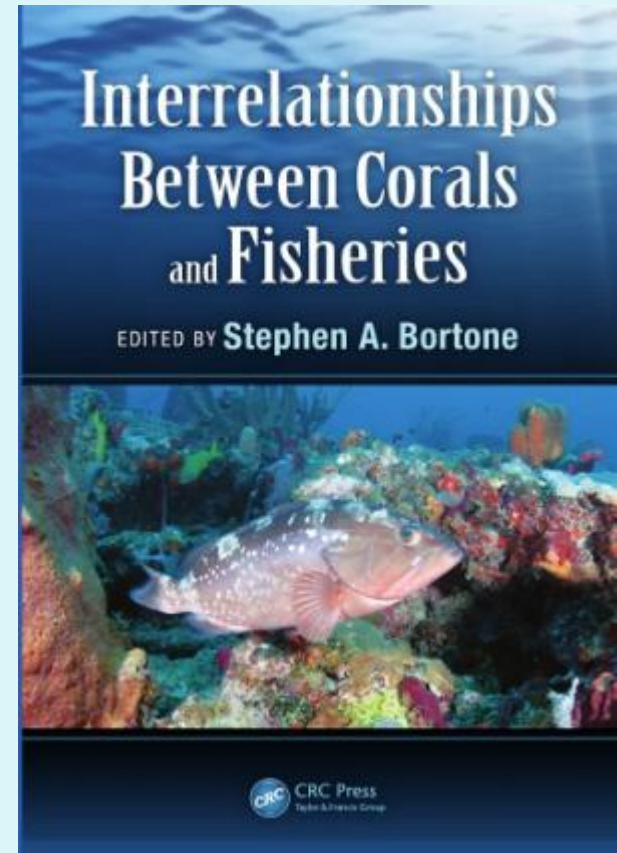




# Deepwater Coral Assessment in the Gulf of Mexico: Roles and Responsibilities of the Contractor, Council, and Coral AP/SSC

# Background

- In 2013, the Council held a workshop focused the interrelationships between corals and fisheries
- From this workshop, a book was released titled “Interrelationships Between Coral Reefs and Fisheries” (Bortone 2014)
- One of the recommendations from that workshop was to reevaluate coral areas in the Gulf of Mexico (Gulf) that might warrant special protections.

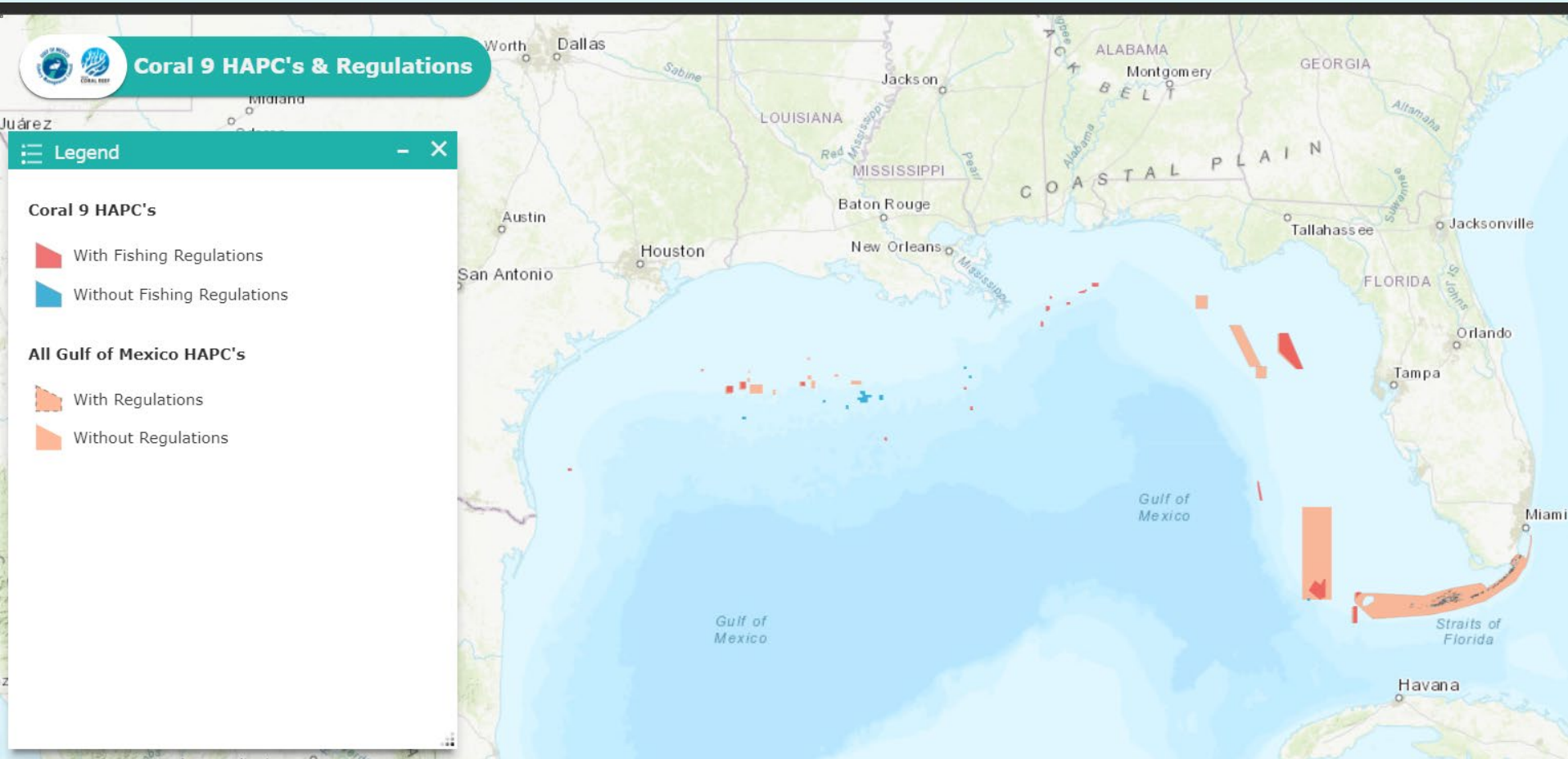


# Background: Review of Priority Areas

- In 2014, the Council held a workshop with coral scientists that identified 47 priority areas, but not all were included in Coral 9
- In 2018, Coral Amendment 9 was completed that established new Coral HAPCs in the Gulf
- This action included new HAPCs with bottom contact gear restrictions and other new HAPCs that did not establish any new prohibitions on allowable activities
- Areas identified as HAPCs get additional review with respect to Essential Fish Habitat Consultations and allow NMFS to comment on potential impacts from other activities (e.g., offshore petroleum or wind farm development)



# Gulf of Mexico Coral HAPCs



To learn more: <https://portal.gulfcouncil.org/coral9/>

# Background: Review of Priority Areas

- The Council has requested additional work (Coral 10) that will consider the areas previously identified as well as new areas for additional conservation and management measures
- The contracted work with CSA provides an updated literature review and an ecological assessment to review known mesophotic and deepwater areas with respect to vulnerability, ecological values, and need for management
- The outcome of this work along with the recommendations by the Coral AP and SSC will inform the development of Coral Amendment 10



# Contractor to Review Coral Areas

- December 2020: The Council issued a Request for Proposals for a qualified contractor to compile and synthesize information on mesophotic and deepwater corals, and coral-related habitats throughout the Gulf of Mexico.
- CSA Ocean Sciences Inc. was awarded the contract and has provided several products to inform the review and prioritization of mesophotic and deepwater coral habitats in the Gulf
- The work products have been developed in close coordination with Council staff



# CSA Contract and Deliverables

- A comprehensive literature review of mesophotic and deepwater coral areas identified by the Coral Working Group in 2014 and identify other ecologically important coral habitat that may benefit from management measures
- A compilation of the most up-to-date information on Gulf managed coral taxa as it relates to the presence of mesophotic and deepwater corals, coral density and diversity
- A general ecological assessment of those areas where corals are identified as a conspicuous element of the bottom, and potential risks to corals in those areas
- Produce a report to be presented to the Coral AP/SSC and the Council





# Roles and Responsibilities

- Council: The management body that will review and integrate the applicable results from this work into management
- CSA: Responsible for project report and related deliverables
- Coral AP/SSC: Serves as a review body for the report and related deliverables produced by CSA. Also provides recommendations to the Council for integration of these products into management
- Council Staff: Project management, review draft materials, and act as the liaison between CSA, the AP/SSC, and the Council





# Questions



# Background: Coral 9 (2018)

- Establishes the following areas as habitat areas of particular concern with regulations prohibiting fishing with bottom tending gear: West Florida Wall, Alabama Alps, L&W Pinnacles, Scamp Reef, Mississippi Canyon 118, Roughtongue Reef, Viosca Knoll 826, Green Canyon 852, AT 047, AT 357, Harte Bank, and Southern Bank.
- Establishes Viosca Knoll 862/906 as a habitat area of particular concern with regulations prohibiting fishing with bottom-tending gear, but allows royal red shrimp fisherman to keep their nets in the water, but off the bottom, in this area.
- Within the current Pulley Ridge habitat area of particular concern, establishes a new habitat area of particular concern with fishing regulations prohibiting all fishing with bottom-tending gear, except for longline gear.
- Establishes the following areas as habitat areas of particular concern without fishing regulation: South Reed; Garden Banks 299 and 535; Green Canyon 140/272,234, and 354; Mississippi Canyon 751 and 885.



# Background: Essential Fish Habitat and Habitat Areas of Particular Concern

## Essential Fish Habitat (EFH)

- EFH includes those waters and substrate necessary to fish (including coral) for spawning, breeding, feeding, or growth to maturity.

## Habitat Area of Particular Concern (HAPC)

- HAPC: A subset of EFH that meets one or more of the following criteria: 1) importance of ecological function provided by the habitat; 2) human induced degradation; 3) the habitat is stressed; 4) is considered to be rare.

