ATLANTIC STATES MARINE FISHERIES COMMISSION

Draft 2027 Action Plan

For Review by the ASMFC Business Session

November 11, 2026

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 socioeconomic interests and needs of coastal communities. Inherent in this is the recognition that healthy and vibrant resources benefit stakeholders. 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. Fishery management plans will also address fair allocation of fishery resources among the states. Understanding evolving ocean ecosystems and their impacts on fishery productivity and distribution is an elevated priority. Successful management in an evolving marine environment will depend not only on adjusting management strategies to be more adaptable and flexible, but also in reevaluating and revising, as necessary, the underlying conservation goals and objectives of fishery management plans. Current ocean conditions have a significant impact on fish stocks, fish habitats, and interactions between species and fisheries. The Commission will strive to proactively consider ecosystem level impacts when making management decisions to take a more holistic consideration of issues. 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 ending overfishing and working to rebuild overfished Atlantic coast fish stocks, while promoting sustainable harvest of and access to rebuilt fisheries. Where possible, the Commission will seek to aid in the rebuilding of depleted stocks, whose recovery is hindered by factors other than fishing pressure.

Fisheries management and stock assessment activities anticipated for 2027 and 2028 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

American Lobster

- **Explore initiating a process to identify management objectives for the Gulf of Maine/Georges Bank lobster stock, pending Board approval and funding**
- Work with partners and ACCSP on maintaining tracking device data collection as part of Addendum XXIX; respond to legal challenges and regulatory changes if necessary
- Update annual indices of stock abundance and settlement, and respond if necessary
- **Develop and evaluate candidate biological reference points for the Gulf of Maine/Georges Bank lobster stock that account for changes in environmental conditions and productivity**
- Continue to collaborate with NOAA Fisheries regarding regulations related to on-demand trap gear, as well as Atlantic Coast Councils as needed

- **Explore facilitating a meeting between the ASMFC American Lobster Technical Committee and Canada DFO lobster scientists**
- Continue to participate 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

- **Initiate and finalize management action to respond to 2026 benchmark stock assessment**

Atlantic Menhaden

- **Conduct Objectives Workshop to provide guidance for next Ecological Reference Point (ERP) benchmark stock assessment, pending Board approval and funding**
- **Initiate development of management action on commercial allocations for 2028 implementation, pending the outcome of the Annual Meeting**
- **Set specifications up to three years beginning with 2028, if necessary**

Atlantic Striped Bass

- **Present benchmark stock assessment and peer review, and respond if necessary Initiate a process to identify management objectives, pending available funding**
- **Address Work Group tasks on future management and report back to the Board**

Atlantic Sturgeon

- Continue work on 2028 benchmark stock assessment
- 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 pending Biological Opinion, and respond if necessary

Black Sea Bass

- Continue development of recreational sector separation Amendment in collaboration with MAFMC
- **Review updated recreational and commercial sector allocations, including consideration of Fishing Effort Survey (FES) calibrated data, and initiate management action if necessary**
- **Initiate management action on state-by-state commercial allocation, pending Annual Meeting outcome**
- **Monitor MAFMC activities including, but not limited to, confidence interval analysis for use in the Percent Change Approach, and respond if necessary**

Bluefish

- Continue development of recreational sector separation Amendment in collaboration with MAFMC
- **Review updated recreational and commercial sector allocations, including consideration of FES calibrated data, and initiate management action if necessary**

- Continue development of management uncertainty tool in collaboration with MAFMC
- Work with contractor on development of the Bluefish Recreation Demand Model, pending funding
- **Monitor MAFMC activities including, but not limited to, confidence interval analysis for use in the Percent Change approach, and respond if necessary**

Cobia

- **Present benchmark stock assessment and peer review, and respond if necessary**
- **Set specifications for up to five years beginning in 2028 and consider changes to recreational measures, if necessary**

Horseshoe Crab

- **Initiate management action to address changes to the Utility/Reward/Harvest (U/R/H) Policy functions of the Adaptive Resource Management (ARM) Framework based on recommendations from stakeholder workshop**
- **Evaluate spawning and egg density surveys and identify changes or improvements to allow future use in stock assessments**
- Conduct ARM Framework to set specifications for up to 3 years beginning in 2028
- **Initiate 2029 benchmark stock assessment**

Scup

- Continue development of recreational sector separation Amendment in collaboration with MAFMC
- **Review updated recreational and commercial sector allocations, including consideration of FES calibrated data, and initiate management action if necessary**
- **Finalize Addendum XXXVII to address commercial quota period overage paybacks**
- **Monitor MAFMC activities including, but not limited to, scup discards and gear restricted areas analysis as well as confidence interval analysis for use in the Percent Change Approach, respond if necessary.**

Summer Flounder

- Continue development of recreational sector separation Amendment in collaboration with MAFMC
- **Review updated recreational and commercial sector allocations, including consideration of FES calibrated data, and initiate management action if necessary**
- **Monitor MAFMC activities including, but not limited to, confidence interval analysis for use in the Percent Change approach and investigation of the potential for a summer flounder open access incidental catch permit, and respond if necessary**

Spot

- Conduct and present traffic light analysis, and respond if necessary
- **Continue work on 2027 benchmark stock assessment**

Tautog

- **Finalize Addendum I on regional management response to the 2025 stock assessment update**
- **Initiate 2028 benchmark stock assessment**

MEDIUM-LOW PRIORITY SPECIES

American Eel

- **Conduct 2027 stock assessment update and respond if necessary**
- **Participate in International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) American eel working group efforts to evaluate the feasibility of developing an international stock assessment for American eels in North America, including Canada, the US, Mexico, and the Caribbean**
- **Set specifications for Maine glass eel commercial harvest quota for up to three years beginning in 2028**

Atlantic Herring

- Monitor and respond if necessary to NEFMC activities, **including development of action regarding river herring and shad management flexibility**
- Conduct meetings as necessary to establish state effort control (days-out) programs for Area 1A

Black Drum

- Initiate 2028 stock assessment update

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**
- **Present Sandbar Sharks Stock Assessment, and respond if necessary**

Jonah Crab

- Work with partners and ACCSP on maintaining tracking device data collection as part of Addendum IV, respond to legal challenges and regulatory changes if necessary
- Update annual indicator time series for the offshore Southern New England stock, and respond if necessary
- **Review process and interval timelines for data updates**

Northern Shrimp

- Conduct traffic light and management trigger analyses, and respond if necessary

Red Drum

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

Shad and River Herring

- Consider updates to shad and river herring sustainable fishery management plans and shad habitat plans, if necessary
- 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 the 2027 benchmark stock assessment and the Council's development of a federal Amendment to address catch level recommendations and several management topics raised through the Council port meeting process

Spiny Dogfish

- Monitor MAFMC and NEFMC activities including accountability measures and specification setting modifications, and respond if necessary

Spotted Seatrout

- No new tasks

Weakfish

- No new tasks

Winter Flounder

- No new tasks

CROSS CUTTING ISSUES

- **Respond to impacts to Commission FMPs and stock assessments from changes to Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) FES calibration results**
- 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
- Consider strategies for increasing responsiveness in management to changing ocean ecosystems
- Participate in the East Coast Coordination Group to track progress of the Potential Action Plan
- Provide support for the 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
- Continue to participate in relevant Council Inflation Reduction Act projects to support the development and advancement of fisheries management and implementation efforts
- **Monitor activities of the Regional Councils and NOAA Fisheries in response to the Administration's Executive Orders on Seafood Competitiveness and Restoring American Saltwater Angling and Recreation**

- Address challenges of sharing tracking data across jurisdictions while maintaining data confidentiality
- Organize an opportunity for the states to present and discuss efforts on northern right whale monitoring and research

Goal 2 – Provide robust, actionable science to inform management decisions

Sustainable management of fisheries relies on accurate and timely scientific advice. The Commission strives to produce robust, actionable science through a technically rigorous, independently peer-reviewed stock assessment process and through consideration of relevant socioeconomic data. Assessments are developed using a broad suite of fishery-independent surveys and fishery-dependent monitoring, as well as research products developed, in cooperation with the fishing industry, by a broad network of fisheries scientists at state, federal, and academic institutions along the coast. This goal encompasses the development of novel and innovative scientific research, modern assessment methodology, and 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 robust science is available 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; supporting multispecies/diet data collection; fish ageing and tagging programs; gear technology research; and participation in 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 incorporate new recreational effort and catch estimates into scientific advice to managers
- Solicit ASC input to long-term stock assessment scheduling priorities, and assessment processes in the Northeast (NRCC) and South Atlantic (SEDAR)
- Seek ASC refinements to the stock assessment retrospective patterns guidance document
- **Seek ASC guidance on transitioning between old and new stock assessment modeling platform, due to phasing out of existing platforms; track NMFS initiative to develop new national assessment platform (FIMS: the Fishery Integrated Modeling System)**
- **Explore contracting a fisheries economist to address Board requests for socioeconomic analyses**
- 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 to inform management, through the Committee on Economics and Social Sciences
    - Evaluate and prioritize socioeconomic data supported by ACCSP
    - Engage CESS members early in the management process, in order to generate socioeconomic advice for decision-making
    - Participate in 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
    - Support development of a Recreational Demand Model for striped bass to evaluate fishery trends, and predict harvester responses to changes in regulations and fishing conditions
- Update the ASMFC Research Priorities; work with scientific committees to write proposals and pursue funding to conduct priority research
- Determine future use of the Risk and Uncertainty Tool; consider using tool to inform management of data-rich species

DATA COLLECTION

- Coordinate the Southeast Area Monitoring and Assessment Program-South Atlantic (SEAMAP-SA) component
    - Consider expanding range of trap-video survey northward or identify survey combination methods to sample shifting stocks
    - Continue to pursue 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 manage and disseminate SEAMAP-SA survey data
    - **Build standardized survey data delivery tools to expedite use in stock assessments**
    - Evaluate past use of environmental data collected during surveys; identify opportunities to improve surveys in order to use the data more fully in assessments and research publications
    - 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
    - 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
    - **Participate on the Northeast Trawl Advisory Panel to implement the Pilot Regional Industry-based Trawl Survey (RIBTS)**
    - Collaborate with partner surveys to transition from paper to digital data collection; evaluate needs and benefits, and acquire equipment and requisite training
- Collect new data to address stock assessment information gaps

    - **Explore the use of spawning stock and egg density surveys as new fishery-independent indices for horseshoe crab**
    - Increase the resolution of catch and survey information, including bycatch and fishery-independent information, for future spatial modeling in stock assessments
    - 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
- Partner with NMFS NEFSC Cooperative Research Branch to pilot an industry-based survey to supplement current fishery-independent data collection
- Work with the Councils to characterize deficiencies in NOAA Fisheries' scientific support and associated impacts to fisheries; this initiative is funded through Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) funds allocated to the Councils
- Monitor progress in Northeast and Southeast commercial landings port and observer sampling information exchanges between state and federal partners

FISHERIES RESEARCH

- **Coordinate Congressionally-funded Chesapeake Bay Atlantic menhaden research RFP and initiate projects; ensure Commission projects are complementary to menhaden research funded by the Virginia legislature**
- **Support NOAA Fisheries' development of the Atlantic Herring Cooperative Research Plan**
- Assist NOAA Fisheries Science Centers in identifying opportunities for the Commission and states to supplement sample collections, lab processing, and analyses
- Conduct ageing sample exchanges for Atlantic striped bass, Atlantic sturgeon and tautog, and species shifting ranges along 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
- Collaborate with university researchers to advance stock assessment population dynamics models and other analytical tools: cobia tagging analyses; **spot spatiotemporal model; modify the ARM Framework**; striped bass multi-stock contributions and management strategy evaluation; and ecological reference points
- **Provide coordination support to coastwide acoustic telemetry tagging**
- **Collaborate with USGS on Atlantic sturgeon research and continue investigating linkages between osprey populations and menhaden availability**
- Provide support to the national partnership among Interstate Fisheries Commissions and USGS Regional Science Centers
- 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

- **Expand the incorporation of environmental data and analysis into assessment workflows to better inform stock-recruitment and population productivity dynamics, including forecasts of future stock productivity**
    - Request support from the NOAA Changing Ecosystems and Fisheries Initiative 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 and evaluate candidate biological reference points for the Gulf of Maine/Georges Bank lobster stock that account for changes in environmental conditions and productivity**
- 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
- 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., Modular Ocean Model, Species Climate Vulnerability Assessments, 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
- Implement NOAA-Commission Memorandum of Understanding to use offshore energy developer funds for surveys and monitoring, pending available resources
- 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. Goal 3 focuses on providing timely, accurate catch, effort, and biological data on Atlantic coast recreational, for-hire, and commercial fisheries to support fisheries management.

The Commission will accomplish this through the 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 US Fish and Wildlife Service.

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, GFMC), and relevant NOAA regional offices and Science Centers

FISHERIES-DEPENDENT DATA COLLECTION

SAFIS

- **Extend One Stop Reporting (OSR) initiative in eTRIPS (e.g., implementation of state requirements, expanded functionality in line with the NOAA East Coast Logbook)**
- **Implement expansion of the eTRIPS 1-ticket functionality to allow single submission from harvesters acting as their own dealers in 2-ticket systems**
- **Implement multi-factor authentication in SAFIS applications to meet NOAA requirements, within the scope of available funding**
- **Implement eTRIPS and eDR data entry checks for partner driven questions (attribute validations) across all submission methods (online, mobile/API, and file upload)**
- **Scope and seek resources for the enhancement of the end user experience for eTRIPS mobile and online applications based on feedback from industry and partner agencies**

Recreational Surveys

- Continue to develop and seek MRIP certification of for-hire methodology for logbook estimates of catch and effort with dockside validation
- **Support and co-organize a national recreational summit that provides an open exchange of information among all sectors of the marine recreational fishing community, scientists, and managers.**
- **Participate in and support National Recreational Angler Partnership Improvement Directive (RAPID) remodeling of recreational fisheries data collection**

DATA DISTRIBUTION, USE AND OUTREACH

Data Distribution and Use

- **Provide validated commercial landings data for planned Commission stock assessments (American eel, black drum, horseshoe crab ARM Framework, Jonah crab, Spanish mackerel, spot, tautog) and SEDAR process (red grouper, snowy grouper, vermillion snapper)**
- **Incorporate additional partner data feeds to the Data Warehouse**
- Implement consolidation, warehousing, and display of released catch data across data types in ACCSP (e.g., mandatory reports, citizen science, observer data), as resources allow.

Outreach and Infrastructure

- **Prioritize and implement improvements to IT hosting scalability to address increased data demands within the scope of available funding**
- Increase outreach via industry publications on the value of SAFIS applications with specific emphasis on OSR features
- **Continue to improve social media and website engagement through strategic content expansion, specifically focusing on access to current data and reporting tools**
- **Develop a strategy for long-term maintenance and development for mobile applications (e.g., internal maintenance, development platforms)**
- Document contingency plans for shifting funding availability

Goal 4 – Protect and enhance fish habitat and ecosystem health through partnerships and education

Goal 4 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 under limited 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 fish habitats of concern for Commission managed species, each year the Habitat 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 an annual issue of the *Habitat Hotline Atlantic*, highlighting topical issues that affect all the states. The Commission and its Habitat Program endorse the National Fish Habitat Partnership and will continue to work cooperatively with the partnership 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 public about the importance of habitat to healthy fisheries and ecosystems
- Publish Annual *Habitat Hotline Atlantic* highlighting emerging habitat issues, innovative conservation approaches, and state habitat activities
- **Develop an interactive Shell Recycling StoryMap highlighting habitat benefits, active Atlantic coast programs, and resources for practitioners**
- Identify mechanisms to evaluate ecosystem health for consideration by Technical Committees and Boards
- **Finalize and disseminate seagrass restoration guidance from the 2026 ACFHP Workshop to support science-based restoration, research, management, and policy**

INTEGRATE

- Update report on state ecosystem resiliency initiatives
- Maintain and update Fish Habitats of Concern descriptions to be considered for integration into Commission FMPs

- **Update, as necessary, the Atlantic States Shell Recycling Habitat Management Series report with current program information, best management practices, and permitting guidance**
- **Share and implement results from Commissioner Survey to identify habitat priorities and guide the Habitat Committee's work**
- 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
- Continue to work with ACFHP to foster partnerships with like-minded organizations at local levels to further common habitat goals
- Provide administrative home and support to ACFHP and identify partners to support restoration grant administration and project management
- **Work with partners to develop standardized seagrass monitoring, assessment, and restoration for Atlantic coast resource managers and habitat stakeholders**
- Implement ACFHP 2027-2031 Strategic Plan and biennial action plan
- 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 supporting habitat conservation projects through the National Fish Habitat Partnership and NOAA Increasing Recreational Fisheries Engagement annual funding cycles
- Support ACFHP and its partners in fundraising efforts through the national 501(c)3, the National Fish Habitat Fund

Goal 5 – Promote compliance with fishery management plans to ensure sustainable use of Atlantic coast resources

Fisheries managers, law enforcement personnel, and stakeholders have a shared responsibility to promote compliance with fisheries management measures. Activities under this goal seek to increase and improve compliance with fishery management plans. 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 fishery management plans.

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

PARTNERSHIPS

- Engage and support NOAA Fisheries and USFWS Offices of Law Enforcement, US 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 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 processes. 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 publish a streamlined Annual Report, highlighting major accomplishments in a concise format
- **Revisit *Guide to Fisheries Science and Stock Assessments* in printed and story map formats for further revisions and continued optimization of the StoryMap**
- Explore changes in format ASMFC documents, including habitat outreach materials
- Promote high profile species and stock assessment results through various outreach tools and platforms
- Provide focused outreach on: Atlantic croaker, Atlantic striped bass, Atlantic menhaden, American lobster, horseshoe crabs, cobia and sector separation with MAFMC
- Develop for stock assessment overviews for **American eel, Atlantic striped bass, , Spanish mackerel, spot, tautog, and cobia**
- **Modernize outreach display and acquire new promotional materials as needed to drive foot traffic and facilitate meaningful staff-to-visitor interactions at outreach events**
- **Increase attendance at a diversity of outreach events, pending available resources**
- 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
- **Explore ways to better explain the ERP assessment (improve understanding that menhaden is being set aside for ecosystem services)**
- **Increase understanding of fisheries management legislation and associated processes along the Atlantic coast through completion of the "Atlantic Coast Fisheries Overview".**

MAXIMIZE USE OF CURRENT AND NEW TECHNOLOGIES

- Enhance understanding of stock assessment science through the use of pre-recorded videos or webinar clips to be shared on the Commission's Fisheries Science webpage and other platforms
- **Continue to use new technologies to further improve website functionality and accessibility**
    - **Develop and update website SOPPs as necessary**
- Explore use of AI to develop engaging videos to highlight the importance of Atlantic coastal fisheries, fisheries management process, role of science, and role of fisheries-dependent and -independent data in stock assessments
- Use improved map graphics via high-quality ArcGIS-generated maps for web and print materials
- 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

- **Continue to develop** Action Tracker webpages for species with pending actions or recent board decisions
- **Launch Benchmark Stock Assessment Tracker webpages to increase transparency and understanding of our stock assessment process and what stages we are at in the process, and revise as necessary**
- **Bolster advisory panel and stakeholder engagement in the Data Workshop portion of our benchmark stock assessment process**
    - **Pilot using upcoming horseshoe crab benchmark stock assessment process**
- Explore options to strengthen stakeholder input on pending management documents, stock assessments, and data collection/management activities
    - **Conduct educational/informational sessions on high priority species to provide stakeholders an opportunity to dialogue with staff on science and management issues**
- Evaluate approach to populating advisory panels, including nontraditional stakeholder representation on advisory panels; solicit new nominations, as necessary

MEDIA RELATIONS AND NETWORKING

- **Update Atlantic menhaden and horseshoe crab FAQs and develop new FAQs for other species as necessary**
- Continue to use Fact Checkers/FAQs 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
- **Coordinate state, regional and federal partners on shared data collection (MRIP, RAPID), stock assessment and management activities (NRCC communications, MRIP Northeast and Southeast communications groups, MAFMC)**
- Strengthen national, regional, and local media relations to increase coverage of Commission actions; continue to respond to factual inaccuracies in news articles
    - **Bolster existing key media relationships to support more informed reporting on the Commission and its processes.**
    - **Seek out new relationships with media contacts that show an interest in balanced reporting on Commission issues to facilitate positive media coverage**
- Consider using a media monitoring service to track media communications and coverage, including social media to analyze strengths and weaknesses and expand coverage
- **Explore holding online or in-person workshop on addressing misinformation, facilitating positive community engagement, and hosting successful virtual meetings**

Goal 7 – Advance Commission and member states' priorities through a proactive legislative policy agenda

Although states are positioned to achieve many of the national goals for marine fisheries through cooperative efforts, state fisheries interests are often underrepresented at the national level. This is

due, in part, to the fact that policy formulation is often disconnected from the processes that provide the support, organization, and resources necessary to implement the policies. The capabilities and input of the states are an important aspect of developing national fisheries policy, and the goal seeks to increase the states' role in national policy formulation. Additionally, the goal emphasizes the importance of achieving management goals consistent with productive commercial and recreational fisheries and healthy ecosystems.

The Commission recognizes the need to work with Congress in all phases of policy formulation. Several important fishery-related laws may be reauthorized over the next couple of years (i.e., Atlantic Coastal Act, Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, Interjurisdictional Fisheries Act, Atlantic Striped Bass Conservation Act, and Anadromous Fish Conservation Act). The Commission needs to proactively engage with reauthorization efforts, this includes advocating for increased funding from sources such as Sportfish Restoration Trust Fund and the Atlantic Coastal Act. The Commission will be vigilant in advancing the states' interests to Congress as these laws are reauthorized and other fishery-related pieces of legislation are considered.

DEVELOP AND STRENGTHEN RELATIONSHIPS WITH MEMBERS OF CONGRESS AND STAFF

- Develop relationships with the new members of the 120th Congress and build upon relationships with members whose committee roles are important to ASMFC
- 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

- Build upon relationships with new appointees to the Administration
- Utilize relationships with Congress and the Executive Branch to resolve the New Jersey and Florida CARES Act disputed payments issue
- 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, shark depredation, whale rulemaking, living shorelines, modernization of recreational data collection efforts, the NOAA Organic Act, and efforts to move diadromous species management to the Fish and Wildlife Service.

PURSUE FEDERAL RESOURCES TO SUPPORT MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

- Communicate the Commission's federal funding needs to Congress and advocate for sufficient appropriations in fiscal years 2027 and 2028
  - 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, and the Mid-Atlantic Horseshoe Crab Trawl Survey
- 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 language included in the FY25 and FY26 House and Senate reports encouraging this partnership
- 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 and USGS funding. Executive Directors should continue to provide unified positions on funding and legislative priorities to lawmakers and federal agencies, where appropriate
- Build on partnerships with the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, USFWS, and USGS

Goal 8 – Ensure the fiscal stability & efficient administration of the Commission

Goal 8 focuses on ensuring 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

- Continue to work with member states to effectively and efficiently administer Atlantic right whale/lobster Congressional funding
- Manage Cooperative Agreements with NOAA, USFWS, and USGS, ensuring deliverables are completed and budgets are responsibly managed
    - **Work with NOAA to implement newly established agreement to facilitate cooperative research, fisheries surveys, habitat restoration, and data management**
- **Develop strategy to address uncertain federal funding timelines**

- Monitor Commission compensation package and adjust as necessary based on local job market and specific duties
- Continue to refine process for developing and tracking sub-awards/contracts
- Evaluate Commission office for necessary renovations, upgrades, and improvements (e.g., HVAC)
- Continue to work with financial advisor to implement Commission investment policy

UTILIZE CURRENT INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

- Continue implementation and improvement of Commission's utilization of cloud resources
- Manage Commission inventory through accounting software, tracking acquisitions and disposals
- Provide updates to staff, reviewing technology that has changed, been implemented, or could be better utilized
- Conduct review of Commission technology, ensuring it is still supported and up to date with current technology needs
- Continue improving technological security using both hardware and software

MANAGE HUMAN RESOURCES

- Investigate additional options and resources to improve recruitment of administrative staff
- **Improve use of the HR Information System and centralize employee resources to streamline HR processes and access to policies, benefits information, and forms**
- Conduct all staff team building retreat
- Recruit talent through outreach meetings with various marine policy and marine science graduate programs
- Promote training opportunities and professional development for ASMFC staff, including **AI and media training**
    - **Explore opportunities for staff training via the National Conservation Training Center**
- Establish a virtual bulletin board to share staff information, calendar events, and resources
- Conduct annual meeting with financial advisor to review retirement program performance with staff
- **Standardize position descriptions across the Commission to consistently document essential duties, qualifications, reporting relationships, and Fair Labor Standards Act classifications**
    - **Work with the Commission's HR attorney to audit all positions for appropriate exempt or non-exempt classification for insurance policies based on actual duties, workers compensation, and applicable federal and state requirements, and implement necessary changes**
- Provide HR support to cooperative programs, including APAIS and ACFHP
- **Work with supervisors to document critical responsibilities and establish backup coverage and cross-training to preserve institutional knowledge during staff transitions**

ENGAGE AND SUPPORT COMMISSIONERS

- Conduct a meetings facilitation training workshop for technical committee members

- Conduct thorough onboarding of new Commissioners to allow for full engagement in the Commission process
- Facilitate the retention and transfer of institutional knowledge among Commissioners
- **Reinitiate new Commissioner orientation (training videos/modules – how to get reimbursed)**

ENSURE THE LEGAL COMPLIANCE OF COMMISSION ACTIONS

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

Action Plan Projects not currently funded

$400,000 to $425,000 available

November 4, 2026

Introduction

The draft 2027 Action Plan contains the priority tasks to be completed next year. All of the tasks in the draft Action Plan are fully funded except the six projects included below. There is not sufficient funds available to fully fund these six projects. The Commission will need to prioritize which projects to fund this year and which projects should be considered for funding in 2028 or later. As noted above, there is $400K - $425K available to support these projects.

1. Striped Bass Management Objectives – $80K

Conduct Management Objectives Workshop to understand what managers and stakeholders want the future of striped bass management to address.

- Conduct a two-day facilitated workshop with scientists, policymakers, and stakeholders to address future management of the Atlantic Striped Bass fishery. The workshop would:
  - Identify Management Objectives
  - Review and consider changes to FMP goals and objectives, noting this would take a plan Amendment to change
  - Recommend refence points
  - Consider management approaches during the low recruitment regime
- Hold 1-2 background informational webinar on striped bass management and science so all stakeholders come to the meeting with the same base knowledge

If the Board wants to move forward with a management objectives workshop, staff recommends it be conducted after the Board is presented the results of the 2027 stock assessment. With significant changes to inputs to the model (e.g. new MRIP FES survey, new discard mortality rates), a fall workshop allows for the updated assessment results to be a part of the workshop conversation.

2. Economist – $60K

ASMFC would contract an economist to address priority economic analyses. A one-year pilot contract would be established with an economist to provide reliable, on-call socioeconomic expertise in support of Commission management decisions. Demand for Committee on Economics and Social Sciences (CESS) support has increased in recent years, while the current volunteer-based model has limited CESS members' ability to complete time-sensitive analyses within quarterly meeting timelines.

Recent species board requests demonstrate the need for more consistent analytical capacity. A pilot program would allow ASMFC to evaluate the contract's cost, utilization, turnaround time, quality of work products, and value to Commissioners, staff, and CESS members before making a longer-term commitment.

This level of funding would support approximately 30 hours/month @ $150/hour. Note: This is the high end of the hourly cost estimate.

3. Menhaden ERP Objectives Workshop – $70K

Conduct an Ecological Management Spatial Objectives Workshop to understand what managers and stakeholders want the next iteration of Ecological Reference Points (ERPs) to address.

- Conduct a two-day facilitated workshop with scientists, policymakers, and stakeholders. The goal is to update and refine the fundamental objectives and their associated performance metrics for ERPs that were originally established during the 2015 Ecosystem Management Objectives Workshop. This workshop will focus on spatial issues, including what the desired spatial scale or regions for Atlantic menhaden ERPs are and what kind of management information is needed from a spatial ERP framework (e.g., regional ERPs, regional TACs, regional stock status?) This information will allow the Atlantic Menhaden Stock Assessment Subcommittee and ERP Work Group to know what aspects of model development to prioritize for the next benchmark assessment
- Hold 1-2 background informational webinar on ERPs so all stakeholders come to the meeting with the same base knowledge

If the Board wants to conduct an Ecological Management Spatial Objectives Workshop, the timing of the workshop can happen anytime during 2027 or 2028 to inform the next Benchmark ERP Assessment.

4. Striped Bass and Bluefish Recreational Demand Model (RDM) – $210K for 16 months of work (includes some work for the bluefish tool)

Complete work on the recreational demand model for striped bass and bluefish.

- Adapt Recreational Demand Model for use in striped bass and bluefish management
- Continue model development and refinement including out of sample predictive validation and sensitivity testing of alternative input data sources
- Enhance catch per trip simulation routines
- Disseminate model framework and results to stakeholders including technical documentation, user guides and summary materials
- Conduct additional stakeholder engagement and targeted outreach to ensure diverse perspective to inform tool development and build tool support
- Develop user friendly interface (point and click type tool)
- The Recreational Demand Model incorporates biological and socio-economic data better inform recreational management decisions.

If the Board wants to use the RDM to help set new striped bass regulations after the results of the 2027 stock assessment or the 2028 bluefish regulations, then work on the RDM needs to start as soon as possible.

5. American Lobster Management Objectives – $223K for 2 years of work (this is likely a low estimate)

Carry out a process to clearly identify new American lobster management objectives (across all stakeholders), to better understand socioeconomic status and concerns, and to identify potential management tools for the Gulf of Maine/Georges Bank (GOM/GBK) stock. The overall goal of the process is identification of comprehensive objectives with broad support across stakeholders for future management of the GOM/GBK fishery, both at a local and stockwide spatial scale. Objectives would be categorized as those that are measurable with existing information and those that need new information collected to be measurable in the future, with the guidance of subject matter experts participating in the process. This could be a standalone project or the first step in conducting a management strategy evaluation with the second step being the more intensive modeling efforts.

- Conduct a 3-tiered meeting approach: local, LCMA, and stockwide meetings with a total of 23 workshops estimated to cost – $113K

- Professional facilitators are recommended for meetings at all spatial levels to effectively gather stakeholder input, despite the high cost. A third-party facilitator would provide a neutral setting and guide meetings toward their objectives.
- Based on average hourly rates the steering committee estimated facilitator fees at $110K *(this is likely a low estimate)*

6. Habitat Mapping – $75K - $325K for over 18 months of work

Create habitat maps in state waters for Commission managed species based on the Fish Habitats of Concern (FHOC) publication. The maps would use similar mapping approaches as done for federally managed species. They would be non-regulatory maps that would translate FHOC text into mapping criteria. The project could be done in phases where the first phase could publish layers for Maine to North Carolina to demonstrate the project for approximately $75K. Maine to North Carolina has more data habitat data layers to pull from than the southern states, hence the rationale to start with that region.