



Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

1050 N. Highland Street • Suite 200A-N • Arlington, VA 22201
703.842.0740 • 703.842.0741 (fax) • www.asmfc.org

Habitat Committee Spring 2017 Meeting Summary

May 2 – 3, 2017

Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

1050 N. Highland St.

Suite 200 A-N

Arlington, VA 22201

Committee Participants: Russ Babb (NJ), Lou Chiarella (NMFS-NE), Jimmy Johnson (NC), Jake Kritzer (EDF, chair), Wilson Laney (USFWS-SE), January Murray (GA, vice chair), Jay Odell (TNC), Cheri Patterson (NH), Mark Rousseau (MA), Eric Schneider (RI), Kent Smith (FL), Marek Topolski (MD), Tony Watkinson (VA), John Gill (USFWS-NE)

Staff: Lisa Havel, Toni Kerns, Pat Campfield

Other Participants: Kate Wilke (TNC), Robert Orth (VIMS)

Participants via Phone and Webinar: Dawn McReynolds (NY), Michelle Bachman (NEFMC), Josh Carloni (NH)

ACFHP Update

Lisa Havel said that the Partnership will have their Spring Steering Committee meeting immediately following the Habitat Committee meeting. Lisa gave an update on NFHP, Coastal FHP, and Whitewater to Bluewater progress, as well as this year's USFWS reporting and the most recent NFHP Board Meeting. The Partnership's focus over the winter and early spring has been on finalizing the new 5-year Conservation Strategic Plan. The Southeast habitat mapping project has experienced delays due to staff turnover at Merrimack River Watershed Council, the contractor for the project. However, in the past few weeks there has been renewed momentum, including a search for new GIS contractor to complete the project by the end of 2017.

Habitat Website Statistics Overview

Lisa provided an overview of recent website traffic. The most recent issue of the Habitat Hotline has been downloaded 670 times, the new Sciaenid Habitat Management Series document has been downloaded 377, and the Submerged Aquatic Vegetation Policy has been downloaded 163 times since December 1, 2016. There are certain documents, such as the Habitat Management Series covering beach renourishment, that are downloaded often each month, even years after publication. There was a discussion on who is visiting the website, how to reach our target audiences, and how to increase our online presence. The Habitat Committee will develop a list of questions and target audiences to provide to the ASMFC Communications Committee. Their expertise can help the group interpret the website traffic and develop recommendations for improving or ensuring we continue to reach our target audiences.

Review of Comment Procedures and Criteria

Lisa provides a refresher to the Committee on who, what, when, where, and how the Commission can comment on development projects that might impact coastal migratory species. The possibility of commenting on the new Executive Order regarding offshore oil and gas development was discussed. The Committee decided to write a new letter to BOEM, reiterating the comments in our previous letter to BOEM. The Committee also decided to create a document that compiles ASMFC's position and recommendations on all published issues. This information will be gathered from Fishery Management Plans, guidance documents, and Habitat Management Series publications. It will be included as an action item in the 2018 Action Plan.

2017 Work Plan Review

The Habitat Committee walked through the ASMFC Action Plan for 2017 to review the status of each task. Some highlights are below.

SAV Policy Update

Lisa provided the Committee with a summary of the ASMFC SAV Policy Questionnaire responses. Most states are taking measures to conserve seagrass in some capacity. This information will be incorporated into the SAV Policy Update. The goals are still applicable, but some of the threats to seagrass habitat have shifted.

Habitat Hotline

The Habitat Hotline theme for 2017 is Submerged Aquatic Vegetation, to coincide with the 20th anniversary of the Commission's SAV Policy. Feature articles are due to Lisa and Michelle by July 1st, and state updates are due on September 1st.

Sciaenid Habitat Source Document

The final draft was approved by the Policy Board at the 2016 Annual Meeting, and was released in March of 2017.

Habitat Management Series

The Aquaculture document is still moving forward. The subcommittee has gone through a few rounds of edits, and sent it to Lou Chiarella for feedback from NOAA. This document will heavily reference the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council's aquaculture document and will be relevant to the entire east coast.

Species Habitat Factsheets

These will be reviewed and updated as necessary this year. We will be adding factsheets for black drum, Jonah crab, and coastal sharks.

Estuarine Habitat Mitigation Banks Discussion

The Committee discussed the topic of estuarine habitat mitigation banks, which produces credits through creation and/or restoration of habitat within a watershed in a location other than where a project is occurring. This allows for the development of critical infrastructure that might not meet specific environmental requirements otherwise. This issue has come up in Florida, but the familiarity with this topic varied among members. Because of this, the Committee decided to discuss it further at the fall 2017 meeting.

Submersed Aquatic Vegetation in the Chesapeake Bay: Sentinel Species in a Changing World

Bob Orth gave a presentation to the Habitat Committee about some of his work on seagrass in the Chesapeake Bay. Seagrass is a sentinel species for the bay – one of the key indicators being used by managers to assess the effectiveness of the Chesapeake Bay clean-up. He provided the current status of eelgrass in the Bay, presented on fishery conflicts and resolutions to management, and addressed aquaculture issues. Results from ~15 years of restoration via plantings and seeding were provided, and current and future threats – including climate change (water temperature, sea level rise, tropicalization), shoreline hardening, and invasive species were discussed as well. This information led to a discussion on how the Committee wants to approach the SAV Policy update.

Artificial Reef Committee Update

Mark Rousseau provided an update to the Habitat Committee on the ASMFC and GSMFC's joint artificial reef meeting held in Jacksonville, Florida in February. The group received presentations and updates on PCB-free military vessels for reefing, South Carolina's deep water artificial reef Marine Protected Area, the newly deployed Harwich Reef in Massachusetts, Special Management Zone designations in the EEZ off New Jersey and Delaware, state updates, and more. The committee discussed the success of the National Saltwater Artificial Reefs Workshop; Habitat Areas of Particular concern, permitting, and reef deployment complications; and historical resource survey requirements. Location and times for the next meeting were discussed, and will take place in early 2017.

ASMFC HAPC Document Discussion

Wilson Laney proposed that the Habitat Committee complete the Habitat Areas of Particular Concern document, which was started by the Habitat Committee around 2013 and not finished. There was a discussion on whether the Commission should continue to use the term 'Habitat Areas of Particular Concern' since it does not carry the same regulatory weight as the federal definition. Many, but not all, of the members of the Committee wanted to continue using the term. Reasons included 1) the Policy Board already approved its use and 2) we are using it as a scientific, not regulatory definition (similar to the term Maximum Sustainable Yield, which has both a scientific and regulatory definition depending on the entity using it). Others thought that this would create confusion both within and outside the Commission. This discussion will be brought to the Policy Board at the summer meeting, and document completion might be included in the 2018 Action Plan.

Other Business

January Murray was voted in as new chair of the Habitat Committee, and Marek Topolski will take on the role of vice-chair.