Commissioner Survey Identifies Habitat Priorities and Information Needs

The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission's (ASMFC) Habitat Committee conducted a Commissioner priority survey in May and June 2026 to better understand habitat issues, information needs, and communication preferences across Atlantic coast states. Responses from 23 Commissioners and proxies will help guide the Committee's strategic priorities and project development over the next 1–3 years, including future Habitat Management Series products, mapping tools, and outreach efforts.

Connecting Habitat Information to Management Needs

Responses highlighted a broad range of habitat-related information needs, with particular interest in spawning habitat which was mentioned in 41% of written responses. Additional interests include juvenile habitat, habitat keystone species, artificial reefs, fish passage, range shift, invasive species, and population dynamics.

Commissioners also identified species for which additional habitat information could improve management decisions. American eel, horseshoe crab, river herring and shad, and Atlantic striped bass emerged as recurring interests. Written responses emphasized the need for these species to better understand spawning and nursery habitat requirements, fish passage, and the relationships between habitat conditions and population dynamics. Several respondents also raised questions about shifting species distributions and the availability of suitable habitat as environmental conditions change.

Emerging and ongoing industry-related impacts were another prominent concern. Offshore wind, watershed impacts that affect water quality, and dredging were the top concerns, each mentioned in 35% of written responses. Additional interests included beach renourishment, freshwater withdrawals, coastal development, and commercial fishing activities. Respondents called for better information on the direct and indirect effects of these impacts, including transmission infrastructure associated with offshore wind, impacts to spawning habitat, and the cumulative effects of changes in water quality and freshwater inflows.

Habitat Hotline Remains a Valuable Resource

The survey also examined how Commissioners use the Habitat Hotline and which sections they find most useful. The sections of the Habitat Hotline found to be valuable to all respondents were the Habitat Science and Research Topics, Restoration and Conservation Projects, and Habitat Management Series Highlight. However, responses suggest that a concise format is important as most reported skimming the publication for interesting articles and 91% responders selected an ideal length equal to the current number of pages or less.

Informing the Committee's Next Steps

To be written by the committee

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

Impact Keyword	Count
Dredging	6
Offshore Wind	6
Watershed Impacts	6
Beach Renourishment	4
Freshwater Withdrawals	4
Commercial Fisheries	2



