Coral Working Group Summary
Gulf Council Office, Tampa, FL
December 4th and 5th, 2014
9:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.

Coral Working Group	Others	Council and Council staff
Sandra Brooke	David Dale	Roy Williams
Erik Cordes	David Hicks	Beth Hager
Peter Etnoyer	Sharon McBreen	Morgan Kilgour
John Reed	Tom Wheatley	Phyllis Miranda
Judith Lang		Mark Mueller
Paul Sammarco		Carrie Simmons
George (GP) Schmahl		

The overall recommendations from the Coral Working group are as follows:

- The group recommends several "broad areas" to be recognized as the presumed, logical extent of deep-water coral habitat, based on topography, depth, and other observations incorporated through predictive habitat suitability models.
- The group recommends several "discrete areas" to be recognized as the confirmed, documented presence of deep-water coral communities.
- The group recommends that these areas be considered as Coral HAPCs as opposed to deep-sea coral areas.
- The group recommends that within the discrete zones, there be restrictions on bottom tending gear (pots, traps, trawls, bottom longlines, deep dropping) and anchoring.
- The group recommends that the Council consider the effects of aquaculture on HAPCs and other coral areas.
- The group recommends that deepwater octocorals (defined here as species known to occur 50 m and deeper, e.g. *Swiftia exserta, Callogorgia delta, and Paramuricea biscaya*) be reconsidered in the FMU.

The group recognized that this process was a prime opportunity for interagency collaboration for the cooperative protection/evaluation of these areas, particularly as other Councils along the eastern US seaboard have already established deep coral HAPCs (SAFMC) or are moving towards protection for deep coral habitats (MAFMC, NEFMC). Before deciding on appropriate areas, the group discussed in great detail the appropriate methodology for drawing the boundaries of both discrete and broad areas. When adequate data were available on coral abundance, extent and community type, the group would encompass the entire feature (such as in the BOEM lease block Viosca Knoll 826) as a 'discrete' zone. Broad areas were those without survey data, were larger than discrete zones and were based on high likelihood of coral presence (similar underlying geology as known coral areas, predictive habitat models or other data that provided strong evidence of coral presence).

Each area was discussed in detail. Following are: maps of the discrete areas and an itemized list, maps of the broad areas and an itemized list. Still to come will be a detailed summary of all

areas the group discussed including: size of area, species present in each area (richness), presence of protected species, fish species (if applicable) and any other useful information. These detailed reports will be geographically separated and will focus on: South Texas Banks, Northwest Gulf of Mexico, Northeast Gulf of Mexico, and West Florida. Several areas were also removed from consideration because there were not enough data.

Drs. Cordes, Brooke, and Etnoyer all contributed new information on coral presence, abundance and diversity in the northeastern Gulf of Mexico.

Mr. Schmahl and Drs. Sammarco and Cordes had new information on many areas of the northwestern Gulf of Mexico including new information on rugosity as a metric predicting species richness, increasing the information about several HAPCs (habitat areas of particular concern), and information about several new banks for consideration. There was also some discussion of the Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary's ongoing efforts to expand to include some of the banks discussed by the group in this region.

Mr. Reed and Drs. Brooke and Etnoyer provided new information about *Lophelia pertusa* and black coral areas that have been recently surveyed on the west Florida shelf and Pulley Ridge.

Dr. Hicks presented new information about the south Texas Banks and identified banks with known high densities of coral for the group. Some of these banks are Pleistocene relict reefs and others are relict barrier island features.

The meeting adjourned at December 5th at 3:30 pm.

Discrete Areas include (Figure 1):

South Texas Banks
Blackfish Ridge
Big Adam Rock
Unnamed Bank (Harte Bank)
Mysterious Banks
Dream Bank
Southern Bank
Hospital, North Hospital and Aransas Banks
Baker Bank

Northeast Gulf of Mexico
Viosca Knoll 862/906
Viosca Knoll 826
Mississippi Canyon 751 and 885
AT 357
AT 047
Mississippi Canyon 118
Roughtongue Reef and Yellowtail Reef
Patch Reef Field and Solitary Mound
L & W Pinnacles and Scamp Reef

Northwest Gulf of Mexico
Garden Banks 535
Green Canyon 354
Green Canyon 140 and 272
Garden Banks 299
Green Canyon 234
Horseshoe Banks
Elvers Bank
Parker Bank
Green Canyon 852
MacNeil Banks
Rankin Bright Bank
Geyer Bank
29 Fathom Bank
Bouma Bank
Rezak Sidner Bank
Sonnier Bank
Alderdice Bank
Jakkula Bank

Shark Reef, Triple Top Reef, Double Top Reef
Mountain Top Bank 3
Pinnacle 1 Near West and West Pinnacle 2
Far Tortuga
Alabama Alps Reef

West Florida
Long Mound
2 unnamed sites surveyed by John Reed
Many Mounds
Okeanos Ridge
Pulley Ridge

Broad Areas include (Figure 2):

South Texas Banks
South Texas Banks North Polygon
South Texas Banks South Polygon

Northeast Gulf of Mexico
Viosca Knoll 862/906
Viosca Knoll 826
Mississippi Canyon 751 and 885
AT 357
AT 047
Mississippi Canyon 118
The Pinnacles

West Florida
West Florida Slope North
West Florida Slope South

Northwest Gulf of Mexico
Garden Banks 535
Green Canyon 354
Green Canyon 140 and 272
Garden Banks 299
Green Canyon 234
Horseshoe Banks
Elvers Bank
Parker Bank
Green Canyon 852
MacNeil Banks
Rankin Bright Bank
Geyer Bank
29 Fathom Bank
Bouma Bank
Rezak Sidner Bank
Sonnier Bank
Alderdice Bank
Jakkula Bank

Figure 1. Broad overview of the discrete coral areas identified by the coral working group. Note: this map does not include HAPCs or other areas with fishing regulations. This map is only the discrete areas that are not currently identified as HAPCs or coral areas, or are identified as HAPCs but have no restrictions.

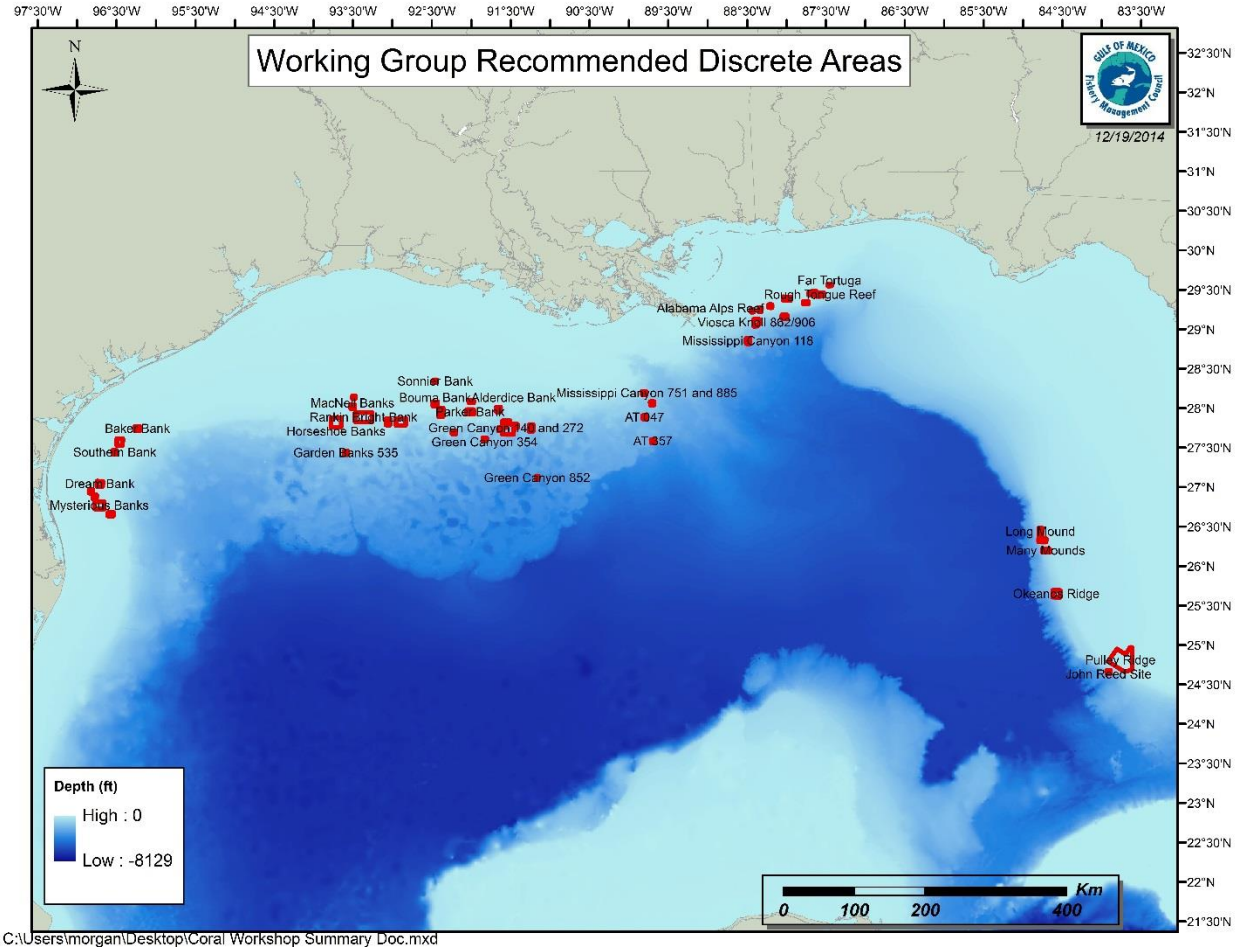

Figure 2. Broad overview of the broad coral areas identified by the coral working group. Note: this map does not include HAPCs or other areas with fishing regulations. This map is only the discrete areas that are not currently identified as HAPCs or coral areas, or are identified as HAPCs but have no restrictions.