

# ATLANTIC STATES MARINE FISHERIES COMMISSION

## 2025 Action Plan



**Approved by the Business Session of the Commission**

**October 23, 2024**

## **Goal 1 – Rebuild, maintain and fairly allocate Atlantic coastal fisheries**

Goal 1 focuses on the responsibility of the states to conserve and manage Atlantic coastal fishery resources for sustainable use. Commission members will advocate decisions to achieve the long-term benefits of conservation, while balancing the socio-economic interests of coastal communities. Inherent in this is the recognition that healthy and vibrant resources mean more jobs and more opportunity for those that live along the coast. The states are committed to proactive management, with a focus on integrating ecosystem services, socioeconomic impacts, habitat issues, bycatch and discard reduction measures, and protected species interactions into well-defined fishery management plans (FMPs). FMPs will also address fair (equitable) allocation of fishery resources among the states. Understanding global climate change and its impact on fishery productivity and distribution is an elevated priority. Improving cooperation and coordination with federal partners and stakeholders can streamline efficiency, transparency, and, ultimately, success. In the next five years, the Commission is committed to making significant progress on rebuilding overfished or depleted Atlantic fish stocks.

Fisheries management and stock assessment activities anticipated for 2025 and into 2026 are outlined below. Activities are divided into high priority species (those with significant management action, stock assessment activity, or are of critical importance to the states and their stakeholders) and medium-low priority species. For most species, there are several activities that occur on an annual or ongoing basis, including specification setting; FMP review and state compliance reports; and ensuring cooperation and consistent management programs among the states, regional councils, and NOAA Fisheries for shared resources. While ongoing activities are not listed below, they continue to be conducted. The focus of the Action Plan is to highlight new and high-profile activities where the Commission will focus its resources and energies for the next two years.

### **HIGH PRIORITY SPECIES FOR 2025**

#### **American Lobster**

- Conduct and present benchmark stock assessment and peer review, and respond if necessary
- Work with partners and ACCSP on implementing and integrating tracking device data collection as part of Addendum XXIX; respond to regulatory changes if necessary
- Update annual indices of stock abundance and settlement, and respond if necessary
- **Collaborate with the New England and Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Councils (NEFMC and MAFMC, respectively) regarding regulations related to on-demand trap gear**
- **Continue to communicate with Canada DFO regarding potential changes in minimum size limits, in the maritime lobster fishing areas, and resulting trade impacts**
- **Explore facilitating a meeting between the ASMFC American Lobster Technical Committee and Canada DFO lobster scientists**
- Continue to monitor and respond as necessary to NOAA rulemaking on Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Plan modifications
- Continue to work with the Law Enforcement Subcommittee, the states, and NOAA Fisheries to improve enforcement of management measures in both state and offshore waters
- Work with NOAA Fisheries to ensure consistency in state and federal regulations

### Atlantic Croaker

- Conduct and present traffic light analysis, and respond if necessary
- Conduct and present benchmark stock assessment and peer review, and respond if necessary

### Atlantic Menhaden

- Conduct and present single-species stock assessment update, and respond if necessary
- Conduct and present ecological reference point (ERP) benchmark stock assessment and peer review report, and respond if necessary
- **Consider Work Group input on precautionary Chesapeake Bay management, and respond if necessary**

### Atlantic Striped Bass

- **Develop management action, if needed, to meet the stock rebuilding deadline of 2029**
- **Consider action to address recommendations from the Recreational Release Mortality Work Group**

### Black Sea Bass

- Continue addressing recreational management reform in collaboration with MAFMC, including:
  - Conduct scoping hearings and begin developing Recreational Sector Separation and Catch Accounting Amendment
  - Finalize and implement Recreational Measures Setting Process Addenda/Framework
- **Present management track stock assessment, and respond if necessary**

### Bluefish

- Continue addressing recreational management reform in collaboration with MAFMC, including:
  - Conduct scoping hearings and begin developing Recreational Sector Separation and Catch Accounting Amendment
  - Finalize and implement Recreational Measures Setting Process Addenda/Framework
- **Present management track stock assessment, and respond if necessary**
- Implement management uncertainty tool in collaboration with MAFMC

### Horseshoe Crab

- Set 2026 Delaware Bay bait harvest specifications using the Adaptive Resource Management Framework Revision
- **Consider recommendations from the Delaware Bay Management Objectives Workshop**
- **Monitor Endangered Species Act 90-day finding and respond if necessary**
- Secure long-term funding for the Horseshoe Crab Benthic Trawl Survey for use in the ARM Framework

### Northern Shrimp

- Conduct and present traffic light analysis, and respond if necessary
- Finalize and implement Amendment 4
- Continue development of industry-based research programs including exploration of an industry-based summer survey and/or a pilot winter sampling program

### Red Drum

- **In response to results of 2024 benchmark stock assessment, conduct projections as requested by the Board and consider management action using the Risk and Uncertainty Tool**
- **Conduct and present traffic light analysis, and respond if necessary**

### Scup

- Continue addressing recreational management reform in collaboration with MAFMC, including:
  - Conduct scoping hearings and begin developing Recreational Sector Separation and Catch Accounting Amendment
  - Finalize and implement Recreational Measures Setting Process Addenda/Framework
- **Monitor management and research activities of MAFMC including, but not limited to, scup discards and gear restricted areas analysis**
- **Present management track stock assessment, and respond if necessary**

### Summer Flounder

- Continue addressing recreational management reform in collaboration with MAFMC, including:
  - Conduct scoping hearings and begin developing Recreational Sector Separation and Catch Accounting Amendment
  - Finalize and implement Recreational Measures Setting Process Addenda/Framework in Collaboration with NOAA Fisheries implement Summer Flounder Commercial Mesh Exemptions Framework/Addendum (Addendum XXXV)
- **Present management track stock assessment, and respond if necessary**

### Tautog

- Continue to monitor implementation of the commercial harvest tagging program to reduce illegal harvest and consider modifications if necessary
- **Conduct and present stock assessment update, and respond if necessary**

### Weakfish

- **Conduct and present stock assessment update, and respond if necessary**

## MEDIUM-LOW PRIORITY SPECIES

### American Eel

- Monitor potential international action on the Convention of International Trade of Endangered Species through communications with US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)

### **Atlantic Herring**

- Monitor and respond if necessary to NEFMC activities including Amendment 10 to address spatial and temporal allocation and management of Atlantic herring to minimize user conflicts, contribute to optimum yield, and support rebuilding of the resource
- Continue to improve coordination and collaboration with NEFMC
- Conduct meetings as necessary to establish state effort control (days-out) programs for Area 1A
- Explore funding options for biological sampling program

### **Atlantic Sturgeon**

- Monitor state and federal activities in response to an Endangered Species Act listing, including 5-year status reviews and recovery plans
- **Monitor state and federal responses to 2025 Biological Opinion and respond, if necessary**
- Monitor state and federal activities to reduce sturgeon bycatch in the monkfish and spiny dogfish fisheries

### **Black Drum**

- Update and present indicators of fishery performance and indices of abundance, and respond if necessary

### **Coastal Sharks**

- Monitor activities of NOAA Fisheries Highly Migratory Species (HMS) Division regarding coastal shark management actions; consider development of complementary management actions as needed for consistency, including HMS Amendment 15 (Mid-Atlantic Shark Closed Area), and **HMS Draft Amendment 16 (commercial and recreational shark fishery management), and proposed rule for electronic reporting**

### **Cobia**

- **Implement new recreational management measures designed to achieve the regional harvest targets based on Addendum II recreational allocations**
- Conduct the 2026 benchmark stock assessment with state and federal partners through the SouthEast Data, Assessment, and Review (SEDAR) process

### **Jonah Crab**

- Work with ACCSP and partners on implementing and integrating tracking device data collection as part of Addendum IV
- Update annual indicator time series for the offshore Southern New England stock, and respond if necessary

### **Shad and River Herring**

- Complete updates to shad and river herring sustainable fishery management plans
- Complete updates to shad habitat plans
- Monitor management activities of MAFMC and NEFMC including, but not limited to, shad and river herring catch caps and bycatch avoidance programs

### Spanish Mackerel

- Monitor and respond if necessary to South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (SAFMC) activities, including review of the mackerel port meeting summary reports

### Spiny Dogfish

- **Finalize and implement Addendum VII to reduce Atlantic sturgeon bycatch and maintain consistency with federal management**

### Spot

- Conduct and present traffic light analysis, and respond if necessary

### Spotted Seatrout

No new tasks

### Winter Flounder

No new tasks

## CROSS CUTTING ISSUES

- Continue to monitor impacts of changes to Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) Fishing Effort Survey (FES) design relative to Commission FMPs and stock assessments
- Continue to update existing management programs to address the concerns of the recreational community with regard to Commission-managed and jointly-managed species
- Continue to work with the states and NOAA Fisheries on changes to the Take Reduction Plan for North Atlantic right whale
- **Explore the development of a guidance or policy-level document on allocation and use of mode splits/recreational sector separations**
- Consider strategies for increasing responsiveness in management to climate change
- Participate in the East Coast Climate Coordination Group to track progress of the Potential Action Plan
- Provide support for the Climate Core Team to track information and changes relevant to East Coast fisheries, identify ideas that are worthy of consideration by the Coordination Group, and identify new possible actions to undertake in the Potential Action Plan
- **Participate in Climate Ecosystem Fisheries Initiative (CEFI) actions including Decision Support Teams and relevant Council Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) projects to support the development and advancement of climate-related fisheries management and implementation efforts**
- **Monitor 304(f) activities of the Regional Councils, and respond if necessary**
- Develop joint management agreement with MAFMC to clarify roles and increase efficiency on collaborative projects

## **Goal 2 – Provide the scientific foundation for stock assessments to support informed management actions**

Sustainable management of fisheries relies on accurate and timely scientific advice. The Commission strives to produce sound, actionable science through a technically rigorous, independently peer-reviewed stock assessment process. Assessments are developed using a broad suite of fishery-independent surveys and fishery-dependent monitoring, as well as research products developed by a coastwide network of fisheries scientists at state, federal, and academic institutions. The goal encompasses the development of new, innovative scientific research and methodology, and the enhancement of the states' stock assessment capabilities. It provides for the administration, coordination, and expansion of collaborative research and data collection programs. Achieving the goal will ensure sound science is available to serve as the foundation for the Commission's evaluation of stock status and adaptive management actions.

Several fisheries science activities occur on an annual or ongoing basis, including development of stock assessments and conducting peer reviews; stock assessment scheduling and evaluation of scientists' workloads; updating Commission research priorities and distributing to funding agencies; external research proposal reviews; development of ecological reference points models; supporting multispecies/diet data collection; fish ageing and tagging programs; gear technology research; analysis and incorporation of socioeconomic data; and participation in Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) and Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program (ACCSP) committees. While ongoing activities are not listed below, they continue to be conducted.

### **SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE ACTIVITIES**

- Seek Assessment Science Committee (ASC) guidance on best practices for use of MRIP FES data in stock assessments; work with MRIP statisticians to scope magnitude of potential effort and catch estimate changes by species; during stock assessments, conduct sensitivity analyses to evaluate the effects of potential MRIP changes on model results and stock status
- Solicit ASC input to long-term stock assessment scheduling priorities, and assessment processes in the Northeast (NRCC) and South Atlantic (SEDAR)
- **Continue to foster US Geological Survey (USGS) partnership; seek analytical support to stock assessment committees from USGS Cooperative Research Units in each state**
- Develop best practices to standardize and archive modeling code and data, during and after assessments, to increase consistency, efficiency, and assessment throughput
- Streamline processes for producing socioeconomic analyses through the Committee on Economics and Social Sciences
  - Participate in the development of the Northeast Fisheries Science Center's (NEFSC) Ecosystem and Socioeconomic Profiles
  - Continue to develop an American lobster socioeconomic data inventory to enhance current stock and fishery indicators
  - **Develop a Recreational Demand Model for striped bass to evaluate fishery trends, as resources allow**

- Update the ASMFC Research Priorities; work with scientific committees to write proposals and pursue funding to conduct priority research
- **Use Risk and Uncertainty Tool to inform management of red drum, and finalize the Risk and Uncertainty Policy**

## DATA COLLECTION

- Coordinate the Southeast Area Monitoring and Assessment Program-South Atlantic (SEAMAP-SA) component
  - **Complete survey designs for a regional fishery-independent survey targeting coastal pelagic species**
  - **Evaluate the efficacy of longline surveys for use as stock assessment abundance indices**
  - Collaborate with the Southeast Coastal Ocean Observing Regional Association to host SEAMAP-SA survey data
  - Seek increased funding support via budget discussions with Congressional staff
- Coordinate the Northeast Area Monitoring and Assessment Program (NEAMAP) and implement action items stemming from annual NEAMAP committee meetings
  - **Develop a new NEAMAP website to enhance outreach to partners and stakeholders**
  - Develop common methodology protocols and standardize guidance documents for NEAMAP partner surveys
  - Seek increased funding support via budget discussions with Congressional staff
  - Communicate with offshore wind energy developers on use of the NEAMAP brand with regard to pre- and post-construction surveys and monitoring; **work with the Northeast Trawl Advisory Panel (NTAP) to develop plans for wind energy area survey mitigation**
- Collect new data to address stock assessment needs
  - Increase the resolution of catch and survey information, including bycatch and fishery-independent information, for future spatial modeling in stock assessments
  - Explore the use of video surveys as new fishery-independent indices for Jonah crab
  - Increase bycatch monitoring of sturgeon, shad and river herring, and sciaenids in state waters, as resources allow
  - Support the states, SAFMC, and ACCSP with the citizen science project to collect new recreational live release data from volunteer anglers
  - Leverage partnerships to increase diet data collection for ecosystem-based assessments and management through new or existing survey programs, as resources allow, notably diets of birds, marine mammals, and larger offshore fish
- **Support the Chesapeake Bay states and NOAA in reviewing striped bass recruitment patterns and associated surveys**
- **Explore conducting Horseshoe Crab Trawl Survey demo trips with stakeholders**
- Explore the use of industry-based surveys to supplement current fishery-independent data collection
- Work with NEFMC, MAFMC and SAFMC to characterize and address deficiencies in NOAA Fisheries' scientific support and associated impacts to fisheries; explore industry-based



platforms to conduct fishery research; this initiative is funded through Inflation Reduction Act funds allocated to the Councils

## **FISHERIES RESEARCH**

- Conduct ageing exchange and workshop for Atlantic sturgeon and for species moving up the coast that are aged differently between regions (black sea bass, cobia)
- Conduct a Fish Ageing Quality Assurance Workshop among Atlantic coast state and university laboratories to ensure consistency between new and historical age data
- Assess fixed gear and right whale interactions in the Gulf of Maine
- Collaborate with university researchers to advance stock assessment population dynamics models: striped bass multi-stock contributions and management strategy evaluation; spot spatiotemporal model; lobster growth model; and ecological reference points
- **Collaborate with USGS to generate new population models for invasive catfish in Chesapeake estuaries, as predators on Commission managed species**
- **Provide support to the new national partnership among Interstate Fisheries Commissions and USGS Regional Science Centers, building on the 2024 American Fisheries Society symposium**
- Work with federal partners to identify shared research priorities and opportunities for enhanced scientific support to the Commission
- Continue to participate with Fisheries and Oceans Canada on the American Eel Work Group supported by the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES)

## **ECOSYSTEM-BASED MANAGEMENT & CHANGING OCEAN CONDITIONS**

- Promote consistencies in fishery-independent survey data collection across East Coast geographic regions and jurisdictions (both state and federal); develop methods to combine or calibrate data across surveys with disparate methodologies
- Evaluate the effects of changing estuarine and ocean conditions on stock productivity and distribution
  - **Request support from the NOAA CEFI to better incorporate environmental information into stock assessments to understand historical and potential future population dynamics**
  - **Partner with the USGS Climate Adaptation Science Centers to characterize changes in diadromous fish populations and their habitats**
- Develop criteria for adding/subtracting states from fishery management boards when stock distributions change
- Improve coordination and knowledge sharing among the Councils' Scientific and Statistical Committees and the Commission's scientific committees, particularly for species spanning multiple jurisdictions and jointly managed species
- Collaborate with NOAA Fisheries Northeast and Southeast Fisheries Science Centers to include Commission interests in Ecosystem Status Reports
- Track development of emerging science and tools related to changing ocean conditions and impacts to fisheries (e.g., Climate, Ecosystems, and Fisheries Initiative; Climate Vulnerability Assessments, Fish Habitat Vulnerability Assessments)
- Examine options to increase fishery management integration across FMPs to fully implement ecosystem-based modeling results

## **COMPETING OCEAN USES**

- Determine the Commission's role in wind energy intersections with fisheries; continue to participate in Responsible Offshore Science Alliance and provide forum for the states to discuss interactions between fisheries resources and offshore energy development
- Support the Recreational Study Fleet Pilot Project, monitor progress, and respond if necessary
- Evaluate NEAMAP and SEAMAP-SA survey interactions with wind energy development; investigate impacts on existing surveys and assessment products

## **Goal 3 - Produce dependable and timely marine fishery statistics for Atlantic coast fisheries**

Effective management depends on quality fishery-dependent data to inform stock assessments and fisheries management decisions. This goal focuses on providing timely and accurate catch, effort, biological and socioeconomic data on Atlantic coast recreational, for-hire, and commercial fisheries to support fisheries science and management.

The Commission will accomplish this through the Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program (ACCSP), a cooperative state-federal program that designs, implements, and conducts marine fisheries statistics data collection programs and integrates those data into data management systems to meet the needs of fishery managers, scientists, and harvesters. ACCSP partners include the 15 Atlantic coast state fishery agencies, the three Atlantic Fishery Management Councils, the Potomac River Fisheries Commission, NOAA Fisheries, and the USFWS.

On a continuing basis, ACCSP does the following:

- Reviews and maintains coastwide standards for data collection and processing in cooperation with all program partners
- Provides funding to its Program Partners supporting data collection management and innovation through a competitive process and monitors funded projects
- Maintains commercial dealer reporting and commercial and for-hire trip catch reporting through the Standard Atlantic Fisheries Information System electronic applications
- Coordinates state conduct of MRIP Access Point Angler Intercept Survey and the For-Hire Survey, including the Large Pelagics Telephone Survey add-on
- Consolidates and integrates partner data and provides user-friendly, on-line, public and confidential access to those data via the Data Warehouse
- Provides communication, outreach, and engagement resources to ACCSP Partners and system users in accordance with the ASMFC Communications Plan
- Maintains security protocols for ASMFC network and information systems to comply with Federal Information Security Management Act
- **Responds to complex custom data requests**

## **PARTNERSHIPS**

- Coordinate with Gulf and Pacific Commissions on data collection and data management initiatives

- Coordinate Atlantic region recreational fisheries data needs, including prioritization of new and ongoing development activities
- Participate in the Fisheries Information Systems program and promote Atlantic data modernization projects
- Coordinate data initiatives with Councils (NEFMC, MAFMC, SAFMC, GMFMC), and relevant NOAA regional offices and Science Centers

## **FISHERIES-DEPENDENT DATA COLLECTION**

### **SAFIS**

- **Complete development and implementation of modernized dealer reporting application and data processing for implementation by January 2026**
- For trip reports, extend One Stop Reporting initiative (e.g., convene workshop on state data needs)

### **Recreational Surveys**

- **Continue to develop and seek MRIP certification of for-hire methodology for logbook estimates of catch and effort with dockside validation**
- **Support recreational data collection pilot projects (e.g., discard catch cards, Large Pelagic Pilot Survey)**

## **DATA STANDARDS, DISTRIBUTION AND USE**

### **Standards**

- **Define data consolidation standards and presentation for released catch, discards, and at-sea observer data across dealer, trip, and citizen science records**

### **Data Distribution and Use**

- **Provide validated commercial landings data for Commission stock assessments (croaker, horseshoe crab Adaptive Resource Management Framework, tautog, and weakfish) and SEDAR process (coastal sharks and dolphin)**
- **Create a biological data load process, including additional partner feeds, and create Data Warehouse queries**
- **Expand Data Warehouse content, with emphasis on presentation of recreational directed trips and catch frequency**

### **Outreach and Infrastructure**

- **Improve IT hosting scalability to address increased data demands**
- **Promote and support communication of ACCSP activities by committee members within their agencies**
- **Create a richer, more engaging ACCSP website that is easy to navigate and provides valuable information to users**

## **Goal 4 – Promote compliance with fishery management plans to ensure sustainable use of Atlantic coast fisheries**

Fisheries managers, law enforcement personnel, and stakeholders have a shared responsibility to promote compliance with fisheries management measures. Activities under the goal seek to increase and improve compliance with FMPs. This requires the successful coordination of both management and enforcement activities among state and federal agencies. Commission members recognize that adequate and consistent enforcement of fisheries rules is required to keep pace with increasingly complex management activity and emerging technologies. Achieving the goal will improve the effectiveness of the Commission's FMPs.

The Commission's Law Enforcement Committee (LEC) carries out much of Goal 4. Most of these activities occur on an annual basis or as part of the FMP development process. Proposed changes in management are evaluated to determine enforceability and effectiveness. The LEC provides managers with feedback on the practicality of regulations to foster stakeholder buy-in and compliance.

### **COMPLIANCE**

- Explore methods for improved enforcement of offshore lobster regulations; work with states to implement vessel tracking requirements, consistent with American Lobster Addendum XXIX and Jonah Crab Addendum IV
- Annually review and comment on (as needed) NOAA Fisheries enforcement priorities to ensure they support the enforceability and effectiveness of Commission management programs
- Evaluate interagency measures to enhance traceability of fishery products across jurisdictional boundaries
- **Collaborate with NEFMC's Enforcement Committee on regulations related to on-demand trap gear**

### **PARTNERSHIPS**

- Engage and support NOAA Fisheries and USFWS Offices of Law Enforcement, U.S. Department of Justice, and US Coast Guard to facilitate the enforceability of Commission FMPs
- Work to sustain financial support for Joint Enforcement Agreements

### **STAKEHOLDER AWARENESS**

- Use emerging communication platforms and tools to deliver real time information regarding regulations and the outcomes of law enforcement investigations
  - Explore the use of electronic tools to communicate real-time commercial and recreational regulations

## **Goal 5 – Protect and enhance fish habitat and ecosystem health through partnerships and education**

Goal 5 aims to conserve and improve coastal, marine, and riverine habitat to enhance the benefits of sustainable Atlantic coastal fisheries and resilient coastal communities in the face of changing ecosystems. Habitat loss and degradation have been identified as significant factors affecting the long-term sustainability and productivity of our nation’s fisheries. The Commission’s Habitat Program develops objectives, sets priorities, and produces tools to guide fisheries habitat conservation efforts directed towards ecosystem-based management.

The challenge for the Commission and its state members is maintaining fish habitat in the absence of specific regulatory authority for habitat protection or enhancement. Therefore, the Commission will work cooperatively with state, federal, and stakeholder partnerships to achieve this goal. Much of the work to address habitat is conducted through the Commission’s Habitat and Artificial Reef Committees. In order to identify critical habitat for Commission-managed species, each year the committee reviews existing reference documents for Commission-managed species to identify gaps or updates needed to describe important habitat types and review and revise species habitat factsheets. The Habitat Committee also publishes the Habitat Management Series and an annual issue of the *Habitat Hotline Atlantic*, both highlighting topical issues that affect all the states.

The Commission and its Habitat Program endorses the National Fish Habitat Partnership (NFHP), and will continue to work cooperatively with the program to improve aquatic habitat along the Atlantic coast. Since 2008, the Commission has invested considerable resources, as both a partner and administrative home, to the Atlantic Coastal Fish Habitat Partnership (ACFHP), a coastwide collaborative effort to accelerate the conservation and restoration of habitat for native Atlantic coastal, estuarine-dependent, and diadromous fishes. As part of this goal, the Commission will continue to provide support for ACFHP, under the direction of the National Fish Habitat Partnership Board.

### **EDUCATE**

- Educate Commissioners, stakeholders, and the general public about the importance of habitat to healthy fisheries and ecosystems
- **Publish Habitat Management Series document on Atlantic coast shell recycling programs and the benefits to fish habitat, and initiate next Habitat Management Series document**
- Identify mechanisms to evaluate ecosystem health for consideration by Technical Committees and Boards

### **INTEGRATE**

- **Update report on state climate change initiatives**
- Maintain and update Fish Habitats of Concern descriptions to be considered for integration into Commission FMPs
- Increase communication on ecosystem-based management with Commission committees to find overlap with fish habitat related issues
- Explore opportunities to integrate habitat data into stock assessments, where possible

## **LEVERAGE PARTNERSHIPS**

- Engage local, state, and regional governments in mutually beneficial habitat protection and enhancement programs through partnerships
- Foster partnerships with management agencies, researchers, and habitat stakeholders to leverage regulatory, political, and financial support
- Engage in state and federal agency efforts to ensure response strategies to changing ocean conditions are included in habitat conservation efforts
- Promote assessment and development of effective fish passage approaches and projects through state and federal collaboration
- Work with ACFHP to foster partnerships with like-minded organizations at local levels to further common habitat goals
- Support ACFHP and its partners in pursuing habitat restoration funding from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and Inflation Reduction Act
- Provide administrative home and support to ACFHP, and identify partners to support restoration grant administration and project management
- **Work with partners to develop standardized submerged aquatic vegetation assessment, restoration, and monitoring for Atlantic coast resource managers and habitat stakeholders**
- Implement the ACFHP 2022-2026 Strategic Plan and annual action plan, including climate resilience and diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives
- Work with partners to protect, restore, or maintain resilient Regional Priority Habitats to optimize ecosystem functions and services to benefit fish and wildlife
- Protect, restore, and enhance fish habitats by funding habitat conservation projects

## **Goal 6 – Strengthen stakeholder and public support for the Commission**

Stakeholder and public acceptance of Commission decisions are critical to our ultimate success. For the Commission to be effective, these groups must have a clear understanding of our mission, vision, and decision-making process, as well as the opportunities that stakeholders have to participate in our process through advisory panels and public comment. The goal seeks to do so through expanded outreach and education efforts about Commission programs, decision-making processes, and its management successes and challenges. It aims to engage stakeholders in the process of fisheries management, and promote the activities and accomplishments of the Commission. Achieving the goal will increase stakeholder participation, understanding, and acceptance of Commission activities.

On a continuing basis, the Commission conducts outreach and stakeholder engagement through a number of products and activities. These include publications (e.g., bi-monthly Fisheries Focus, Annual Report to Congress), press releases, meeting summaries, stock assessment overviews, website and social media platforms, industry tradeshows and state festivals, and stakeholder engagement through the advisory panel process. Building strong relationships with local, regional and national media contacts, and networking/collaborating with our management partners from the Councils, states and federal agencies are also critical components of our outreach program, which occur on an ongoing basis.

## **INCREASE PUBLIC UNDERSTANDING AND SUPPORT OF ASMFC**

- Continue to provide a streamlined Annual Report, highlighting major accomplishments in a concise format
- Update *Guide to Fisheries Science and Stock Assessments*
- **Explore changes in format of the *Habitat Hotline Atlantic and Fisheries Focus***
- Promote high profile species and stock assessment results through various outreach tools and platforms
- Provide focused outreach on: **Atlantic striped bass, red drum**, Atlantic menhaden, American lobster, horseshoe crabs and continuing recreational reform initiatives with MAFMC
- Develop overviews for stock assessments for **American lobster, Atlantic croaker, Atlantic menhaden, and ERPs**
- Develop story map of striped bass migration, spawning patterns and the impact of environmental factors on recruitment to increase understanding of the complexity of the species' life history

## **MAXIMIZE USE OF CURRENT AND NEW TECHNOLOGIES**

- **Launch redesigned website with offsite hosting; receive training in WordPress back-office management and develop SOPPs**
- **Enhance understanding of stock assessment science through the use of pre-recorded videos or webinar clips**
- **Use new website technology to highlight engaging content and eye-catching images**
- **Assist Fisheries Science Coordinator in the re-design and migration of the NEAMAP website to offsite host**
- Use new technologies and communication platforms to more fully engage the broader public in the Commission's activities and actions
- Use story mapping to better communicate science and management activities
- **Track analytics to assess the success of new website and social media platforms in reaching broader constituency and effectively communicating ASMFC mission, programs and activities**

## **FACILITATE STAKEHOLDER PARTICIPATION**

- **Develop Action Tracker webpages for species with pending actions or recent board decisions**
- **Streamline submission of public comment through use of new website forms to gather public comment for quarterly meetings and public comment documents**
- **Improve stakeholder communication through use of new website "contact us" page with easy sign-ups for listservs**
- Revise Advisory Panel (AP) Primer and other AP guidance documents
- Explore options to strengthen stakeholder input on pending management documents, stock assessments, and data collection/management activities
- Explore additional tools to gather public comment on proposed management actions (e.g., online surveys)

## **MEDIA RELATIONS AND NETWORKING**

- **Develop FAQs of commonly asked questions for high profile species (horseshoe crab, Atlantic menhaden)**
- **Develop Fact Checkers news post webpage(s) to address inaccuracies in print and digital media**
- Continue to publish weekly Atlantic Coast Fisheries News listserv to communicate activities of the Commission, member states, regional organizations and partnerships, and federal agencies
- Work with other Northeast Regional Coordinating Council (NRCC) communication members to coordinate outreach on shared stock assessments
- Work with MRIP communications staff to develop messaging regarding the impacts of possible changes to FES survey methodology on ASMFC managed species
- Continue to participate on the SAFMC Outreach Advisory Panel and continue to work closely with MAFMC on communication and outreach activities, possibly through participation its newly established Outreach Committee
- Strengthen national, regional, and local media relations to increase coverage of Commission actions; continue to respond to factual inaccuracies in news articles
- Consider using a media monitoring service to track media communications and coverage, including social media to analyze strengths and weaknesses and expand coverage
- Finalize ASMFC Communications Plan to clarify staff roles and details of outreach program as well as provide vision for future outreach efforts across all Commission Programs, social media; and trade show participation.
- Work with Atlantic Coast Fisheries Communication Group, comprised of Public Information Officers from the Councils, states and federal agencies, to share successful tools, identify key media contacts and work cooperatively on joint projects

## **Goal 7 – Advance Commission and member states’ priorities through a proactive legislative policy agenda**

State input is critical for a coherent national fisheries policy. The Commission recognizes the need to work with Congress, the Administration and partner organizations in policy formulation, and will be vigilant in advocating state interests to Congress. The Commission will pursue federal resources for states to implement and comply with the Atlantic Coastal Fisheries Cooperative Management Act (Atlantic Coastal Act) and to improve or maintain fisheries data collection. The importance of habitat restoration, research on the impacts of changing ocean conditions, and the need for effective marine enforcement will also be communicated to Congress and our management partners.

## **DEVELOP AND STRENGTHEN RELATIONSHIPS WITH MEMBERS OF CONGRESS AND STAFF**

- Establish relationships with the new members of the 119<sup>th</sup> Congress
- Encourage Commissioners to communicate with members of Congress and facilitate in person meetings on the Hill and in their districts



- Provide opportunities for the Executive Director to communicate with Congressional staff on a regular basis
- Provide state-specific ‘ASMFC Meeting Previews’ to Congressional staff ahead of quarterly Meetings

## **ENGAGE CONGRESS AND THE ADMINISTRATION ON FISHERY-RELATED LEGISLATION AND ISSUES**

- **Establish relationships with new appointees to the Administration**
- Utilize the Legislative Committee to increase the Commission’s effectiveness on Capitol Hill
  - Review pending legislation of interest to the Commission and make recommendations to the Executive Committee
    - **Develop process to comment on pending legislation if a consensus position cannot be reached among the member states**
  - Explore authorizing legislation for fishery-independent surveys supporting ASMFC-managed species (horseshoe crab, Atlantic menhaden, NEAMAP and SEAMAP-SA trawl surveys)
- Monitor federal legislation affecting the Commission, including policy and annual appropriations bills and develop Commission positions on pending federal legislation
  - Existing laws: Atlantic Coastal Act, Interjurisdictional Fisheries Act, Anadromous Fish Conservation Act, Magnuson-Stevens Act, Federal Aid in Sport Fish Restoration Act, and Endangered Species Act
  - Pending legislation/emerging issues: forage fish management, shifting stocks and reallocations, disaster declarations and increasing declaration efficiency, energy initiatives (offshore wind, hydropower; fishery compensation/mitigation), shark fin trade, whale rulemaking, living shorelines, modernization of recreational data collection efforts, the NOAA Organic Act, efforts to move diadromous species management to the Fish and Wildlife Service, Reinvesting in Shoreline Economies and Ecosystems, and Recovering America’s Wildlife Act

## **PURSUE FEDERAL RESOURCES TO SUPPORT MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES**

- Communicate the Commission’s federal funding needs to Congress and advocate for sufficient appropriations in fiscal years 2025 and 2026
  - Priority line items under NOAA: Regional Councils and Fishery Commissions, Interjurisdictional Fisheries Act, Fisheries Data Collections, Surveys and Assessments, SEAMAP, and Fisheries Information Networks
  - Priority projects, programs, and activities include: Atlantic Coastal/National Fish Habitat Partnership, Cooperative Enforcement Joint Enforcement Agreements, NEAMAP and SEAMAP-South Atlantic trawl surveys, GOM lobster research, Mid-Atlantic Horseshoe Crab Trawl Survey, Chesapeake Bay Atlantic menhaden abundance, retrofitting South Carolina DNR’s R/V Lady Lisa replacement
- Priority line items under USGS
  - Priority projects, programs, and activities include: Eastern Ecological Science Center, the Species Management Research Program and Ecosystem Mission Area

- Four Interstate Commissions/USGS science cooperative research funding, building upon the report language included in the FY24 House and Senate reports
- Build relationships through USGS facilitation with Cooperative Research Units
- Seek federal funding support for long-term monitoring surveys and species-specific initiatives
- Engage the Administration (Commerce and Interior Departments) on funding and policy issues; and work to ensure Commission and state priorities are reflected in the President’s budget
- Communicate state and Commission funding needs to NOAA Fisheries, USFWS, and USGS

## **PARTNERSHIPS**

- Coordinate with the Gulf, Pacific, and Great Lakes Commissions on policy items of mutual interest including federal funding for fisheries programs and the allocation of Sport Fish Restoration Funding. Executive Directors should continue to provide unified positions on funding and legislative priorities to lawmakers and federal agencies, where appropriate
- Continue participation on Marine Fisheries Advisory Committee
- Build on partnerships with the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, USFWS, USGS, and Bureau of Ocean Energy Management

## **Goal 8 – Ensure the fiscal stability and efficient administration of the Commission**

Goal 8 will ensure that the business affairs of the Commission are managed effectively and efficiently, including workload balancing through the development of annual action plans to support the Commission’s management process. It also highlights the need for the Commission to efficiently manage its resources. The goal promotes the efficient use of legal advice to proactively review policies and react to litigation as necessary. It also promotes human resource policies that attract talented and committed individuals to conduct the work of the Commission. The goal highlights the need for the Commission as an organization to continually expand its skill set through training and educational opportunities. It calls for Commissioners and Commission staff to maintain and increase the institutional knowledge of the Commission through periods of transition. Achieving this goal will build core strengths, enabling the Commission to respond to increasingly difficult and complex fisheries management issues.

On a continuing basis, the Commission staff conservatively manages fiscal resources to achieve the proper balance between allocating funds to coastwide priorities and ensuring fiscal stability. Tasks performed to accomplish this balance include monitoring expenditures on a monthly basis; managing the reserve fund; fine-tuning meeting and travel policies; and preparing and participating in the annual audit and indirect cost proposal.

Human resources management is an ongoing process of recruitment and selection of employees; thoroughly orienting and introducing new employees to the culture of the Commission; maintaining good working conditions for all employees; managing employee relations; and training to enhance and increase their current skills. Ongoing tasks to accomplish this are annual review and revision of position

descriptions; facilitating staff participation at national and regional conferences; and providing professional training opportunities. Additionally, human resource support is provided to cooperative programs such as APAIS and ACFHP. All human resources documents are reviewed at least annually to ensure compliance with federal regulations and consistency with current practices.

Further, Commission staff keeps abreast of changes in technology and evaluates the need for updating the Commission's hardware and software. Ensuring consistency of resources and training across the Commission as well as documenting processes and verifying database information are ongoing tasks conducted by the staff.

The Commission process can be overwhelming to new Commissioners. The staff is committed to providing a thorough introduction and orientation to new Commissioners. Tasks conducted throughout the year include documenting institutional knowledge and updating on a regular basis the Commissioner Manual. Staff also provides this service to new members of Commission committees.

## **MANAGE OPERATIONS AND BUDGETS**

- **Engage a consultant to update Indirect Cost Agreement for ASMFC**
- **Establish guidelines for issuing 1099s to disaster relief recipients**
- Assist member states in distributing fishery disaster funds as requested
- Work with member states to effectively and efficiently administer Atlantic right whale/lobster Congressional funding
- **Respond to audit requirements as necessary regarding CARES and Consolidated Appropriations Act funds**
- Manage all ongoing Cooperative Agreements, ensuring deliverables are completed and budgets are responsibly managed
- Utilize and update as necessary the Commission compensation plan, including job classifications and salaries based on location
- Expand the capacity of contracts database to capture the complete life-cycle of all Commission funding sources
- **Refurbish office space to use energy efficient technology (i.e., LED light fixtures)**

## **UTILIZE CURRENT INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY**

- **Migrate accounting software to a cloud-based platform**
- Manage Commission inventory through accounting software, tracking acquisitions and disposals
- Develop and implement a Commission intranet to connect our hybrid workforce via seamless and transparent communication
- Provide training for staff on technology that has changed, been implemented, or could be better utilized
- **Continue digitization of historical documents and improve digital archive storage**
- Perform review of Commission technology, ensuring it is under support and is up-to-date with current technology needs

## **MANAGE HUMAN RESOURCES**

- **Investigate additional options and resources to improve recruitment of administrative staff**
- **Research improvements to Human Resources Management System**
- **Conduct all staff team building retreat**
- Promote Commission's mission and programs, and recruit new and diverse talent through outreach meetings with various marine policy and marine science graduate programs
- Provide training opportunities for ASMFC staff, including National Conservation Training Center
- Conduct annual meeting with financial advisor to review retirement program performance with staff

## **ENGAGE AND SUPPORT COMMISSIONERS**

- Conduct a meetings facilitation training workshop for technical committee members
- Continue process to welcome and orient new Commissioners to allow for full engagement in the Commission process
- Facilitate the retention and transfer of institutional knowledge among Commissioners

## **ENSURE THE LEGAL COMPLIANCE OF COMMISSION ACTIONS**

- Utilize legal advice on new management strategies and policies, and respond to litigation as necessary, whether it be regarding challenges to Commission FMPs, a human resource issue, or access to confidential data