

**Habitat Protection and Restoration Committee Report
November 4, 2024
Mr. Michael McDermott, Chair**

The Committee adopted the agenda (**Tab P, No. 1**) and approved the minutes (**Tab P, No. 2**) of the October 2022 meeting as written.

Final Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) Contract Report (Tab P, No. 4)

Dr. Bridgette Froeschke (University of Tampa) provided an overview of contract work to identify, catalog, and document contemporary habitat data sources in the Gulf of Mexico. Documentation of these spatial data were presented to the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) in July 2024. The SSC provided feedback on possible other data sources for the states of Florida, Louisiana, and Texas. Dr. Bridgette Froeschke reported that the SSC recommended data sources from Florida and Louisiana had been obtained through the online Geographic Information Systems Clearinghouse. Her team updated the metadata for those sources to include the direct state habitat division contacts based on the recommendation from the SSC. Several missing habitat data sources were included from the state of Texas based on SSC feedback. The deliverables from this contract work will be used to update the descriptions of EFH for all managed finfish and shrimp species in a generic amendment.

A Committee member asked about the inclusion of artificial habitat data layers in the report. Council staff responded that, while artificial reefs are not considered EFH, those data are often requested by the public and have now been cataloged in case this information is needed for any future EFH work. The Committee provided feedback on next steps for the EFH project including potentially collaborating with appropriate Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission committees and considering data storage for the collected spatial layers. Council staff noted the Committee's recommendations. Additionally, Council staff will provide regular updates and continue to incorporate Committee feedback on the developing EFH amendment.

Mr. Chair, this concludes my report.