



Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

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Habitat Committee

2015 Fall Meeting Summary

Attendees: Russ Babb (NJ), Eric Schneider (RI), Lou Chiarella (NOAA Fisheries NE), Marek Topolski (MD), Cheri Patterson (NH), Penny Howell (CT), Wilson Laney (USFWS SE), Mark Rousseau (MA), Bob VanDolah (SC), Pace Wilber (NOAA Fisheries SE), Ron Brockmeyer (guest, St. Johns River Water Management District), Kent Smith (FL), Jay Odell (TNC), Dawn McReynolds (NY), Jake Kritzer (EDF, chair), January Murray (GA, vice-chair), Michelle Bachman (NEFMC), Jessica Coakley (MAFMC), Deb Wilson (guest, Shad and River Herring TC), Virginia Fay (NOAA Fisheries SE)

Staff: Lisa Havel

Outside presentations

The Habitat Committee held its second in-person meeting of the year at the Commission's 74th Annual Meeting. The Committee received an update on the Atlantic Coastal Fish Habitat Partnership program from the coordinator, Lisa Havel. The Committee then heard presentations from Ron Brockmeyer of the St. Johns River Water Management District, and from Deb Wilson of the ASMFC Shad and River Herring Advisory Panel. Ron presented on marsh habitat restoration success in the Indian River Lagoon, in Florida, and Deb gave a presentation on the restoration of the Damariscotta Mills Dam fish ladder in Maine.

Presentation on EDF Ecosystem Stressors Workshop

The new Habitat Committee Chair, Jake Kritzer, gave a presentation on the Environmental Defense Fund Northeast Ecosystem Stressors Workshop that was held in September. He summarized the results from both an online survey and meeting discussions on the relative importance of various threats to coastal towns and cities, marsh and estuarine habitats, marine habitats, and fisheries. Four representatives and the coordinator from the Habitat Committee were present at the meeting (Lou, Mark, Kent, Jake, and Lisa).

Habitat Factsheets

The committee discussed the habitat factsheet review process. It was decided that after this round of comprehensive edits to the factsheets, we can set aside time every spring meeting to look at the species list and see if there are any necessary updates. A formal review like that in 2015 will take place every 5 years.

Jake Kritzer hosted a discussion on some recent eel genetics papers that have been published. The fact sheets do not discuss how genetic variation and habitat interact, but it could be a topic (if not in the factsheets) for a Habitat Hotline or Management Series document. We could also write a discussion paper to summarize the issues and concerns (e.g. should we prioritize eel rivers based on length?), and can decide on this at the spring meeting. Wilson said that Dave Secor has a recent paper on eel genetics, and he will forward it to Lisa to share with the

Committee. Jake might get some feedback from the Policy Board as well. Eel genetics would be a great place to start but there are other species that this could apply. Pace recommended adding a parasite issue to the potential discussion paper as well.

Habitat Bottlenecks

The Committee discussed the completion of the habitat bottlenecks white paper, which includes case studies on examples of species with physical bottlenecks. The white paper was sent to the Policy Board, and if they approved it, the document will be formatted for publication and put on the website. Jake will ask the Board if they want us to be comprehensive on each bottleneck facing every species, or if the paper should only include examples. Do they want us to include a paragraph or two on a species that is not currently facing a bottleneck (e.g. bluefish)?

Fishery Management Plan Updates and other Documents for the Policy Board

There was a discussion on the Fishery Management Plan updates for Northern shrimp, tautog, and menhaden. Northern shrimp updates have been put on hold until 2016, tautog is current underway, and menhaden updates will begin in late 2015. The Committee does not need to review the updates before being incorporated into the Plan. The habitat section should only include information pertinent to what is being managed and what should be managed (and include climate change issues as per 2016 Action Plan). It should not be comprehensive.

The Committee also discussed how our documents and recommendations are received in general. Possible documents the Habitat Committee could produce include a non-regulatory guidance document for habitat (similar to Council documents; Lisa will share a link from Michelle with the group). We could ask states to report on what they are currently doing, and what they are not doing, in terms of fish habitat management. It was asked whether we can get the Board to incorporate habitat management into the Fishery Management Plans, which could be a suggestion for the Policy Board. We could ask the review teams (which have to report on compliance measures annually) to also report on recommended measures. One way to determine our reach with our documents is to look at the number of times each document has been downloaded. It is recommended that the Habitat Committee seeks out feedback from Commissioners during this meeting, and provide an update at the spring meeting.

2015 Work Plan

The Committee reviewed its 2015 work plan. The 2015 issue of *Habitat Hotline Atlantic*, with a focus on the impacts of energy development to fish habitats, is on track for publication by the end of the year. Lisa Havel and Kent Smith are working with Lisa Hartman on the layout now that the submission deadline has closed for articles (updated deadline was 11/9).

As for Task 4.2.1 of the work plan, 'Facilitate coordination and distribution of information for ecosystem-based management and marine protected area activities, and the potential consequences of significant anthropogenic activities on habitats of concern,' Wilson is currently working to gather information. He also plans to once again focus on writing the letter about Topsail Beach. It was decided that the management database is difficult to keep up to date, and would be best if we do not focus our attention on maintaining it.

The first draft of the *Sciaenid Habitats Source Document*, which was initiated in 2014, is ready for editing from the Habitat Committee and the South Atlantic Species Technical Committee. This latest installment of the *Habitat Management Series* will be ready for approval and publication by the winter Commission meeting.

2016 Work Plan

The Committee finalized the 2016 Work Plan.

For outreach, Lisa will work with Tina to put the lobster source document on the website. They will make sure all of the Habitat Hotline links are working. They will also reorganize the website to have the following headlines:

Source Documents

- Diadromous

- Sciaenids

- Shellfish

Management Series (renamed to 'technical reference documents')

- All other docs

Lisa will also add any other source documents to the website (from Councils, NMFS, etc.).

Ideas for the next *Habitat Hotline* were discussed, and will be finalized at the spring meeting. Potential topics include diversity (genetic, behavioral, life history, and geographic), fishing gear impacts (and ghost gear, emergency debris removal), pelagic habitats, power plant impingement, and living shorelines.

For 2016, the Committee plans to finalize the next installment of the *Habitat Management Series*, which will focus on Aquaculture. Marek will work with Lisa to set up a call with the subcommittee.

The Committee plans to identify common climate change themes and gaps in their state coastal regulatory plans, and will incorporate climate change threats into the upcoming Fishery Management Plans.

Action items:

Lisa will update the NEFMC contact from the spring notes.

Lisa will ask Tina to date all of the factsheets so that we know when they were last updated.

Lisa will share Wilson's forwarded papers on eel genetics.

The Habitat Committee will think about how they want to address genetic concerns for a discussion during the spring meeting.

Lisa will share a link to the NOAA Essential Fish Habitat document with the group.

The Habitat Committee will provide any feedback that they receive from Commissioners on habitat management issues and incorporation into management plans.

Wilson will continue to work on gathering information for 4.2.1 and will pick up writing the letter about Topsail Beach again.

Lisa will resend the list of the FMP subcommittees to the Habitat Committee (and get a reminder on Joe Smith's contact information for menhaden).

Lisa will convert the Sciaenid source document to a Google document for the Habitat Committee and South Atlantic Technical Committee to edit.

Lisa will work with Tina to update website (see 2016 Work Plan notes above).

The Habitat Committee will send Lisa any relevant source documents for Commission-managed species (e.g. from NMFS, Councils, etc.) to include on the website.

The Habitat Committee will consider which topic would be best for the next Habitat Hotline from the list above.

Marek will work with Lisa to host a subcommittee call on the Aquaculture document.

For spring meeting, **the Habitat Committee** would like to discuss the timeframe for commenting on issues.

Each state will look at their state coastal regulatory plans and report at the spring meeting about how they are addressing climate change.