Habitat Mapping and Characterization on the West Florida Shelf

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Synopsis of presentation and desired outcomes:

What: The College of Marine Science at USF has had a habitat mapping and characterization project since 2015, funded through a grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, Gulf Environmental Program. The program – acronym CSCAMP, for Continental Shelf Characterization, Assessment and mapping Project, seeks to provide high-resolution bathymetry, habitat characterization, and population estimates for reef fishes and sea turtles in 2,800-3,000 km^2 of high-valued habitats on the West Florida Shelf. Initial priorities for mapping habitats were informed by fishery-dependent catch and location information (Fig. 1). This presentation will outline progress to date, including tools and techniques for bathymetric mapping (multibeam), habitat characterization and fish/turtle density estimates (towed video using C-BASS), and water column acoustic density estimates (EK-60/80). The presentation will consider the background for the project (funding originating from the TransOcean oil spill settlement), the collection and curation of all known high-resolution multibeam data (Fig. 1), and the conversion of *in situ* data into useful habitat mapping products of use to fishery and environmental managers. http://www.marine.usf.edu/scamp/

Desired Outcomes: (1) Inform and discuss with members of the Scientific and Statistical Committee the ongoing project, for potential synergies among other complementary efforts by NMFS, state agencies, academic institutions and the private sector, (2) solicit input on the prioritization of areas to be mapped in 2018 and 2019 under this project, relative to the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council's priorities for habitat protection, HAPCs and fishery management, and (3) discuss the utility of making a similar presentation to the full Council at a future meeting.

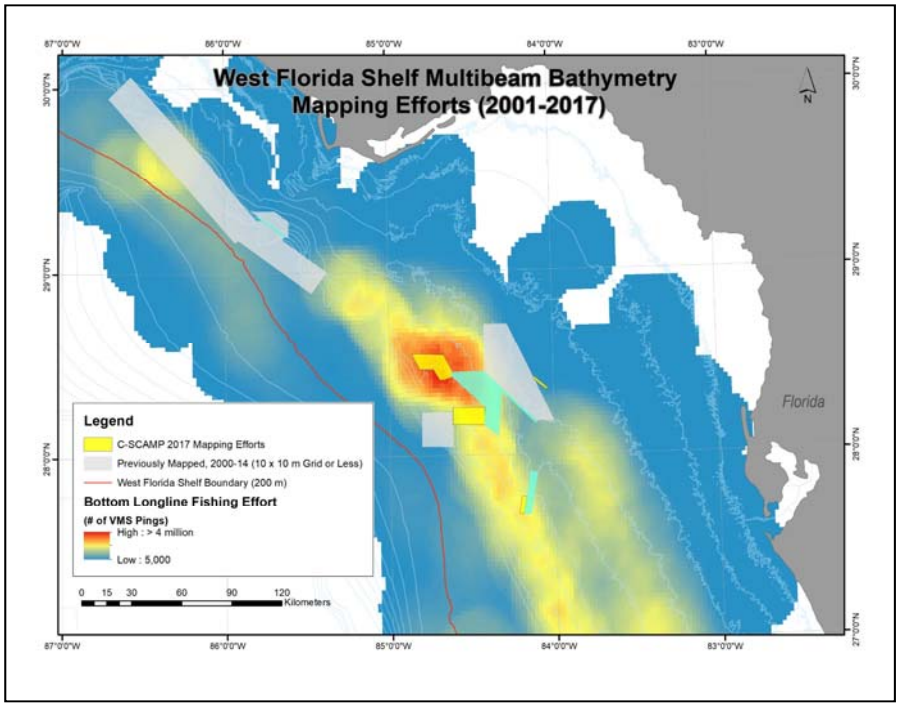

Figure 1. General area of habitat mapping projects being conducted by the CSCAMP program. Contoured areas are relative fishing effort by fishers engaged in reef fish fishing. Gray polygons are pre-project existing areas where multibeam maps are available. Yellow and turquoise polygons are areas mapped under the current project.