Gulf Council
Standing Scientific and Statistical Committee
Meeting Summary
May 5, 2026
Webinar

The meeting of the Gulf Council Standing Scientific and Statistical Committees (SSC) was convened at 8:40 AM EDT on May 5, 2026. The agenda for this meeting was adopted, and the minutes from the February 2026 meeting were approved as written.

Presentation: Gulf Fishery-Independent Survey of Habitat and Ecosystem Resources (G-FISHER)

Dr. Ted Switzer (Florida Fish and Wildlife Research Institute [FWRI]) reviewed the Gulf – Fishery Independent Survey of Habitat and Ecosystem Resources (G-FISHER) composite video survey index. G-FISHER blends three Gulf video surveys to form a more comprehensive view of relative abundance by species. Dr. Switzer and his team reviewed the development process for G-FISHER, how its data products are created and applied for stock assessment and management purposes. He also discussed how the program adapts to survey limitations and emerging needs. G-FISHER is a key index in many Gulf reef fish stock assessments and analyses, offering key insight into relative abundance and trends in catch per unit effort and length composition. Dr. CJ Sweetman (Gulf Council member) commented that indices like G-FISHER were likely to be used more frequently in the future for index-based management procedures. Council staff added that the areas where sampling for G-FISHER occurs are also where much of the fishing effort in the Gulf on reef fish species also occurs. This makes the index a great way to check up on changes in relative abundance and length and age at length composition data relative to fishery observations.

An SSC member asked about the survey design, and whether habitat types were being deliberately sampled or not. Dr. Switzer replied that up to 2019, the sampling design was random, and transitioned to stratified random to more representatively sample various strata thereafter. SSC members asked about other data available to augment those data collected by G-FISHER. Specifically, funding for the expansion of the survey in the Gulf with more involvement by the Gulf states was discussed. Dr. Switzer noted that expansion into the western Gulf has been more difficult logistically, and data collected must be open access to the public. SSC members supported more state involvement and survey expansion, especially into the western Gulf.

An SSC member asked about the differences in camera design between the stereo and spherical designs. Dr. Switzer clarified that the cameras were the same, but that the spherical design allows the camera field of view to be stitched across cameras. The SSC member also asked about the eDNA component of G-FISHER, the use of primers for new species, and the data needed to expand that part of the survey. Ms. Kate Overly (FWRI) replied that a project is underway to examine seven reef fish families for better differentiating between species within those families.

An SSC member commented on the low sample sizes from the western Gulf and asked about how to expand sample sizes there. Dr. Switzer commented that there are a number of sites where there

are little to no proportion positive data but added that the banks in the western Gulf do have useful sample sizes. Dr. Switzer noted that many reef fish on larger vertical relief Gulf are found above the bottom among the structure complexity (e.g., oil and gas platforms), and sometimes out of the field of view of the camera array. Another SSC member said that Mississippi has mapping data of its natural and artificial reefs and supported furthering integration of state support of sampling to expand survey coverage and sample sizes, despite visibility issues.

Dr. Katie Siegfried (Southeast Fisheries Science Center [SEFSC]) noted the model weighting procedure is applied across the time series of data, and that depending on when a survey applies to a stock assessment, data truncation is necessary. Also, differences in survey selectivity and catchability are evident between species. Dr. Switzer said that species-specific approaches are able to be considered, and while a standardized approach is the goal, species-specific products will remain available to be produced. Dr. Siegfried was appreciative and noted that the years and areas used could vary between species. Regarding automation and machine learning, Dr. Siegfried asked about how data synthesis might be expedited in the future. Dr. Switzer said that those advances were largely limited by reference image library but were being expanded. With time, data processing will improve. Dr. Matt Campbell (SEFSC) said that some confusion with conspecifics required more thorough human validation but was confident that improvements would continue to be made.

Public Comment, May 5

None given.

Other Business

The Council solicited the SSC for volunteers to review the SEDAR 100 stock assessment of Gulf gray triggerfish. Dr. Luiz Barbieri volunteered to serve as the chair, and Council staff will solicit additional volunteers to serve as reviewers.

The meeting adjourned at 11:00 am eastern time on May 5, 2026.

Meeting Participants

Standing SSC
Luiz Barbieri
Harry Blanchet
David Griffith
Tiffany Hopper
Jack Isaacs
John Mareska
Paul Mickle
Trevor Moncrief, *Chair*
James Nance
Dan Petrolia
Ralph Townsend
Steven Scyphers

Council Representative
CJ Sweetman