Ongoing Efforts and Challenges for Managing Deep-sea Corals in the Gulf of Mexico

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Who is the Council?

Seventeen voting members:

- Regional Administrator of NOAA Fisheries
- Directors of the 5 Gulf state marine resource management agencies
- Eleven members who represent different interests in the fishery
The Council draws upon the expertise of knowledgeable people from other state and federal agencies, universities, and the public.
Fishery Conservation & Management Act of 1976

- Set up the regional Council system
- Extended control of the U.S waters to 200 nautical miles offshore
- Phased out foreign fishing activities
- Created measures to:
  - Prevent overfishing
  - Allow overfished stocks to recover
  - Conserve & manage fishery resources

Sustainable Fisheries Act-1996

- Rebuild overfished fisheries
- Protect essential fish habitat
- Reduce bycatch
- Consider the effects of management decisions on communities
Involvement in Fishery Management Plan Development

- Issue Identified
  - Initial Review
    - Scoping
      - Options Paper
        - EA/EIS
          - Public Hearing
            - Final Action
              - Rule Making

- NOAA Comment Period
  - Public is asked to identify possible solutions to fishery.
  - Public is asked which solution they prefer
  - Advisory panel gives advice
  - Final public opportunity for input at Council level

- NOAA Comment Period
150+ species in the Fishery Management Plan

ACL = Zero

Coral Essential Fish Habitat = where coral occurs

Octocorals managed by the state of FL
Timeline

- Process initiated after a workshop funded by the CRCP (2013)
- Meeting of Advisory Panels and Scientific and Statistical Committees (2014)
- Working Group to provide recommendations (2014)
- Meeting of Advisory Panels and Scientific and Statistical Committees (2015 and 2016)
- Scoping Document (2016) - It started!!!
Recommended Areas

- 47 identified from the 2014 Working Group
- Coral SSC and AP and Shrimp AP met to set priority areas
- Based on known coral presence and recommendations from experts
Successes

Information from researchers

Participation in the Ocean Exploration site determining process

Use of fishing information to gain industry participation, input, and collaboration

Two meetings with industry participants helping facilitate the boundaries and discussion of resources
Challenges

- No direct connection of a current fishery species using deepwater coral as habitat
- Resistance to more closed areas
- No Council champion of the issue
- Limited data or area of investigation
- Reincorporation of octocorals
- Not red snapper
Moving Forward

- Continue to add data
- Make data publicly available via the portal
- Continue to provide the public with resources that highlight deep ecosystems
Coral portal website:  http://portal.gulfcouncil.org/

- Online mapping for review, discussion, and decision making
- Improved access to the ‘data’ supporting management decisions
- Explore distribution and diversity patterns of corals in the Gulf of Mexico
- GIS data download capabilities
- View individual coral record information (Name, Species, Depth, and Source)