



Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

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Habitat Committee Virtual Meeting Summary May 28-29, 2020

Staff Present: **Dr. Lisa Havel** (Atlantic Coastal Fish Habitat Partnership, and ASMFC Habitat Committee Coordinator) and **Toni Kerns** (Interstate Fisheries Management Program Director)

Guests Present: **Dr. Tim Ellis** (Ecosystem Analyst, Albemarle Pamlico National Estuary Partnership), **Anna Weinstein** (Marine Conservation Director, National Audubon Society)

Habitat Committee (HC) Members Present: **Russ Babb** (NJDFW-Marine Fisheries Administration-Bureau of Shellfisheries), **Michelle Bachman** (NEFMC), **Josh Carloni** (NHFGD-Marine Fisheries Division), **Lou Chiarella** (NOAA-NMFS-GARFO-Habitat Conservation Division), **Jessica Coakley** (MAFMC), **Dr. Phil Colaruso** (USEPA-Coastal and Ocean Protection Division), **Jimmy Johnson** (NCDEQ-Coastal Habitat Protection Program and Albemarle Pamlico National Estuary Partnership, Committee Vice Chair), **Sharleen Johnson** (SCDNR-Marine Resources Research Institute), **Dr. Wilson Laney** (NC Coastal Federation), **Mark Rousseau** (MADMF), **Eric Schneider** (RIDFW-Marine Fisheries), **Kent Smith** (FL FWC Aquatic Habitat Conservation and Restoration Division), **Julia Socrates** (NYDEC), **Marek Topolski** (MDDNR, Committee Chair), **Tony Watkinson** (VMRC, Chief Habitat Management), and **Kate Wilke** (TNC-Mid-Atlantic Seascape)

The Habitat Committee met virtually in the spring due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Lisa provided an update on ACFHP activities. There are a couple of new projects funded, one from NOAA Recreational Fishing funding for oyster restoration in the Lynnhaven River in VA. The Coecles Harbor project for new moorings within SAV was not able to be completed, so they are brainstorming on how to reallocate the funds. ACFHP received Level 3 funding for the 2nd year in a row from the USFWS – the highest level possible. Both the Northeast and Southeast Habitat Mapping projects are complete, and Lisa is working on the final report, user guide, and rollout. ACFHP, Pew, and partners have been moving the conservation along regarding SAV monitoring protocols for the Atlantic coast, having held multiple webinars with stakeholders. ACFHP endorsed two projects for the Upper and Lower Kickemuit dams.

Michelle and Jessica provided an update on the Northeast Regional Habitat Assessment (NRHA). Michelle noted that the Northeast Region Fisheries Science Center Climate Vulnerability Assessment is also completed, and they are considering how to integrate those results with the habitat assessment. There are 65+ focus species in NHRA, which includes all of those managed by the New England Fishery Management Council, Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council, and some additional National Marine Fisheries Service Highly Migratory Species (HMS) and ASMFC species. Michelle reviewed the four major components of the assessment: 1) abundance and trends in habitat types in the inshore area; 2) spatial descriptions of species habitat use in the offshore area; 3) habitat climate vulnerability; and 4) habitat data visualization and decision support. They will look at all of this information and determine how it will be useful to the Councils and ASMFC. They also plan to put the information on regional data portals.

Vision: Sustainable and Cooperative Management of Atlantic Coastal Fisheries

They are finalizing data gathered, which includes fisheries data inventory (by species and survey), and data inventory (environmental, oceanographic, sediment, habitat, etc.). They are creating metadata reports for those categories and creating species profiles.

Wilson led a discussion on clean water and ecological flows. He noted that while the HC has through the years focused on multiple types of important structural habitats and/or impacts to them, we had never done a *Habitat Management Series* document on the water column, which is the medium that overlays all of the structural habitats and provides connectivity from the whitewater to the bluewater, for all ASMFC-managed species. He reviewed each of the topics included in the briefing materials: 1) article in The Guardian (Perkins 2019) about Nestle corporate use of public trust waters in the US, taking public trust waters, bottling it in plastic, single-use bottles, and in many cases paying little for the privilege; 2) Science article about DO and pH criteria leaving fisheries, and fish, at risk (Tomasetti and Gobler 2020); 3) the concept of ecological flows, which he was aware that some states have explored; 4) the issue of Combined Sewerage Overflows (CSOs) which arose during discussions at the fall meeting of the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council's Habitat Protection and Ecosystem Based Management Advisory Panel meeting, and contributes to the DO issues. Wilson, Kent, Russ, Jimmy, and Phil will work to produce an outline for a *Habitat Management Series* document on water quality (DO and pH) by the fall meeting.

Lou raised the issue of living shorelines (LSLs) being placed in proximity to SAV beds, which then creates issues for sustainability of the SAV. The problem he sees is that some states are pushing LSLs, without considering other impacts. The HC will present the Policy Board with a proposal to create an ASMFC policy statement that would express opposition and/or concern about these sorts of projects. It would enable NOAA Fisheries to work more closely with some of the states that are allowing these.

The HC also discussed the status of the Aquaculture Impacts to Fish *Habitat Management Series* document, which was recently released, the Acoustic Impacts to Fish Habitats *Habitat Management Series* document, as well as the Fish Habitats of Concern document and the 2020 *Habitat Hotline*. The *Habitat Hotline* will focus on fish habitat assessments along the Atlantic coast.