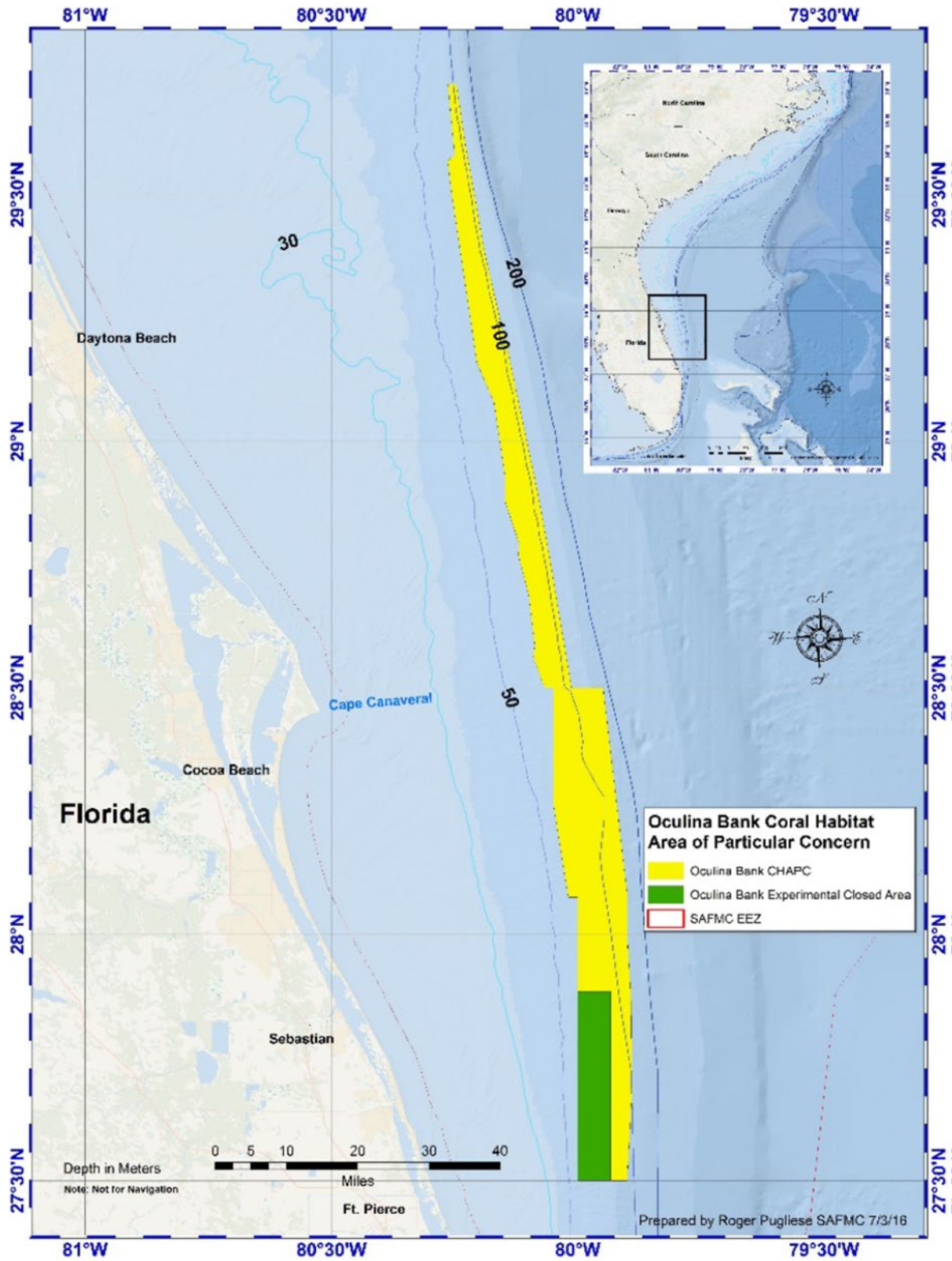


Figure 2. Map of *Oculina* Bank Coral Habitat Area of Particular Concern with implementation of Coral Amendment 8. Source: Roger Pugliese SAFMC Staff.

During development of Coral Amendment 8, the Council worked with the Habitat and Ecosystem, Coral, and Deepwater Shrimp Advisory Panels (AP) to find ways to best protect deepwater coral ecosystems while allowing the fishery to operate in historic fishing areas. **Figures 3 and 4** and **Table 2** present past rock shrimp VMS representing vessel transit and fishing associated with the northern extension of the OHAPC. The Council ultimately modified the eastern boundary of the northern extension of the OHAPC in response to public input. However, after approval of Coral Amendment 8, some rock shrimp fishermen expressed concern because the fishery has, at times, operated slightly inshore of the northern extension boundary. In 2018 the Deepwater Shrimp AP recommended that the Council move the eastern boundary of the northern expansion westward, based on recommendations by rock shrimp fishermen. The Coral AP discussed fishing closer to the high relief coral habitat and expressed concern over sedimentation due to the plume from the fishing gear. In subsequent Council discussion, members indicated concern over potential interaction of the gear and juvenile deepwater snapper grouper species, which are known to inhabit the base of the coral habitats and mounds found along the eastern boundary.

Table 2. Past fishing activity based on historic VMS data. Source: Coral Amendment 8, SAFMC 2014.

Rock Shrimp Fishery	Total VMS Points	Total Rock Shrimp Points	Rock Shrimp Fishing Points (2-4 knots)	Rock Shrimp Fishing Points in the Eastern Edge of Northern Extension of the Oculina CHAPC	% Rock Shrimp Fishing Points in the Eastern Edge of Northern Extension of the Oculina CHAPC	% Rock Shrimp Fishing Points in Northern Extension as Presented in Coral 8
2003 -2007	1,139,266	156,877	58,560	1,170	2.00%	4.90%
2008 -2014	1,848,303	143,250	38,656	538	1.39%	2.70%
Total (2003-2014)	3,127,042	301,861	97,251	1,708	1.76%	4.22%
2013	241,777	19,329	5,718	126	2.20%	
2014	223,194	7,114	1,470	125	8.50%	

During the September 2020 meeting, the Council recommended proceeding to develop Coral Amendment 10 to include one action considering establishing a shrimp fishery access area (SFAA) along the eastern boundary of the northern extension of the OHAPC. The Habitat and Ecosystem, Coral, and Deepwater Shrimp APs discussed the possible establishment of a SFAA and comments were provided to the Council in December 2020.

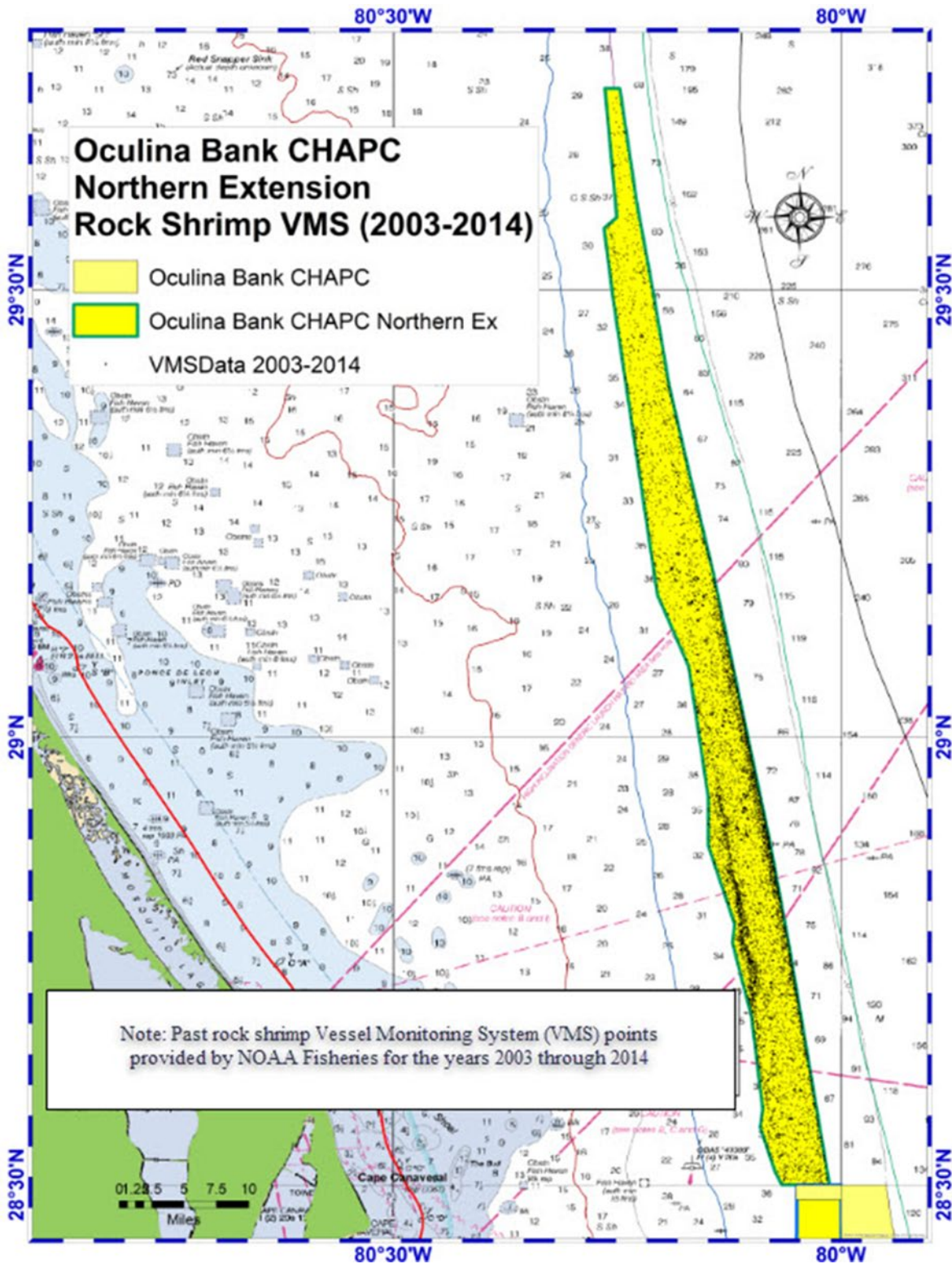


Figure 3. Rock shrimp VMS points in the northern extension of the Oculina Bank Coral Habitat Area of Particular Concern (2003-2013). Source: Roger Pugliese SAFMC Staff.

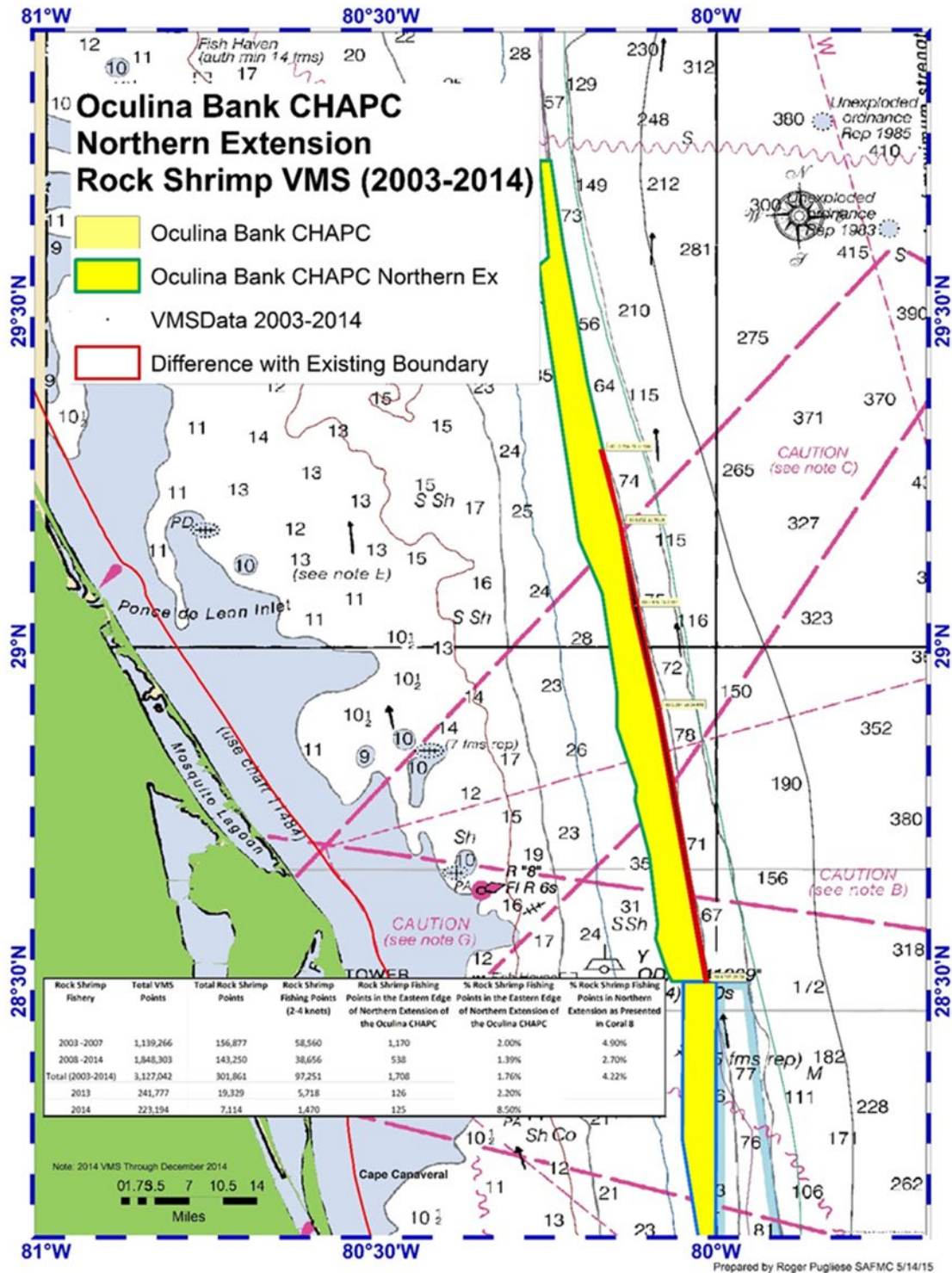


Figure 4. Relative position of possible SFAA along eastern edge of the northern extension of the *Oculina* Bank CHAPC including table of past fishing activity based on historic VMS data.

Objectives for this meeting

- Review and approve the draft purpose and need statements.
- Review action and alternatives and make modifications as appropriate.
- Review comments received during scoping meetings.
- Retain or modify the selected preferred alternative.
- Consider timing of the amendment and approve for public hearings.

Amendment timing

	Process Step	Date
✓	Council directs staff to request input on industry requested SFAA in Northern Extension of OHAPC and options for scoping.	September 2020
✓	Habitat and Ecosystem AP Webinar input on SFAA.	October 2020
✓	Deepwater Shrimp AP and Coral AP Webinar input on SFAA.	November 2020
✓	Council reviews AP input and approves amendment for scoping.	December 2020
	Scoping Meetings	February 2021
	Council reviews public input and approves actions/alternatives for public hearings	March 2021
	Public Hearings	Spring 2021
	Council reviews the draft amendment, modifies the document as necessary, and approves for formal review.	June 2021
	Early 2022	Regulations effective

Draft Purpose and Need

Purpose for Action

The purpose of Coral Amendment 10 is to create a Rock Shrimp Fishery Access Area along the eastern edge of the northern extension of the *Oculina* Coral Habitat Area of Particular Concern where rock shrimp permit holders may fish for and possess rock shrimp.

Need for Action

The need for Coral Amendment 10 is to increase socio-economic benefits to rock shrimp fishermen by increasing access to historic rock shrimp fishing grounds, while maintaining protection of the *Oculina* deepwater coral ecosystems.

Committee Action:

APPROVE THE IPT'S SUGGESTED PURPOSE AND NEED STATEMENTS IN CORAL AMENDMENT 10.

Proposed Action and Alternatives

1. Establish a Rock Shrimp Fishery Access Area along the eastern edge of the northern extension of the *Oculina* Coral Habitat Area of Particular Concern.

Alternative 1 (No Action). No person may fish for or possess rock shrimp in or from the *Oculina* Bank Coral Habitat Area of Particular Concern. No person may use a bottom longline, bottom trawl, dredge, pot, or trap. If aboard a fishing vessel, no person may anchor, use an anchor and chain, or use a grapple and chain.

Preferred Alternative 2. Establish a rock shrimp fishery access area along the eastern edge of the northern extension of the *Oculina* Coral Habitat Area of Particular Concern. Allow a shrimp vessel with a valid commercial permit for rock shrimp to bottom trawl within the established area bounded by the following coordinates. No person may use a bottom longline, dredge, pot, or trap. If aboard a fishing vessel, no person may anchor, use an anchor and chain, or use a grapple and chain.

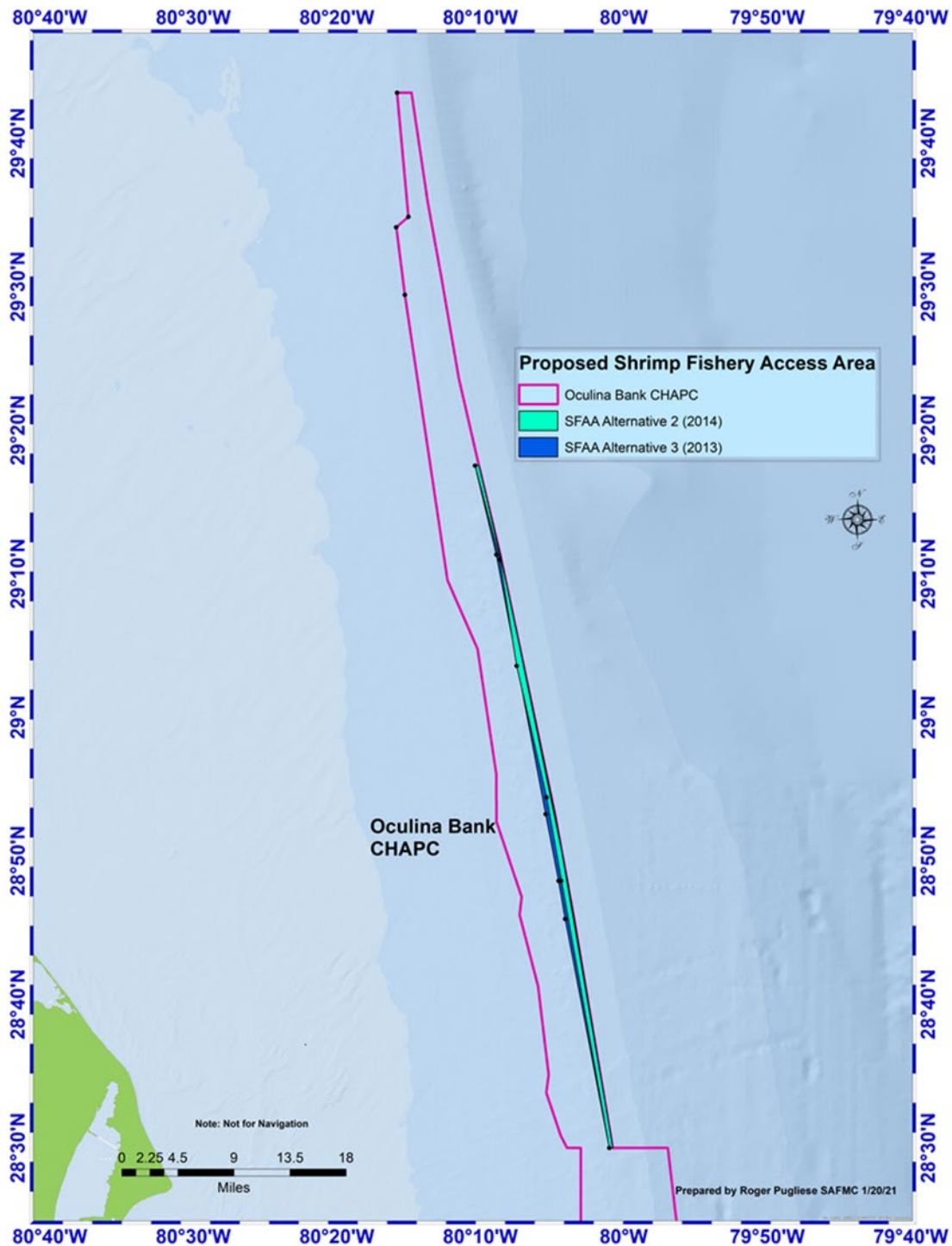
Point	Latitude	Longitude
1	29.725	-80.2634
2	29.58102	-80.2502
3	29.56872	-80.2644
4	29.49025	-80.2544
5	29.29213	-80.1728
6	29.183	-80.1442
7	29.05973	-80.1246
8	28.90697	-80.0898
9	28.81013	-80.0728
10	28.5	-80.017

Alternative 3. Establish a rock shrimp fishery access area along the eastern edge of the northern extension of the *Oculina* Coral Habitat Area of Particular Concern. Allow a shrimp vessel with a valid commercial permit for rock shrimp to bottom trawl within the established area bounded by the following coordinates. No person may use a bottom longline, dredge, pot, or trap. If aboard a fishing vessel, no person may anchor, use an anchor and chain, or use a grapple and chain.

Point	Latitude	Longitude
1	29.725	-80.2634
2	29.58102	-80.2502
3	29.56872	-80.2644
4	29.49025	-80.2544
5	29.29213	-80.1728
6	29.18887	-80.1482
7	28.88742	-80.0907
8	28.81005	-80.0759
9	28.7659	-80.0681
10	28.5	-80.017

Discussion:

- **Alternative 1 (No Action)** would retain protections through the known northern extension of *Oculina* coral, to protect high relief coral mounds, low relief coral habitat, and conservation of the full extent of the deepwater *Oculina* coral ecosystem in the South Atlantic region.
- **Preferred Alternative 2** is based on coordinates presented by rock shrimp fishermen as part of March 2014 public comment which are along the eastern edge of the OHAPC Northern extension.
- **Preferred Alternative 2 (Figures 5, 6, 7)** encompasses approximately 22 square miles in depth ranges of 92 to 95 meters (m) inside the proposed boundary and 98 m for the existing outside boundary. From VMS data, the maximum depth trawled for rock shrimp appears to be approximately 150 m.



Note: Oculina Bank Coral HAPC width range (22,000-5,000ft.) Preferred Alt. 2 width range (2,000-500 ft.) and Alt.3 width range (3,300-1,400 ft.)

Figure 5. Northern Extension of the Oculina Bank Coral HAPC and SFAA **Preferred Alternative 2** (based on 2014 fishermen input) and SFAA **Alternative 3** (based on 2013 fishermen input).

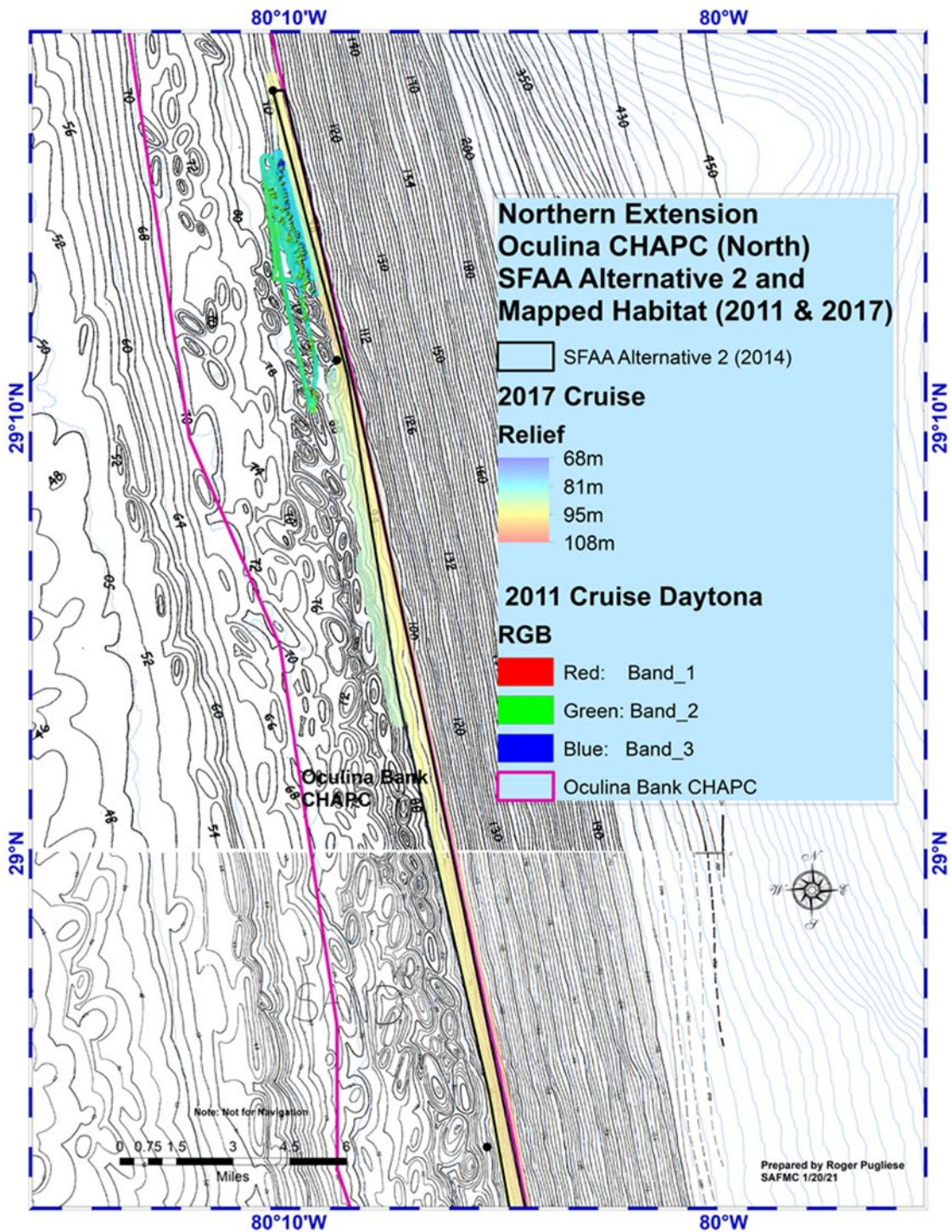


Figure 6. Northern extension of the Oculina Bank Coral Habitat Area of Particular Concern (North) Preferred Alternative 2 SFAA and habitat mapped in 2017 during the Southeast Deep Coral Initiative (SEDCI) expedition and during the 2011 Pisces expedition.

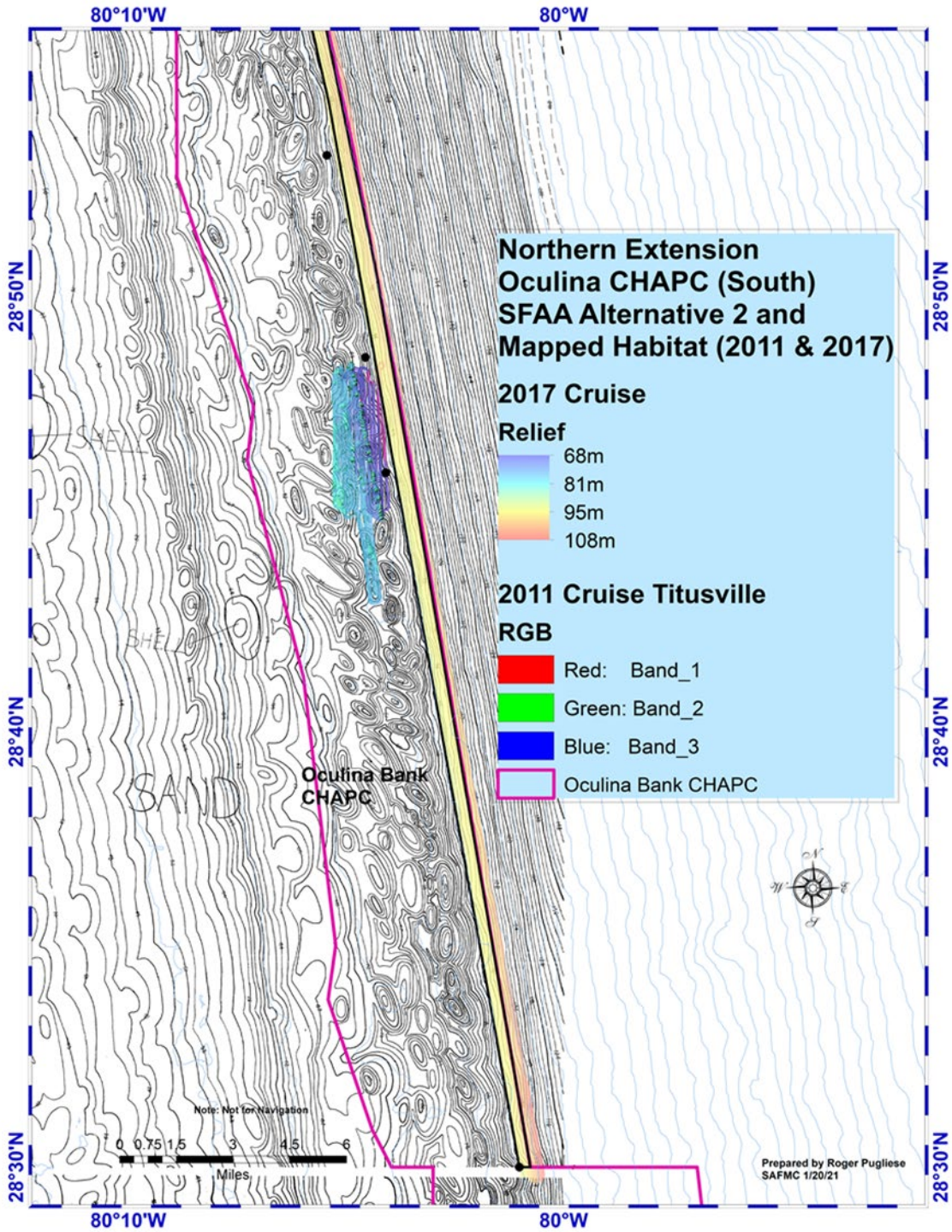
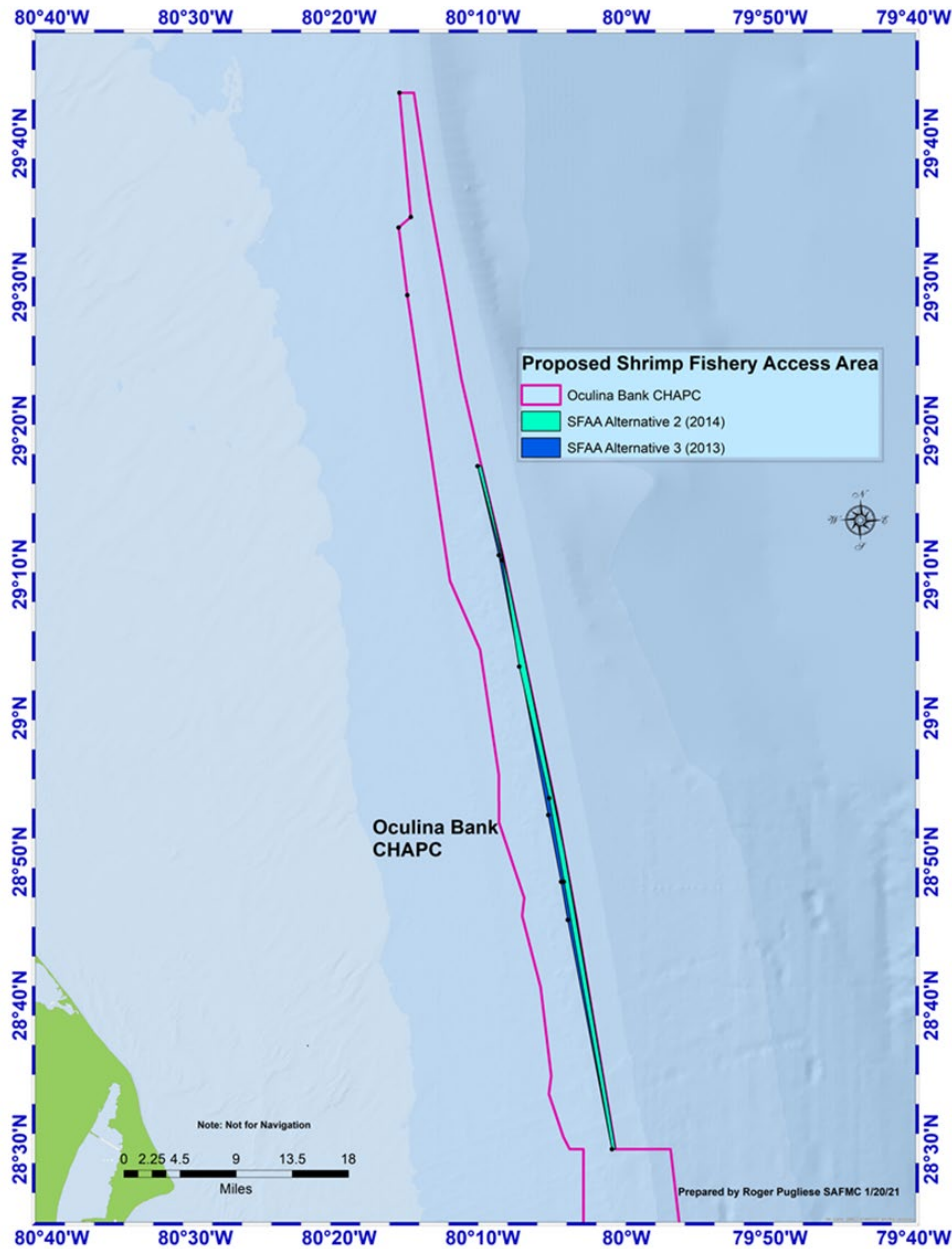


Figure 7. Northern extension of the Oculina Bank Coral Habitat Area of Particular Concern (South) **Preferred Alternative 2** SFAA and habitat mapped in 2017 during the Southeast Deep Coral Initiative (SEDCI) expedition and during the 2011 Pisces expedition.

- **Alternative 3** is based on coordinates presented by fishermen as part of March 2013 public comment which are along the eastern edge of the OHAPC Northern extension.
- **Alternative 3 (Figures 8, 9, 10)** encompasses approximately 32 square miles in depth ranges for the proposed inside boundary of 88-90 and for the existing outside boundary of 98 m.



Note: Oculina Bank Coral HAPC width range (22,000-5,000ft.) Preferred Alt. 2 width range (2,000-500 ft.) and Alt.3 width range (3,300-1,400 ft.)

Figure 8. Northern Extension of the Oculina Bank Coral HAPC and SFAA Preferred Alternative 2 (based on 2014 fishermen input) and SFAA Alternative 3 (based on 2013 fishermen input).

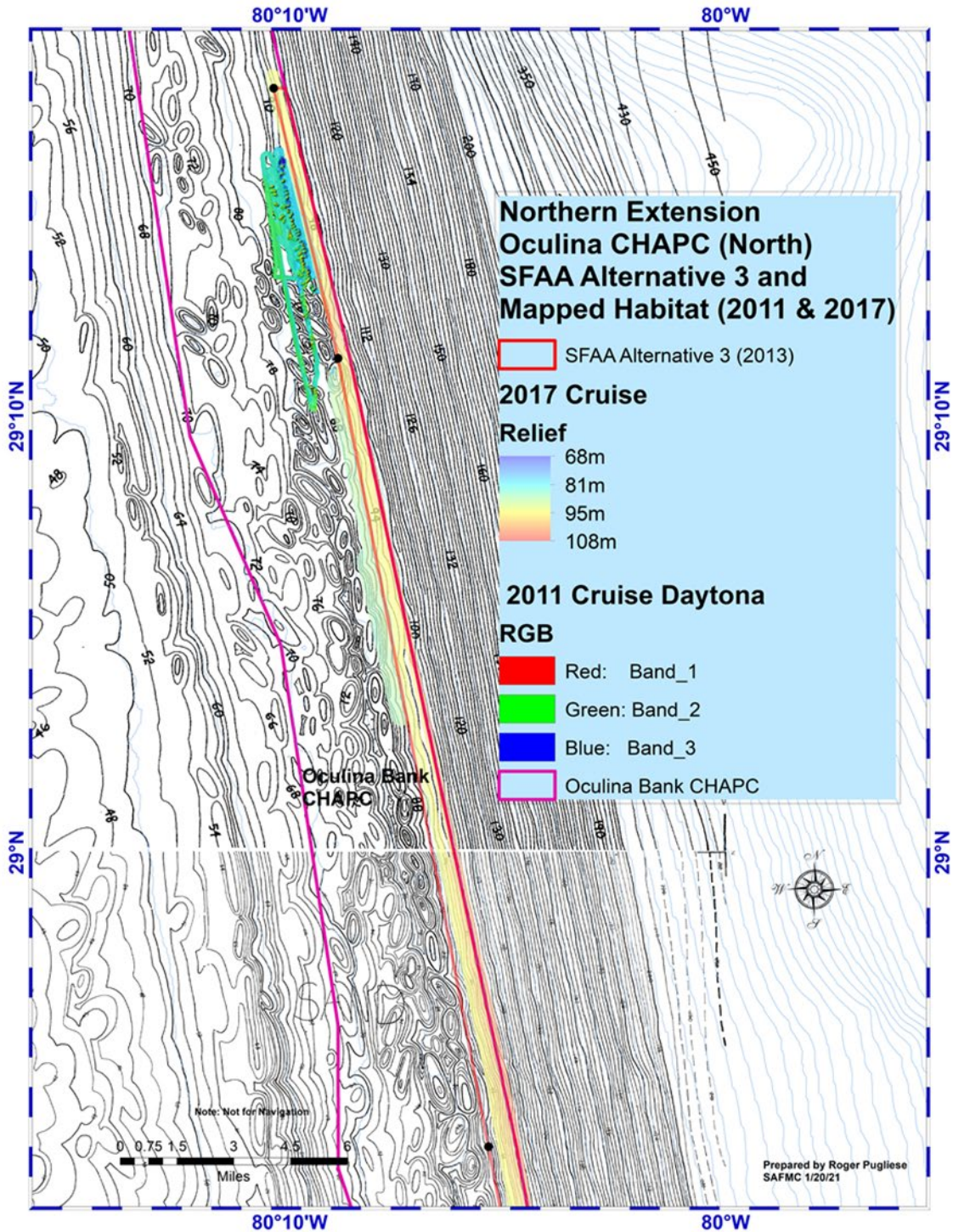


Figure 9. Northern extension of the Oculina Bank Coral Habitat Area of Particular Concern (North) **Alternative 3** SFAA and Habitat mapped in 2017 during the Southeast Deep Coral Initiative (SEDCI) expedition and during the 2011 Pisces expedition.

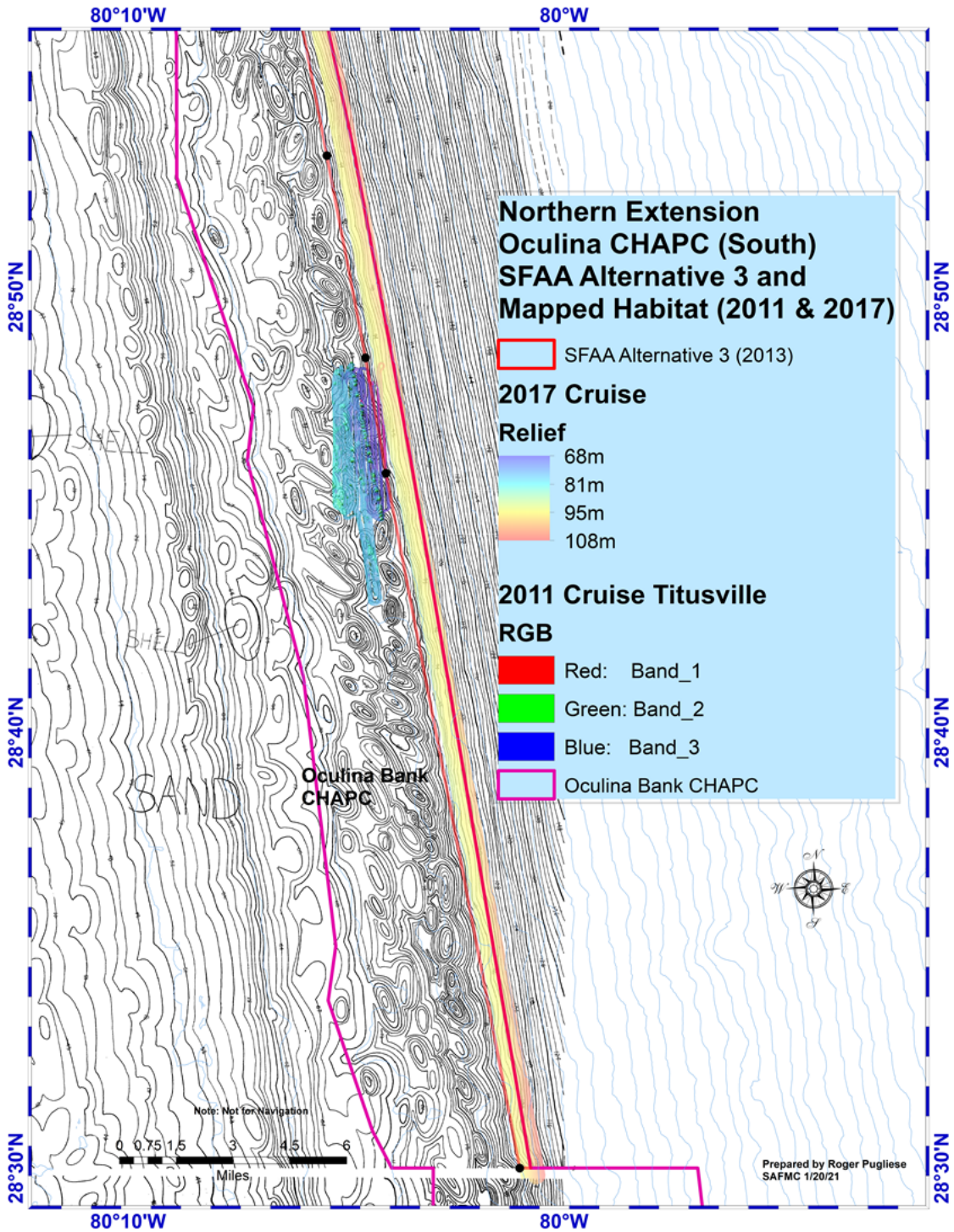


Figure 10. Northern extension of the Oculina Bank Coral Habitat Area of Particular Concern (South) **Alternative 3** SFAA and Habitat mapped in 2017 during the Southeast Deep Coral Initiative (SEDCI) expedition and during the 2011 Pisces expedition.

- **Preferred Alternative 2** and **Alternative 3** are expected to impart positive economic benefits to rock shrimp fishery relative to **Alternative 1 (No Action)** since they would allow access to historic areas to harvest rock shrimp.
- **Preferred Alternative 2** is smaller than **Alternative 3** and provides additional buffer to high relief coral habitat. **Alternative 1 (No Action)** would provide the greatest biological benefit.
- Mapping of bottom habitat conducted in 2017 and 2011 in the northern extension of the OHAPC is presented in the options paper reviewed by the Council in December 2020 (https://safmc.net/download/BB%20Council%20Meeting%20Dec%202020/Habitat%20Ecosystem/HabEco_A1_Coral10_Options_12_2020.pdf).

Advisory Panel Recommendations:

- The Deepwater Shrimp Advisory Panel met via webinar on November 10, 2020 and approved a motion supporting **Preferred Alternative 2**.
- The Coral Advisory Panel met via webinar on November 10, 2020 and approved a motion which supported **Alternative 1 (No Action)**.
- The Habitat Protection and Ecosystem Based Management Advisory Panel met on October 22, 2020 and expressed concerns regarding modification of the existing boundary given the proximity to the OHAPC boundary, the low percentage of historical effort in the area, and the fact that there is some “low relief” coral habitat in the area. However, some members also noted that, given the historical extent of fishing in the area, they support the fishing industry’s proposal while providing a buffer zone adjacent to coral pinnacles.
- The Law Enforcement Advisory Panel was given a brief update on this amendment at their February 1, 2021 meeting and they had no comment.
- A summary of all AP comments received in October and November 2020 is included in [Appendix A of the scoping document](#).

Scoping Comments:

Comments were requested from the public from January 26 through February 10, 2021. A scoping document and presentation were posted on the Council’s website and an online form was made available. Webinars were held on February 8 and 9th, 2021. No comments were received on this amendment during the scoping period.

Committee Action:

**APPROVE ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES.
CONSIDER SCOPING COMMENTS AND RETAIN OR MODIFY
PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE
CONSIDER RECOMMENDING CORAL AMENDMENT 10 FOR PUBLIC
HEARINGS IN SPRING 2021**