

Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

Habitat Committee

November 11, 2026

9:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.

Agenda

The times listed are approximate; the order in which these items will be taken is subject to change.

Webinar Link: <https://v.ringcentral.com/join/412940340>

- | | |
|---|------------|
| 1. Welcome & Introductions (<i>K. Wilke</i>) | 9:00 a.m. |
| 2. Committee Consent (<i>K. Wilke</i>) | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Approval of Agenda• Approval of July 2026 Virtual Meeting Proceedings | |
| 3. Committee Species Assignments (<i>S. Kaalstad</i>) | 9:30 a.m. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review and discuss previous species board and TC summaries | |
| <i>Break</i> | 10:20 a.m. |
| 4. ASMFC Commissioner Survey Results (<i>C. Brinton</i>) | 10:30 a.m. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Updated summary• Discuss next steps | |
| 5. Discuss ASMFC Habitat Priorities | 11:15 a.m. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Implementing commissioner survey results to inform 1-3yr plan | |
| <i>Lunch</i> | 12:00 p.m. |
| 6. Continue ASMFC Habitat Priorities discussion | 1:15 p.m. |
| 7. Finalize Habitat Hotline 2026 (<i>S. Kaalstad</i>) | 2:00 p.m. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Commissioner Survey Summary• Feature Articles• State Updates• ACFHP Update | |
| <i>Break</i> | 2:30 p.m. |
| 8. Round Table Habitat Updates | 2:45 p.m. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Large-scale sand mining in Virginia• Systematic approaches to dredging time-of-year restrictions | |
| 9. Mapping Project Updates (<i>K. Wilke</i>) | 3:30 p.m. |
| 10. Other Business | 3:45 p.m. |
| 11. Adjourn | 4:00 p.m. |

The meeting will be held at Hotel Viking, One Bellevue Avenue, Newport, RI
and via webinar; click [here](#) for details

Keyword	Count
Artificial Reefs	3
Fish Passage	3
Habitat Keystone Species	4
Invasive Species	2
Juvenile Habitat	5
Population Dynamics	2
Range Shift	3
Spawning Habitat	7

Select Keyword
Spawning Habitat

ASMFC Commissioner Habitat Survey Results

Describe the Fish Habitat(s) of Concern you would like more information about.	Describe the industries affecting the marine environment for which you would like more information regarding habitat impacts.	Describe any other habitat-related questions, concerns, and/or information gaps you would like addressed in a future Habitat Management Series document or alternative product.	Are there any particular species where additional habitat information would improve your ability to make management decisions?
Horseshoe crab beach sand requirements for spawning. American eel and shad and river herring passage requirements. Atlantic sturgeon spawning and nursery area requirements. How dependent are red drum on oyster beds as habitat?	Offshore wind development effects on managed species. Releases of sewage effluent and chemical spills in coastal rivers and streams. Entrainment and impingement studies from power plants are now pretty dated.	See above.	American_Eel,Atlantic_Sturgeon,Horseshoe_Crab,River_Herring_and_Shad
Red Drum nearshore spawning areas/habitat. Horseshoe crab salt marsh spawning areas for laying eggs.	Dredging regarding direct impacts and indirect for audio impacts to sciaenids		Horseshoe_Crab,Red_Drum
	Wind energy areas. Assessing the habitat value of offshore wind areas to ASMFC managed species and to the fisheries in these areas (including after decommissioning).	interstate transfer of eelgrass seeds to facilitate regional seed-based eelgrass restoration collaboratives change in suitable habitat for striped bass spawning	American_Eel,Atlantic_Menhaden,Atlantic_Striped_Bass,Atlantic_Sturgeon,Horseshoe_Crab
eelgrass, upper riverine spawning habitat/riparian habitat for diadromous fish, beach nourishment/dredging impacts on horseshoe crab spawning habitat	dredging, sand/gravel extraction, water use impacts on riverine systems		American_Eel,Atlantic_Striped_Bass,Horseshoe_Crab,River_Herring_and_Shad
water levels and withdrawals and the impacts on estuarine species such as American eel, river herring & shad Oyster reefs and the potential benefits to nitrogen and carbon sequestration	Sand mining and channel dredging impacts on winter flounder and alosine spp.	Habitat related changes in Chesapeake Bay and the failure of striped bass year classes	American_Eel,Atlantic_Striped_Bass,Horseshoe_Crab,River_Herring_and_Shad
See notes on striped bass and eels below		I wonder if a focus on striped bass habitat would be helpful. We are in the midst of this pervasive poor recruitment regime in the Chesapeake Bay but I think its hard to speak to why, other than environmental and habitat effects. I checked eels above because there has been significant dam removal in Maine which some in the state attribute to supporting the glass eel fishery. But its hard to quantify this impact.	American_Eel,Atlantic_Striped_Bass
I think mapping the important, juvenile lobster habitat would be useful when state agencies have to deal with construction and development project. In regards, River Herring I think it would be useful to know how much potentiality of to expand and guide, potential fish ladder, constructions, and various parts of the coast. Some of that work has already been done by the state agencies, so I think it would be more useful just assimilate that information	I think it would be useful to assimilate the information on Surf Ciam dredging in inshore area, the types of habitat, being affected or not affected, and characterize impact bottom type and species. The point being that if there are probably habitat types with this little or no impact of dredging, and in other types of habitat that should be avoided an entirely due to the abundance of juvenile species, particularly lobster.		American_Lobster,River_Herring_and_Shad

Keyword	Count
Beach Renourishment	4
Comercial Fisheries	2
Dredging	6
Freshwater Withdrawls	4
Offshore Wind	6
Watershed Impacts	6

Select Keyword
Offshore Wind

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Artificial reefs for tautog and black sea bass. The old question of whether they produce these species or just attract them.	While it looks like offshore wind development is at a standstill under this administration, the impact of the transmission lines from the OSW turbines to shore did not seem to have much information compared to the habitat impacts of the turbines.		Atlantic_Menhaden,Atlantic_Striped_Bass,Atlantic_Sturgeon,Horseshoe_Crab,Tautog
	Wind Energy		River_Herring_and_Shad,Tautog
Effects of artificial reefs on congregation of tautog, specifically is reproductive habitat being improved or are they serving as congregation tools for increasing angling mortality. Additionally, are artificial reefs resulting in growing populations or aggregating populations, pulling them off of other structure.	Offshore wind	Effects of sand mining for beach replenishment	American_Eel,Tautog
	Marine construction (ex. piling installation) & offshore wind industries.	1. Electricity transmission effects. 2. Empirically, how changes to habitat condition will influence abundance & population dynamics. 3. Risk assessment of habitat condition trends that influence stocks (scenarios) which can be used to inform decision making. 4. Potential for stock response (i.e. distribution & abundance) to habitat shifts due to climate/environment change (including ecological repercussions); particularly for Red Drum & Cobia in Chesapeake Bay. 5. Other [jointly managed] species of interest for habitat information not listed earlier are Black Sea Bass, Bluefish, Tautog, & Summer Flounder.	American_Eel,Atlantic_Menhaden,Atlantic_Striped_Bass,Cobia,Red_Drum,Tautog
Horseshoe crab beach sand requirements for spawning. American eel and shad and river herring passage requirements. Atlantic sturgeon spawning and nursery area requirements. How dependent are red drum on oyster beds as habitat?	Offshore wind development effects on managed species. Releases of sewage effluent and chemical spills in coastal rivers and streams. Entrainment and impingement studies from power plants are now pretty dated.	See above.	American_Eel,Atlantic_Sturgeon,Horseshoe_Crab,River_Herring_and_Shad
	Wind energy areas. Assessing the habitat value of offshore wind areas to ASMFC managed species and to the fisheries in these areas (including after decommissioning).	interstate transfer of eelgrass seeds to facilitate regional seed-based eelgrass restoration collaboratives change in suitable habitat for striped bass spawning	American_Eel,Atlantic_Menhaden,Atlantic_Striped_Bass,Atlantic_Sturgeon,Horseshoe_Crab

Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

ASMFC Habitat Committee

Meeting Notes

July 29, 2026

Overview

The Habitat Committee meeting focused on reviewing a commissioner survey to understand habitat-related priorities and discussing the next issue of the Habitat Hotline newsletter. Cameron presented survey results showing high participation from commissioners, with American Eel, striped bass, and horseshoe crabs being the species of greatest concern, and identified offshore wind energy as the top industry-related issue. The committee discussed how to use this information to guide future priorities and decided to include a summary of the survey results in both the policy board presentation and the Habitat Hotline newsletter. They also explored potential topics for the next Habitat Hotline, with Wilson offering to write about fish-friendly turbines at Roanoke Rapids Dam and Christopher suggesting an article on marsh spawning habitat for horseshoe crabs. The conversation ended with a brief discussion of a proposed fish habitat mapping project led by Jay Odell, which would cost approximately \$240,000 total or \$75,000 for an initial subset, with potential funding from the National Fish Habitat Partnership.

Striped Bass Aquaculture

At the start, there was a conversation involving Wilson Laney and Toni Kerns about striped bass offshore aquaculture. Wilson expressed strong concerns about the idea of culturing striped bass in net pens offshore, referencing problems seen in the Atlantic salmon industry. He indicated he was working on a review of a NOAA technical memorandum related to this topic. Toni advised him to first look at an existing draft letter that she and Emily had already prepared based on board member feedback, before doing additional work. The board's position is that they are not in favor of moving forward with the aquaculture proposal at this time.

Kate then formally opened the meeting and outlined the agenda, which includes three main items: reviewing the results of a Commissioner Survey, discussing the next topic for the Habitat Hotline newsletter, and providing an update on a habitat mapping project.

Lou Chiarella from NOAA Fisheries joined and noted he was unaware of the draft letter regarding striped bass aquaculture and requested an opportunity to review and provide input on it, as he had not been part of those discussions.

Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

Toni then began explaining the background of the letter, noting it was initiated because NOAA had brought forward a document proposing offshore finfish aquaculture, potentially using striped bass in net pens in the Atlantic.

Toni clarified that the letter was not originally a task assigned to the Habitat Committee. Instead, it originated from NOAA, which brought forward a document proposing offshore aquaculture for finfish, specifically suggesting striped bass as a potential species for net pen operations in the Atlantic. The board reviewed this and provided feedback, and Toni and Emily put together a draft letter based on that feedback. The board's position, as reflected in the letter, is that they are not in favor of moving forward at this time.

Lou Chiarella from NOAA Fisheries noted that he had not been part of any discussions on the striped bass aquaculture issue and was unaware a letter had been prepared, expressing that he would like the opportunity to review it and provide input.

Wilson Laney had also weighed in earlier, expressing strong skepticism about the idea of culturing striped bass in offshore net pens, drawing on lessons from the Atlantic salmon industry. He indicated he would finish his own review and share it with Toni and the committee, though Toni suggested he first check the existing letter to see if his concerns were already addressed before doing additional work.

Chris McDonough mentioned that something related to offshore aquaculture for Red Drum in the Gulf of Mexico had been approved, as he had seen it in a commercial fishing publication. He brought this up as it was news to him and seemed relevant to the ongoing discussion about offshore net pen aquaculture.

Eric Schneider shared a link to the Striped Bass meeting materials:

<https://asmfc.org/resources/management-meeting-materials/atlantic-striped-bass-management-board-summer-meeting-materials-august-2026/>

The letter, from ASMFC, is on pdf pages 38-42.

Kate Wilke: https://asmfc.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/HMS16_Aquaculture_May2020.pdf Pg 5-6 is a small section on net pens, section label is "Fish Farming".

Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

Chris McDonough: <https://www.seafoodsource.com/news/ocean-era-receives-final-permit-for-red-drum-demo-off-florida-coast> This is the (very brief) article on the approved demo aquaculture operation for red drum in the Gulf (off FL)

Commissioner Survey and the Habitat Hotline discussions:

Cameron Brinton (GA DNR) presented the results of a Commissioner Survey that was designed to help the Habitat Committee better understand what commissioners prioritize regarding habitat, and to guide the committee's work over the next 1 to 3 years.

Key findings from the survey:

- Participation: almost every state had at least one commissioner or proxy respond.
- Species of concern: the top three were American Eel, Atlantic Striped Bass, and Horseshoe Crabs. Most of the leading species identified were diadromous species, which Wilson Laney noted have the most complicated life cycles and are the hardest to manage.
- Habitat issues: the most cited were spawning and spawning migration habitats, Chesapeake Bay-related issues, artificial reefs, juvenile habitat, oyster reefs, habitat changes, and eelgrass.
- Industries of concern: offshore wind energy was by far the top concern, followed by dredging and beach renourishment, which were often linked to horseshoe crab spawning impacts. Other mentions included marine construction, salinity changes from water use, and various one-off items.
- Habitat Hotline: most commissioners said they skim it for relevant information and prefer shorter editions, around the current length of 23 to 27 pages. The most valued sections were habitat science and research topics, habitat restoration and conservation projects, and state updates.

The group discussed presenting survey results to the policy board, with Toni suggesting to wait until February 2027 rather than the upcoming meeting in November. They agreed to include a summary of survey results and state updates in the 2026 Hotline that will be released between the annual meeting (November 2026) and winter meeting (February 2027), with plans to present the full survey findings to the policy board at the winter meeting (February 2027).

Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

Habitat Hotline 2026

The team discussed focusing the Habitat Hotline on specific species rather than habitat types. Robert suggested looking at the priority species identified in the survey, reviewing what the committee has already done on those species, and finding gaps. Wilson supported this and suggested tackling species one at a time rather than trying to update the entire 2009 diadromous species source document all at once. He also suggested using the order of priority from the survey responses as a starting point. As an example, Robert suggested aligning with existing menhaden studies and eel research. Toni expressed caution about focusing on menhaden due to litigious issues and the need for board direction on species selection. Wilson suggested republishing or reviewing the Commission's menhaden FAQ (https://asmfc.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/AtlMenhaden_FAQ_Oct2025.pdf), though Toni noted it primarily covers non-habitat issues.

Kate proposed creating a list of past work related to priority species identified in the survey to identify gaps and next steps. Wilson noted existing source documents from 2009 that need updating, while Eric suggested involving FMP coordinators for species like eels and horseshoe crabs to provide additional expertise and research needs for the upcoming meeting. Simen suggested the committee consider whether to organize the next Hotline around a species, a specific threat or issue, or a habitat type that encompasses the priority species. Eric suggested also reaching out to FMP coordinators for species like eel and horseshoe crab.

Eric Schneider said for the Habitat Hotline - In addition to state updates, survey results suggested that both (1) Habitat Science and Research Topics and (2) Habitat Restoration & Conservation Projects were very valuable and valuable to Commissioners. Perhaps we can poll the HC to see if there are projects related to these topics for: A. eel, horseshoe crab, or striped bass that might be worth highlighting in the hotline.

The group further discussed potential topics for the next Habitat Hotline, focusing on habitat-related projects rather than menhaden issues. Wilson proposed writing about a potential fish-friendly turbine installation at Roanoke Rapids Dam, which would benefit multiple species including American eels. Christopher offered to contribute content about marsh habitat research for horseshoe crabs, and Toni mentioned an ACFHP project related to eels. Lars Hammer mentioned that Maine also has some projects that are potentially moving forward with fish friendly turbines for eels/alosines/salmon

The group discussed what topic to focus on for the next issue of the Habitat Hotline. Several ideas came up:

1. Survey results summary - Wilson suggested including a short summary of the Commissioner Survey results in the hotline, and Cameron said he

Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

could put together a one- or two-page summary. This idea was generally well received.

2. Species-focused content - Based on the survey results, the top species of concern among commissioners were American Eel, Striped Bass, and Horseshoe Crab. Eric suggested polling habitat committee members to see if anyone has projects related to habitat for those species that could be highlighted.
3. Menhaden - Robert and Wilson floated the idea of covering menhaden, but Toni cautioned that most menhaden issues are not really habitat-related, and that some topics around that species can be politically sensitive. The group largely agreed it was not the right fit at this time.
4. Recap of previous work - Simen suggested the option of recapping something the committee has already done, similar to what was done two hotlines ago when they previewed the shell recycling management series.

Regarding length, Simen noted that the ideal length seems to be around 20 pages, and raised the concern that combining state updates with a focused topic could push the issue longer than ideal.

No final topic was decided for the 2026 Habitat Hotline, but the committee agreed to include:

- Summary of the Commissioner Survey results
- State Updates
- **Maybe:** an article on fish-friendly turbines
- **Maybe:** a piece on horseshoe crab marsh spawning in the next issue.

FHOC Mapping Project

The committee discussed a potential fish habitat mapping project led by Jay Odell, with an estimated total cost of \$240K and a possible initial subset for \$75K. The group explored funding options, including potential support from the National Fish Habitat Partnership and existing mapping expertise from NOAA's EFH mapping work. The committee agreed to pursue external funding opportunities and consult with experts like Tori and Jessica Coakley to determine the feasibility and value of mapping commission-managed species habitats.

Eric Schneider shared these links:

Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

MAMFC: <https://nrha.shinyapps.io/dataexplorer/>

The NOAA Fisheries Essential Fish Habitat Mapper:

<https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/resource/map/essential-fish-habitat-mapper>

Major Action Items and Next Steps

1. Striped Bass Offshore Aquaculture

- **Wilson Laney** will complete his review of NOAA's striped bass offshore aquaculture technical memorandum and provide comments to **Toni Kerns** and the Habitat Committee.
- **Lou Chiarella (NOAA Fisheries)** will review the draft ASMFC response letter and provide feedback to Toni to ensure NOAA's perspective is considered before the letter is finalized.
- **Toni Kerns** will coordinate revisions to the draft response letter and determine whether any additional issues raised by Wilson or NOAA need to be incorporated before submission.

2. Commissioner Habitat Survey

- **Cameron Brinton** will distribute the Commissioner Survey dataset to Committee members and prepare a more comprehensive summary of open-ended responses, including categorization of recurring themes.
- **Cameron Brinton** will also prepare a one- to two-page summary of the survey results for inclusion in the 2026 *Habitat Hotline Atlantic*.
- **Kate Wilke, Cameron Brinton, and Simen Kaalstad** will work together to develop a concise briefing document and discussion points summarizing the survey findings for presentation to the ASMFC Policy Board at the February 2027 meeting.

3. 2026 *Habitat Hotline Atlantic*

- **Wilson Laney** will coordinate with Dominion Energy regarding publicly available information on the proposed fish-friendly turbine installation at Roanoke Rapids Dam and, if appropriate, prepare a feature article for the *Habitat Hotline*.
- **Christopher McDonough** will develop or coordinate an article highlighting marsh habitat as spawning habitat for horseshoe crabs.

Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

- **Cameron Brinton** will also prepare a one- to two-page summary of the survey results for inclusion in the 2026 *Habitat Hotline Atlantic*.
- **Toni Kerns, Simen Kaalstad** will follow up via email to write a short blurb for the Habitat Hotline highlighting an Atlantic Coastal Fish Habitat Partnership (ACFHP) project focused on American eel habitat restoration.
- **All Habitat Committee members** will identify additional state projects and habitat science updates (preferably focused on horseshoe crabs, American eel, striped bass, if possible) for inclusion in the 2026 *Habitat Hotline Atlantic*.
- **Eric Schneider** will poll Habitat Committee members to identify habitat science, restoration, and conservation projects related to American eel, horseshoe crab, and striped bass that could be featured in the next issue.

4. Fish Habitats of Concern (FHOC) Mapping Project

- **Kate Wilke** will consult with **Jay Odell** to evaluate the feasibility and value of pursuing an initial \$75,000 pilot phase of the proposed habitat mapping project.
- **Kate Wilke** will continue identifying external funding opportunities, including potential National Fish Habitat Partnership support, and assist with development of future funding proposals.
- **Committee members** will continue coordinating with NOAA mapping experts and Commission partners to evaluate opportunities to leverage existing Essential Fish Habitat mapping resources and refine the project's scope.

3. [Habitat Committee Species Assignments](#) (Google)
4. [2026 ASMFC Habitat Committee Commissioner Survey](#) (Analyze)
8. [Link to VA BOEM Mineral Activity](#) (BOEM.gov)