

Joint Habitat/Coral Committee Report
June 22, 2016
Roy Williams and Dale Diaz, Chairs

Update on Gulf Council Activities supported by the NOAA Coral Reef Conservation Program

Council staff presented on the progress of the Gulf Council Portal site. The presentation highlighted previous grant milestones, expanding digital content, data portal visual products, Gulf of Mexico coral and coral reefs viewer, data uses, and future grant steps.

Deep-Sea Coral Workshop Report

Staff gave a brief summary of the deep-sea coral workshop. NOAA Fisheries convened a priority setting workshop November 18-20, 2015 to discuss and refine priorities for this science initiative. The workshop was designed to glean information on priority research questions and priority locations within each jurisdiction; and to encourage and facilitate collaboration and partnership throughout the Southeast region. The official workshop summary is not yet available.

5-year EFH Review Status Update

Staff presented an update on progress regarding the EFH 5-year review. The update highlighted textual and web elements that will be completed during the review, emphasizing habitat association tables, species profiles and mapping. The EFH Summit meeting was discussed, focusing on the wide variability between regions regarding EFH designation and cooperation between NOAA and Councils. Mr. Diaz gave feedback on his takeaways from the EFH Summit and informed the Council that he is interested in discussing the EFH consultation process and the level of Council involvement at a future meeting.

Recommended Coral HAPCs Update

Staff presented the comments from the Reef Fish AP, Shrimp AP, LETC, and Spiny Lobster AP. Overall, the APs would like continued input from fishermen during the evaluation of the recommended HAPCs. Staff updated the Committees on the upcoming joint meeting of the Shrimp AP, Coral AP and Coral SSC.

Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary Draft Environmental Impact Statement

GP Schmahl, superintendent of the Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary (FGBNMS) presented the Draft EIS for the FGBNMS Expansion. The Draft EIS has five alternatives for expansion (including one 'no action' alternative) and proposes extending current FGBNMS regulations to any expansion of the sanctuary. These regulations include: no anchoring, no discharge, prohibition on taking corals and invertebrates, and only hook and line fishing is allowed. The sanctuary is requesting that the Council look at the proposed fishing regulations and determine if the fishing regulations are appropriate. The Committee discussed the differences between fishing impacts on these areas and impacts from other sources such as

oil and gas. Mr. Schmahl reviewed the proposed areas and the criteria for the proposed areas. Most of the proposed areas in the Sanctuary's preferred alternative are existing HAPCs. There was considerable discussion about the content of the DEIS and some recommendations to improve both the maps and the DEIS were provided to Mr. Schmahl. The Council has until August 19, 2016, to submit public comment, and has 180 days to provide input on the fishing regulations for FGBNMS.

This concludes my report.