



*2020-2023*  
*Gulf of Mexico and*  
*South Atlantic*  
Greater Amberjack Research Program  
Visioning Phase

# Background and Visioning Phase Recommendations Summary



# Greater Amberjack Research Program

- \$10 Million multi-year research program implemented by the National Sea Grant Office (NSGO) and the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS).
- Managed by the seven Sea Grant programs from Virginia to Texas, with Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant as overall lead  
<http://masgc.org/greater-amberjack/about>
- Florida Sea Grant leads a regional visioning process  
<http://www.flseagrant.org/fisheries/gaj-researchprogram/>

# Greater Amberjack Research Program

Goal:

“To develop additional data sources, assessment approaches, and knowledge to improve agency and agency-independent estimates of the abundance of Greater Amberjack throughout the Greater Amberjack’s range.”

# Research Program Phases



# GAJ RP Visioning Phase

Recommendation identified from:

- Congressional intent (*understood* to emphasize absolute abundance estimate & building on methods developed for red snapper count)
- Review of existing information (SEDARs, Councils, sci. literature)
- Situation assessment: stakeholder interviews
- Listening sessions (feedback on draft priorities)

# Listening Sessions



## Gulf of Mexico Region

December 7<sup>th</sup> 6-8 pm CDT  
December 8<sup>th</sup> 3-5 pm CDT  
December 10<sup>th</sup> 6-8 pm EST

## South Atlantic Region

December 2<sup>nd</sup> 3-5 pm EST  
December 3<sup>rd</sup> 6-8 pm EST  
December 9<sup>th</sup> 3-5 pm EST

# Big 3: Estimate (absolute) abundance and characterize distribution and movements throughout the continental range of GAJ

## Rationale:

- GAJ stock components show extensive seasonal movements which must be accounted for when interpreting local abundance estimates
- Distribution and movement information will help address widespread stakeholder concerns about different regional conditions and management
- Regional exploitation rates can be estimated alongside movement in tagging studies and will provide further important information
- Integrated suite of visual and acoustic survey methods and tagging programs can address the 'big 3'

# Address GAJ-specific survey and identification issues

## Rationale:

- GAJ pose specific survey issues due to difficulties of differentiating GAJ from similar species, behavioral responses to survey equipment, and use of full water column
- Accounting for these issues in developing survey approaches is critical
- Routine sampling of eDNA is suggested as an independent check on visual/acoustic survey estimates and as a potential future survey method



# Task applicants with designing an approach to address the 'big 3' that is appropriate to GAJ

## Rationale:

- Estimating abundance and characterizing distribution and movements of GAJ appropriately poses challenges given limited *a priori* information on stock structure and movements and known challenges of species identification and behavior
- Applicants should be tasked with developing approaches to address these challenges and provide appropriate justification
- The RFP should build on the approaches developed for the Red Snapper Count but needs allow for modifications that account for important differences between red snapper and GAJ

Encourage auxiliary sampling for life history information, age composition and future genetic studies throughout the GAJ range

Rationale:

- GAJ life history (reproductive parameters, growth, natural mortality) and age composition data are comparatively poor
- Improving life history and age comp. data has been identified in many SEDAR and Council research recommendations
- Samples (fin clips) can easily be collected for future genetic studies (stock structure and close-kin mark recapture for absolute abundance)
- Moderate funding allocations to auxiliary sampling can help address long-standing recommendations

# Encourage synergies with other/existing efforts

## Rationale:

- There are many related, ongoing survey and sampling efforts as well as parallel (SA red snapper count) and previous (Gulf red snapper count, Louisiana rig survey) surveys with GAJ information
- Applicants should be encouraged to explore and leverage such synergistic efforts to enhance returns to investment

# Consider encouraging applicants to include project elements that address specific stakeholder concerns

## Rationale:

- Stakeholder consultations identified certain concerns relevant to dynamics of GAJ that could be addressed in auxiliary project elements
- Discard mortality was frequently mentioned, subject to very different perceptions, and is moderately important in assessments
- Recent increases in shark depredation were frequently mentioned and may benefit from further study
- Identification of spawning aggregations in space and time was frequently mentioned as a priority for improving management implementation

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# Status and next steps

- Key recommendations for RFP provided to Steering Committee in December 2020
- More detailed reports forthcoming – will include information on additional research priorities and management issues deemed outside the scope of the Greater Amberjack Research Program
- Visioning team will monitor SSC review of ‘The Great Red Snapper Count’ and its use in interim management advice to identify possible lessons for Greater Amberjack Research Program

# Visioning Team

## Leadership Team



**Kai Lorenzen**  
 Professor, Fisheries and Aquatic Sciences Program. School of Forest Resources and Conservation. University of Florida.  
 klorenzen@ufl.edu



**Ed Camp**  
 Assistant Professor, Fisheries and Aquatic Sciences Program. School of Forest Resources and Conservation. University of Florida.  
 edvcamp@ufl.edu



**Joy Hazell**  
 UF/IFAS/SFRC State Specialist Agent  
 Facilitation Deliberative Engagement. Fisheries and Aquatic Sciences Program School of Forest Resources and Conservation. University of Florida.  
 jhazell@ufl.edu



**Chelsey Crandall**  
 Postdoctoral Associate. Fisheries and Aquatic Sciences Program. School of Forest Resources and Conservation. University of Florida.  
 kicksea@ufl.edu



**Nancy Montes**  
 Postdoctoral Associate  
 Florida Sea Grant. University of Florida  
 nancymontes@ufl.edu



**Susana Hervas**  
 Postdoctoral Associate. Fisheries and Aquatic Sciences Program. School of Forest Resources and Conservation. University of Florida.  
 shervas@ufl.edu



**May Lehmensiek**  
 Ph.D. Candidate  
 University of Florida  
 mayl@ufl.edu



**Lisa Chong**  
 Ph.D. Student  
 University of Florida  
 li.chong@ufl.edu



## Florida



**Mike Sipos**  
 Extension Agent  
 Collier County  
 sipos624@ufl.edu



**Shelly Krueger**  
 Extension Agent  
 Monroe County  
 shellykrueger@ufl.edu



**Angela Collins**  
 Regional Extension Agent  
 Manatee, Hillsborough and Sarasota Counties  
 abcollins@ufl.edu



**Matthew Jargowsky**  
 Marine Fisheries Specialist  
 matthew.jargowsky@msstate.edu  
 228-388-1375

## Mississippi Alabama

## Georgia



**Bryan Fluech**  
 Associate Marine Extension Director UGA. Marine Extension University of Georgia  
 fluech@uga.edu  
 912-264-7269

## South Carolina



**Graham Gaines**  
 Living Marine Resources Program Specialist  
 graham.gaines@sceagrants.org  
 843-470-5109

## North Carolina



**Scott Baker**  
 Fisheries Specialist  
 msbaker@ncsu.edu  
 910-962-2492



**Sara Mirabilio**  
 Fisheries Extension Specialist  
 semirabi@ncsu.edu  
 252-475-5488

## Louisiana



**Julie Anderson Lively**  
 Fisheries Specialist  
 JAnderson@agcenter.lsu.edu  
 225-578-0771

## Texas



**Laura Picariello**  
 Fisheries Specialist  
 lpicariello@tamu.edu  
 361-371-4207

## Virginia



**Susanna Musick**  
 Marine Recreation Specialist  
 susanna@vims.edu  
 804-684-7166

Thank you!



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