

FISHERIES SCIENCE PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Habitat Program – Habitat Committee

Committee Name: Habitat Committee

Active Subcommittees: Artificial Reef Subcommittee

History/Purpose: The Commission’s involvement in habitat has grown with its broadening fisheries management responsibilities and the evolution of ecosystem-based fishery management. Formal actions to address habitat issues began in 1980 with the adoption of a resolution that identified the harmful estuarine impacts of chlorine use in sewage treatment operations, and requested review of state and federal policies. For the next ten years, habitat issues were addressed in much the same way, with the adoption of resolutions in response to specific concerns. The Commission adopted resolutions on the issues of ocean dumping (1987, 1993), oil spills (1989), federal fishery management council habitat policies (1989), toxic materials in artificial reefs (1990), dam construction (1993), and federal legislation protecting estuarine habitat (1993).

Habitat was included historically in fisheries management planning under the Interstate Fisheries Management Program. Many early fisheries management plans (FMPs), such as spot, croaker, and menhaden, included useful biological information; however, they lacked specific habitat information and habitat management recommendations. The striped bass (1981) and river herring (1985) FMPs were the first plans to significantly address habitat. Since 1990, plans have been developed to include more specific habitat-related information and recommendations. The most noteworthy of these is the winter flounder plan (1992), which compared the significance of habitat management actions with harvest management actions.

In 1989, the Commission held a habitat summit that reviewed the concerns of fisheries managers with respect to the need for healthy habitats. The result of this summit was the development of a resolution adopted as the “Joint Statement to Conserve Marine, Estuarine, and Riverine Habitat.” This statement offers general guidance to states and other agencies on the importance of minimizing adverse impacts to vital fish habitats, making good use of existing authorities and improving them when necessary, and fostering interagency cooperation and collaboration. This served as the momentum to initiate the development of a dedicated program for habitat within the Commission.

As the first step in the development of the Habitat Program, the Commission Chair appointed a Habitat Committee in December 1991. The first task the Habitat Committee undertook was the development of program goals and objectives. These centered on using the assets of the Commission, including its broad network of fisheries managers, fishermen, and others

concerned about fisheries, its forum for consensus building, and its reputation for building collaborative interagency programs. In January 1992, the Committee adopted a Statement of Policy and Activities.

In 1993, funding for a part-time Habitat Coordinator and the education portion of the Habitat Program was initiated via funding from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Sportfish Restoration Program. The Atlantic arm of the Fishermen Involved in Saving Habitat (F.I.S.H.) Education Program was implemented, and the goal of the education portion of the program was threefold: to educate fishermen and the general public about the habitat needs of important marine fish and habitat issues, to weigh in on policies that will ultimately affect marine and anadromous fish habitat, and to encourage fishermen and the public to weigh in on these issues for themselves. Habitat Program coordination was elevated to a full-time staff position in 1995.

Most of the activities performed under this portion of the program were educational in nature, and were designed to facilitate outreach to fishermen and the general public. In March 1994, the first issue of the *Habitat Hotline Atlantic*, a newsletter addressing issues of concern for Atlantic marine fish habitat, was published. In following years, many documents, brochures, and posters have been developed educating the public and promoting healthy habitats for fish.

Development of policies that protect and conserve fish habitats has also been an important focus area of the Commission's Habitat Program. The Habitat Program has participated in reauthorization of federal legislation and development and review of federal environmental policies. Establishment of Commission policies in relation to, or separate from, federal activities has also been an important part of this focus area. In May 1997, the Commission adopted a coastwide policy on submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV) conservation, and updated the policy in 2018 and 2022. Since its adoption, the policy has served as an impetus for the development of regulations that protect SAV in a number of Atlantic coast states.

Regional fishery management council implementation of the essential fish habitat (EFH) provisions of the 1996 amendments to the Magnuson-Stevens Act necessitated the development of a policy or position on the use of EFH in Commission fishery management plans, since many Commission plans are developed jointly with regional fishery management councils. The Commission adopted the definition of EFH that is given in the Magnuson-Stevens Act (16 USC 1801 *et. seq.*) and is clarified in the EFH regulations (50 CFR 600.10). The Commission also chose to adopt EFH designations for species managed jointly with councils, but refrained from designating EFH for species solely under its management authority.

In the mid to late 1990s, the focus of the Habitat Program turned from public education towards coordination between fisheries and habitat management programs. In November 1993, a roundtable discussion was held at the Annual Meeting to gain input from Commissioners on the future direction of the Habitat Program. These participants determined that one of the most effective things the Commission could do to protect fish habitat was to develop information that habitat managers could use in their decision-making process, and

ensure they receive it. The Habitat Program has pursued this by improving coordination between fisheries and habitat management programs, and integrating information useful to habitat managers into Commission FMPs. In 1998, the Habitat and FMP Subcommittee published a guide for use by FMP authors in the development of FMP and source document habitat sections. That same year the Habitat Program produced its first strategic and management plan.

Since the 1990s, the Habitat Program has evolved to become an authority on fish habitat for the Atlantic coast. The *Habitat Management Series* publications have been used by many agencies and organizations along the coast to promote the protection and restoration of fish habitat.

According to the ISFMP Charter (2003), the purpose of the Habitat Committee is to review, research, and develop appropriate response to concerns of inadequate, damaged, or insufficient habitat for Atlantic coastal species of concern to the Commission. Among its duties for the Commission, the Habitat Committee shall:

1. Serve as a consultant to the ISFMP regarding habitat on which the species of concern to the Commission are dependent, whether salt, brackish, or freshwater
2. Provide comment on the habitat sections of fishery management plans, and provide suggested text for these sections
3. Propose habitat mitigation measures, comment on proposed habitat mitigation measures, and proposed alternate measures if necessary to ensure appropriate habitat conservation
4. Establish subcommittees or other work groups as are necessary to research various habitats related issues
5. Formulate habitat-specific policies for consideration of and adoption by the Commission

The Habitat Committee operates under the Commission's Five Year Strategic Plan (2019 – 2023), the current Action Plan (2022), as well as the Habitat Committee Guidance Document (2013).

Membership: Each Commission member state is allowed one nomination to the Habitat Committee, and nominations shall not include current Commissioners. The Committee members vote on a Chair and Vice Chair every two years. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and NOAA Fisheries each have two nominees to the Habitat Committee. The following federal agencies have one nomination to the Habitat Committee: Environmental Protection Agency and U.S. Geological Survey. Two seats are available on the Habitat Committee for members from non-governmental organizations (NGO).

Codifying Document: ISFMP Charter

Type & Frequency of Meetings: The Habitat Committee meets two times a year.

Primary activities:

- Developing Habitat Sections of Fishery Management Plans
- Creation of *Habitat Management Series* publications
- Publication of the *Habitat Hotline Atlantic* newsletter and other outreach materials

Major accomplishments: Please see the Commission’s website, under Habitat Publications, for a complete list of products.

History of Chairmanship:

Current Chair &

Vice-Chair:	11/20 -	Chair: Jimmy Johnson, NC DENR Vice-Chair: Russ Babb, NJDEP
	11/18 – 11/20	Chair: Marek Topolski, MD DNR Vice-Chair: Jimmy Johnson, NC DENR
	5/17 to 11/18	Chair, January Murray, GA DNR Vice-Chair, Marek Topolski, MD DNR
	5/15 to	Chair, Jake Kritzer, Environmental Defense Fund Vice-Chair, January Murray, GA DNR
	5/15 to 5/13	Chair, Kent Smith, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission; Vice-Chair: Jake Kritzer
	5/13 to 5/11	Chair, Bob Van Dolah, SC Department of Natural Resources Vice-Chair, Kent Smith, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
	04/11 to 11/08	Wilson Laney, USFWS Southeast Region
	10/08 to 6/07	Karen Chytalo, NY Department of Environmental Conservation
	5/07 to 1/97	Bill Goldsborough, Chesapeake Bay Foundation
	1/97 to 3/91	Tom Fote, New Jersey Commissioner

Staff Lead: Lisa Havel, lhavel@asmfc.org

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Habitat Program – Artificial Reef Committee

Subcommittee Name: Artificial Reef Committee

Purpose: The Artificial Reef Technical Advisory Committee was established in 1986 to coordinate artificial reef development activities in the Atlantic Ocean in state and federal waters.

Membership: Each state along the Atlantic coast that has an artificial reef coordinator may participate on the subcommittee. Some states may have more than one representative, depending on the size of their program. Additionally, there is one representative on the subcommittee representing NOAA Fisheries Service’s artificial reefs program. Subcommittee membership changes as artificial reef managers change.

Codifying Document: Request of ISFMP Policy Board

Type & Frequency of Meetings: One in-person meeting per year; a joint meeting with the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission’s Artificial Reefs Subcommittee. Discussions via conference call as necessary.

Primary activities: Sharing information on state-of-the-art materials and protocols for deploying artificial reefs.

Major accomplishments:

- Guidelines for Marine Artificial Reef Materials (1997)
- Coastal Artificial Reef Planning Guide (1998)
- Guidelines for Marine Artificial Reef Materials, Second Edition (2004)
- National Artificial Reef Plan (as Amended): Guidelines for Siting, Construction, Development, and Assessment of Artificial Reefs (2007)

History of Chairmanship:

Current Chair & Vice-Chair: (2/19 - present) Chair, Jordan Byrum, NC DENR; Vice-Chair, Chris LaPorta, NYSDEC

Staff Lead: Lisa Havel, lhavel@asmfc.org