

Habitat Protection and Restoration Committee Report
August 25, 2021
Mr. Chris Schieble, Chair

The Committee adopted the agenda (**Tab P, No. 1**) as written and approved the minutes (**Tab P, No. 2**) of the June 2021 meeting as written.

Presentation from BOEM on Renewable Wind Energy (Tab P, No. 4)

Mr. Mike Celata, regional director at the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM), presented some initial investigations for renewable wind energy projects in the Gulf of Mexico (Gulf). The presentation included an overview of the steps required in the request for interest procedure, typical windfarm layout, and stakeholder engagement milestones. Specific to stakeholder engagement, he highlighted towing effort data provided by the Southern Shrimp Alliance for consideration when selecting sites for windfarms.

A Committee member inquired if the proposed wind turbines would provide recreational fishing opportunities similar to offshore oil rig platforms. Mr. Celata indicated that was something BOEM could take into consideration and stated that positioning of turbines to allow for vessel navigation is also a high priority. Several NOAA staff encouraged their continued cooperation with BOEM and renewable energy development. They agreed that the existing oil and gas operations in the Gulf provided experience for renewable ventures and that recent development of wind energy in the Atlantic Ocean would serve as important lessons as well.

A Committee member echoed the support of continued collaboration and provided some addition comments. She focused on the importance of planning for future removal of a turbine should it no longer produce energy or be deemed not economically viable. She also encouraged the development of a fund that would reimburse fishermen should fishing gear be damaged or lost as a result of entanglement with a platform. She indicated that established mitigation for these issues exist for the oil and gas and industry and urged BOEM to institute similar procedures for renewable energy sources.

Draft: Generic Essential Fish Habitat Amendment (Tab P, No. 5)

Dr. Jim Nance provided the SSC's recommendation for the methodologies proposed in the Generic Amendment for Essential Fish Habitat (EFH). The SSC encouraged more computational methods for identifying and describing EFH. However, the SSC agreed that extensive consideration should be taken to ensure data inputs are spatially comprehensive and complete as possible. The SSC suggested using a hierarchical approach, based on available data by species and life stage, be used to inform the selection of preferred alternatives. Dr. Lisa Hollensead stated that Council staff agreed with the SSC recommendation for selection of data inputs and intends to include a detailed rationale for selecting these inputs in the document. Additionally, she indicated that while this technical portion was being completed, the interdisciplinary planning team (IPT) could also begin work on developing other chapters of the document. Given the substantial work load for the IPT at this time, Dr. Hollensead asked if the Committee would be amenable to seeing the next revision of the document at the January 2022

Council meeting. The Committee indicated that timeline would be satisfactory and suggested Council staff provide some concrete examples of methods used by other regional Councils for describing EFH at its next meeting.

Mr. Chair, this concludes my report.