

**Habitat Protection/Restoration Committee Report  
August 14, 2019  
Mr. Patrick Banks – Chair**

The agenda and minutes of the June 2019 meeting were approved.

***Permitting Process for Siting of Artificial Reefs and Aquaculture Operations in Federal Waters (Tab P, No. 4)***

Mr. Andrew Kizlauskas from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers provided a presentation on the permitting process for siting of artificial reefs and aquaculture operations in federal waters. He provided information on the geographic range of the three Army Corps districts along the Gulf coast. He then discussed the various types of authorizations for permits, the permit application process, and the Army Corps' permit review process. He also provided information on engagement with stakeholders via public notices. The Committee noted that artificial reefs may provide additional habitat for reef fish but that the siting of these reef should be carefully considered so there is minimal conflict with commercial shrimping grounds. The Committee further discussed that artificial reefs can affect catch rates, which impacts fishery management. Dr. Crabtree noted that in the future, NOAA will be asking permittees to provide more rationale regarding the merits and contribution to management for siting and materials of artificial reefs in the analyzes. As interest in aquaculture increases, the Committee would like to stay informed about the location, size and fish species that will be part of any future aquaculture operations.

***Essential Fish Habitat Outline (Tab P, No. 5)***

Council staff presented a proposed timeline for developing a future Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) policy document over the next year. This EFH document will incorporate recommendations to the 5-year EFH review provided by NOAA and will strive to develop a procedure for efficiently updating EFH considerations to fishery management plans. The Committee requested frequent updates from the IPT as this document is developed.

***Other Business***

The Committee briefly discussed the need to know more about major projects being permitted in federal waters, and how might the Committee be better informed that such projects were being considered by the Army Corps for permitting.

Mr. Chair, this concludes my report.