ISSUE 143

Wild Oceans
For the future of fishing

Summer Newsletter 2014

The Horizon

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CONSERVATION PLAN UNDERWAY IN THE MID-ATLANTIC

The coral canyons of the Atlantic

In her groundbreaking novel The Sea Around Us, published in 1951, Rachel Carson wrote, "We can only sense that in the deep and turbulent recesses of the sea are hidden mysteries far greater than any we have solved."

Sixty-three years later and many mysteries still lie hidden in the depths. But thanks to advances in technology, notably remotely operated underwater vehicles (ROVs) capable of diving thousands of meters to the ocean floor with high-definition cameras, some mysteries are beginning to unfold. Of the latest amazing finds is the discovery of deep water coral communities thriving in the canyons off the U.S. Atlantic coast.

As *Wild Oceans* reported last summer (see *The Horizon* Summer 2013 issue), 60,000 visitors tuned in for live webcasts of deep water images captured by a robotic submarine deployed from NOAA's ship, the *Okeanos Explorer*. During

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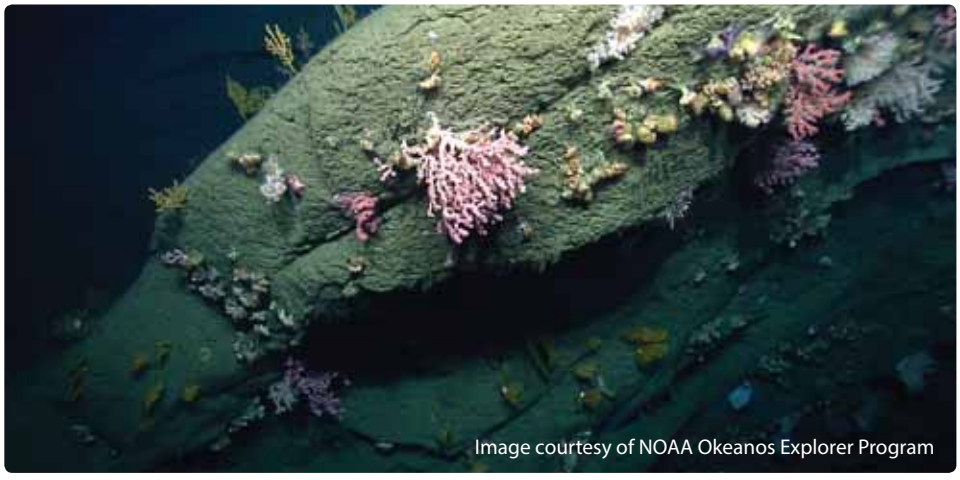

Image courtesy of NOAA Okeanos Explorer Program

Our Mission

Wild Oceans was founded by anglers in 1973. Like the sportsmen before us who pioneered wildlife conservation on land, we are passionate protectors of fish and the wild world we share.

Our mission is to keep the oceans wild to preserve fishing opportunities for the future. To do this, we bring conservation-minded fishermen and pro-fishing environmentalists together to promote a broad, ecosystems approach to fisheries management that reflects our expanding circle of concern for all marine life and the future of fishing.

So much of what we love about the sea, about fish, about fishing, is in the wildness. But that wild world, and the future of fishing, now hangs in the balance. Everything we do, every decision we make, must be guided by a clear vision of the future we want for our oceans and of how the fishing public and responsible consumers will fit into that future.

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The path forward, not backward

On page 10, we describe our priorities for reauthorizing the Magnuson-Stevens Act, a once-in-a-decade opportunity to amend the nation's fishery conservation law currently underway in Congress. We were there at the beginning when the Act was passed in 1976, and we've been involved in every reauthorization since. The challenge, as always, is to hold on to the gains of the past, while adapting to meet the needs of the future.

Our agenda this time around is simple: The survival of wild fisheries rests on our ability to sustain an abundance and variety of fish, fishing and fishermen; in other words, to make the ocean safe for a diversity of life.

Unfortunately, we are facing a Congress that seems incapable of putting aside its differences, plagued as it is with partisanship, polarization and paralysis. To some extent this reflects the mood of the public, or at least its most strident voices.

> "If we cannot now end our differences, at least we can make the world safe for diversity."
>
> — John F. Kennedy

In spite of tangible progress in ending overfishing and restoring depleted fish stocks, lawmakers are hearing calls from some in the fishing industry to let the pendulum swing back the other way, to give fishery managers the flexibility to allow short-term economic interests to override rebuilding requirements. But can Congress do that without undoing the progress we've made, progress that can be directly attributable to strict mandates added to the law in past reauthorizations?

In our view, the first principle must be to renew the law in ways that will keep the nation on the path toward truly sustainable fisheries while keeping fishermen fishing, and to avoid any changes that could have unintended and disastrous consequences, such as creating loopholes in or broad-brush exceptions to anti-overfishing provisions that would set the nation back a decade or two. We do not want to do that, and we don't need to.

As of this writing, the House and Senate have proposed draft bills to amend the Magnuson-Stevens Act. Each is disappointing, albeit in very different ways, and yet so very much in character. The House, for its part, is aggressively seeking to undo some of the Act's most fundamental conservation requirements. An anti-regulatory mood permeates their bill. The Senate, on the other hand, is taking a restrained but ultimately ineffectual approach, leaning toward what amounts to a straight renewal of the statute as is. The Senate leadership has little stomach for a fight over anything controversial; to wit, language promoting forage fish conservation and

For the Future of Fishing

Wild Oceans is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization dedicated to keeping the oceans wild to preserve fishing opportunities for the future.

Our Goals:

- preventing overfishing and restoring depleted fish populations to healthy levels
- promoting sustainable use policies that balance commercial, recreational and ecological values
- modifying or eliminating wasteful fishing practices
- improving our understanding of fish and their role in the marine environment
- preserving fish habitat and water quality

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ecosystem planning, included in an early "discussion draft", was yanked when industry lobbyists said boo.

The problem with the House approach is obvious. With the Senate, the risk is being left without a map for the future until the next reauthorization, another 10 years down the road.

Some expect Washington gridlock to worsen following this fall's elections, should Republicans gain control of the Senate along with the House, facing off with a lame-duck Democratic administration. That may be the case. But it's worth reminding our representatives, and everyone who fishes and votes, that fish conservation historically has been a bipartisan affair.

In 1976, the original Act was passed by a Democratic congress and signed by a Republican president. The landmark Sustainable Fisheries Act (SFA) Amendments of 1996 were enacted by a Republican congress and signed into law by a Democratic president. And the last reauthorization in 2006, which strengthened the SFA's rebuilding mandates, was the work of a Republican administration and a Democratic majority on the Hill. In our experience, Republicans have championed important fishery conservation initiatives as often as Democrats. [As evidence, we refer readers to the annual *Congressional Marine Fisheries Report Card* we published in Sport Fishing magazine from 1995 to 2000.]

There is no good reason on earth, or at least 71% of it, that Congress shouldn't do again what it's done in every reauthorization of the Magnuson-Stevens Act up until now. And that means giving fishermen who care about the future of the ocean and its ability to sustain wild fisheries a good reason to support it.

-Ken Hinman, President

END OVERFISHING

A play in two acts

In 1976, the United States Congress celebrated the nation's bicentennial by declaring independence from foreign overfishing off our shores. Of course, it's taken another 3 decades or more to free *ourselves* from overfishing, but there's no question we're making enormous progress. The *2013 Annual Report on the Status of U.S. Fisheries* shows the advances that NOAA Fisheries, the regional fishery management councils, and cooperating stakeholders have made toward ending overfishing and rebuilding depleted stocks, with a total now of 34 fisheries recovered to "sustainable" levels since 2000.

As NOAA points out, "When stocks are rebuilt, they provide more economic opportunities for commercial, recreational, and subsistence fishing." Other recent reports out of the Department of Commerce affirm this, showing gains in the economic value of our commercial and recreational fisheries and the number of jobs they support.

Even in the country's early days of fish conservation, however, our leaders knew that conserving each species alone was only the first step toward truly sustainable fisheries and healthy oceans. Richard A. Frank, who took over the reins of NOAA soon after passage of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, told a Striped Bass Symposium we sponsored in 1980 that he expected most fishery management plans would "within a few years" take account of predator-prey relationships. "Not too long after that," said Dr. Frank, who passed away earlier this year, "I hope we will use an ecosystem approach to fishery management," by which he meant managing "with full knowledge of the interactions between the managed species and the living and nonliving components of their environment."

It is a hope shared by many, but it's not just a dream, it's a necessity. Pressures are building on every part of the ocean environment – industrial-scale exploitation of forage species, undermining the very foundation of stable and healthy food webs and fisheries; the advent of large-scale farming at sea, potentially supplanting wild fisheries; energy development, competing for space offshore with established fishing grounds and essential habitats; and, of course, climate change.

The times are changing and so is the world. Now is the time and this is the opportunity to take that all-important second step, one specifically recommended to Congress by the Ecosystems Principles Advisory Panel it convened in the 1996 reauthorization (see box), to define and mandate an ecosystems approach to fisheries conservation and management. [Full disclosure: Wild Oceans president Ken Hinman was a member of that panel.] (see also p.10) ■

"Too often we learn about ecological consequences after the fact, because we do not consider them in our decision-making, nor do we monitor ecosystem changes due to increased exploitation."

From the EPAP 1999 Report to Congress, recommending that all councils develop Fishery Ecosystem Plans and consider predator-prey interactions affected by fishing.

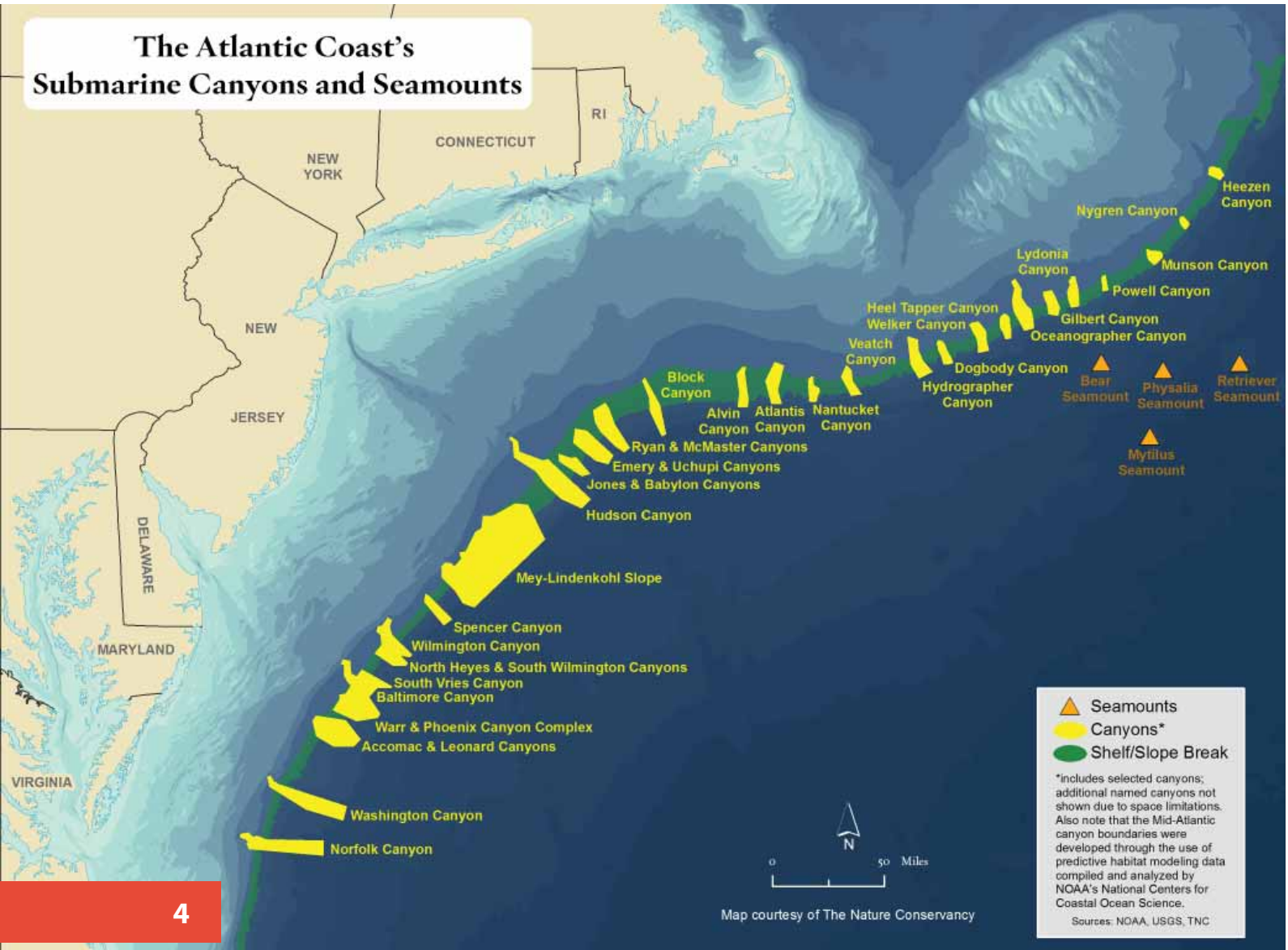
the 36-day expedition, scientists discovered diverse communities of life in previously unexplored canyons. And this was just one of several expeditions to the Atlantic's canyons and seamounts that have occurred in the last two years. And more expeditions are underway.[1]

Why the recent attention to deep sea corals? Recognizing the importance of deep sea coral habitat to fisheries, the 2007 reauthorization of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Act) required NOAA to establish a Deep Sea Coral Research and Technology Program, which was launched in 2009 to provide scientific information needed to conserve and manage coral ecosystems. The Act also gave regional fishery management councils authority to designate deep sea coral zones in order to protect corals from physical damage caused by fishing. The first council to draw on this authority is the Mid-Atlantic Council, which initiated action to protect deep sea coral habitat in 2012. Now that action, packaged as Amendment 16 to the Atlantic Mackerel, Squid and Butterfish Fishery Management Plan, is moving forward.

The right time to protect corals.

At its August 11 meeting in Washington, D.C., the Mid-Atlantic Council unanimously voted to seek public input on a suite of alternatives designed to protect the region's deep water corals. *Wild Oceans* Executive Director Pam Lyons Gromen attended the Council meeting, supporting the Council's decision. "Council staff worked hard to develop a wide range of potential actions and present them in a reasonable number of alternatives that stakeholders can get their heads around. It's time to get Amendment 16 in front of the public," she said. Scheduled to be released for public comment this fall, the options range from the status quo (i.e., doing nothing) to establishing a network of coral protection zones where bottom-tending commercial gears like otter trawls would be prohibited because of their potential to irreparably damage fragile coral structures.

An otter trawl, also known as a dragger, tows a funnel-shaped net, fitted with floats on the top and weights on the bottom, along the sea floor in pursuit of bottom-dwelling fish. Two rectangular otter boards keep the mouth of the net open. To protect the



Map courtesy of The Nature Conservancy

net and prevent it from snagging on obstacles, bobbins, rollers and/or discs are fitted to the bottom edge.

Though some deep water corals can grow quite large (colorful bubblegum corals can grow upwards of 6 meters high!), growth rates are relatively slow - just a few centimeters per year. Once toppled by fishing gear, coral colonies could take thousands of years to recover, if they recover at all.

Currently in the mid-Atlantic region, there is little overlap between existing bottom trawl fisheries and proposed coral protection zones. However, in a world of growing demand for and diminishing supplies of wild seafood, it is feasible that deep water fisheries could be explored. Protection zones would encourage the development of sustainable gears compatible with corals rather than the expansion of destructive and indiscriminate trawling operations. There could not be a more opportune time for the Mid-Atlantic Council to take action.

A shared mission for the Atlantic councils.

Before the Mid-Atlantic Council could develop its coral protection plan, it had to clarify its geographic area of responsibility for coral management since deep water corals have been found offshore from Maine to Florida. The first order of business was to negotiate a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the neighboring New England and South Atlantic Councils, signed in 2013. The memorandum not only delineates areas of authority, it sets the stage for cross-council coordination and consistency.

Finalized prior to the MOU, the South Atlantic Council's coral protection measures include five Coral Habitat Areas of Particular Concern (HAPCs), encompassing more than 23,000 square miles off the coasts of North Carolina South Carolina, Georgia and Florida. The HAPCs, which prohibit bottom-tending gear and vessel anchoring, are part of the essential fish habitat components of the South Atlantic Council's Coral, Coral Reef and Live/Hardbottom Habitat Fishery Management Plan.

Several basket stars rest on a bubblegum coral in Norfolk Canyon, with a colony of the stony coral *Lophelia pertusa* in the background.

Image courtesy of Deepwater Canyons 2013 - Pathways to the Abyss, NOAA-OER/ BOEM/USGS.

The New England Council plans to manage deep sea corals in Alvin Canyon and areas north through an Omnibus Deep Sea Corals Amendment, but a timeline and plan for completion have not been finalized.

The Mid-Atlantic Council's area of responsibility covers federal waters off the coast of Long Island south to the Virginia/North Carolina line, and includes 12 major canyon systems with familiar names like Hudson, Baltimore, Washington and Norfolk. (see map)

Corals flourish in the mid-Atlantic canyons.

The Atlantic canyons, which are a part of the continental shelf and slope, range from 100 meters to 3,500 meters deep. V-shaped in cross-section, the canyons provide an ideal environment for deep sea corals, which anchor to the hard, sloping walls to trap plankton carried by currents that whip through the valleys. Unlike their shallow-water relatives, deep water corals do not obtain food through symbiotic algae. Thriving at depths where there is no sunlight, deep sea corals must filter food from the surrounding waters.

In 2012 and 2013, Dr. Sandra Brooke, a research scientist for Florida State University's Coastal and Marine Laboratory, was part of a team that conducted research cruises for the Atlantic Deepwater Canyons Project funded by Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM), NOAA and the USGS. The team's expeditions to Baltimore and Norfolk canyons resulted in the first mid-Atlantic sightings of some important species, such as the reef-building coral *Lophelia pertusa.*

Dr. Brooke was the featured speaker at a reception hosted by the Pew Charitable Trusts and Natural Resources Defense Council on August 12th, an event that coincided with the Mid-Atlantic Council's meeting in Washington, D.C. Addressing an audience of Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council members, staff and constituents, Dr. Brooke explained that in the mid-Atlantic canyons, exploration has not yet reached the tip of the iceberg. "We are just starting to see the tip now," said Dr. Brooke.

A model for proactive conservation.

While deep water expeditions are still "scratching the deep," habitat suitability models can be used to predict areas in the ocean where deep sea corals are likely to occur. Such a model is the foundation for identifying coral protection zones in and around the mid-Atlantic canyons. The model takes what we know about documented coral locations, such as the slope, temperature, depth and substrate, and then extrapolates that information to unexplored areas to generate maps of suitable coral habitat. To have faith in a model, it must be ground truthed. In July 2012, the NOAA ship *Bigelow* visited three "highly-likely" areas predicted by the model and found that corals were indeed present.

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Using existing coral location records and model-generated maps of suitable habitat, the Mid-Atlantic Council has identified a series of coral protection zones that fall into two categories, discrete protection zones and broad protection zones. The discrete zones generally follow the shapes of the canyons and encompass areas where corals have either been observed or are highly likely to occur based on habitat suitability modeling. Broad zones cover areas where little bottom fishing has occurred, following a depth contour as the landward boundary and extending outward to the end of the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone (200 miles from shore). Both types of zones follow guidance provide by NOAA in its 2010 *Strategic Plan for Deep-Sea Coral and Sponge Ecosystems.*[2] The plan emphasizes robust protection for areas where corals are known to occur (i.e., discrete protection zones) and a freeze-the-footprint approach to prevent the expansion of bottom-tending gear into unexplored areas until we know for certain whether or not corals are present (i.e., broad zones).

Assessing the value of the invaluable.

Amendment 16 has the potential to make meaningful strides in the protection of Atlantic deep coral habitat, but it also has the potential to become a largely paper exercise, sounding good but making little difference on the water. A crucial area of debate will be how to weigh the costs and benefits of coral protection. In their decision-making, fishery managers typically rely on economic analyses that estimate dollar costs associated with each alternative. How will the benefits of corals be fairly weighed against costs of displaced fishing effort or lost revenue to the fishing industry?

Foley, van Rensburg and Armstrong (2010)[3] expand on benefits provided by diversity-rich deep water coral ecosystems. The long list of ecosystem services includes nursery, feeding and refuge habitat for fish and invertebrates; climate change research; carbon sequestration; and opportunities for advancing medical science. Deep water corals have already been used for bone grafting and in trial cancer treatments.

Cultural services too should not be overlooked. Aesthetic enjoyment, inspiration and awe for the natural world – the desire to keep the oceans healthy and wild for future generations – are intangible but very real benefits of deep sea coral ecosystems that must be brought to the forefront as the Mid-Atlantic Council reaches out to the public this fall. ■

- Pam Lyons Gromen,
Executive Director

(Endnotes)

1 As of this writing, the NOAA ship *Henry Bigelow* just returned to dock after completing a 2-week Deep Water Corals Survey. NOAA ship *Okeanos Explorer* is conducting a 22-day research cruise to Veatch Canyon and the New England Seamount chain, formations that are prime real estate for deep sea corals.

2 National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Coral Reef Conservation Program. 2010. NOAA Strategic Plan for Deep-Sea Coral and Sponge Ecosystems: Research, Management, and International Cooperation. Silver Spring, MD: NOAA Coral Reef Conservation Program. NOAA Technical Memorandum CRCP 11. 67 pp.

3 Foley, N. S., van Rensburg, T. M., & Armstrong, C. W. (2010). The ecological and economic value of cold-water coral ecosystems. Ocean and Coastal Management, 53(7), 313-326.

SKY-HIGH PRICES DRIVE GLASS EEL POACHING

American eels on the edge

Commanding $400-$2,500 per pound in Asian markets, glass eels, the translucent young of the American eel, have incited a gold rush on the U.S. Atlantic coast. The Cape Cod Times reported a recent bust of two men who had illegally caught 35 pounds of eels worth $28,000.

The demand for glass eels could not come at a worse time for the U.S. American eel population. Responding to a petition to list the American eel under the Endangered Species Act, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) is conducting a full status review with a final decision expected next year. USFWS will no doubt consider the results of a 2012 stock assessment, which concluded that eels were depleted to historically low levels. The assessment team called for reducing fishing on all eel life stages, especially young of the year and silver adult eels.

The American eel has a fascinating life cycle. The only catadromous species in North America, American eels spawn in the Sargasso Sea. Newly hatched eels ride the currents to the U.S. coast where they enter river systems as glass eels, serving a critically important role in the forage base. As the migrate up rivers, the eels develop pigment, first turning brown and then yellow at age 2. Between the ages of 3 and 24, the eels "silver" in preparation for their voyage to the Sargasso.

All eel phases are targeted by fisheries, but only Maine and South Carolina allow glass eel fishing. Yellow eel fisheries for bait and food are the most common in other states.

On August 7th, the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission met to take final action on Addendum IV to the American Eel Interstate Fishery Management Plan. Addendum IV was initiated in response to the grim stock assessment and includes measures to reduce fishing mortality. In written comments, *Wild Oceans* supported quotas and significant catch reductions consistent with the stock assessment advice. Disappointingly, there was broad disagreement among the states as to how to move forward, so action was postponed until the Commission's October meeting in Mystic, CT. ■

ASMFC LAUNCHES NEW PLAN TO CONSERVE STRIPED BASS

Keep "the flagship" afloat

At its summer meeting, the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC), acting on behalf of worried striped bass fishermen from Maine to Florida, approved a suite of options aimed at restoring the iconic game fish's declining numbers. The proposed measures, which would reduce fishing pressure by 25-30% beginning next year, will be presented to the public for comment through the end of September, either in writing or in person at hearings in most coastal states. A final decision is expected at the ASMFC Annual Meeting at the end of October.

Draft Addendum IV to the Interstate Striped Bass Fishery Management Plan was set in motion last year when scientists doing the latest stock assessment recommended lowering fishing mortality to halt a troubling decline in the spawning population.

The abundance target for a healthy striper population, according to the plan, correlates to what it was in 1995, when the stock was declared recovered from years of overfishing. But after years of steady growth, the spawning stock began shrinking in 2005 and is now crossing the ASMFC's overfished threshold, making it obvious the plan's allowable fishing mortality levels are too high. With Addendum IV, the commission adopted a new target fishing mortality rate and is proposing management measures to stimulate rebuilding. [*Ed.* – The role of prey availability in the striper's troubles is also very much an issue at the commission. See "250 Million Menhaden," this page]

Give the people what they want.

Noting that the ASMFC has been hearing from concerned anglers all along the coast for some time, Chairman Louis Daniel of North Carolina urged the Striped Bass Management Board in August to give the public a choice that includes the strongest possible conservation measures. "This is our flagship stock," he said, referring to the commission's signature success story, bringing the striped bass fishery back from the brink of extinction in the 1980s. "As chairman, I want to make sure that whatever we do has the greatest possibility of restoring the stock to the level that our constituents are hoping (we) will."

The proposals in Draft Addendum IV are all aimed at bringing fishing mortality down to the new target level, which means reducing the total recreational (controlled through bag and size limits) and commercial (regulated by quotas) catch of striped bass by 25% or more, coast-wide and in Chesapeake Bay, the striper's chief spawning ground. That goal could be achieved under any of three different time frames. The most precautionary would make the cutbacks in fishing all at once during the 2015 fishing season. Another would make a 17% reduction next year, reaching the target in three years. Still another would phase in the cuts between now and 2017, with a stepwise 7% reduction in each of the next three years.

As noted during Board discussion of these alternatives, the immediate reductions will restore striped bass to the target abundance level sooner, rather than later (but even then not likely before the end of the decade), while the second and third approaches are meant to ease sacrifices from fishermen in the short-term. The sequential three-year phase-in, however, would likely result in confusion among fishermen with poor compliance if the regulations are changed every year. ■

Make Your Voice Heard for Striped Bass!

A copy of Draft Addendum IV and instructions for submitting comments or attending public hearings are available on the ASMFC website, asmfc.org.

UPDATE

250 Million Menhaden

….The estimated number of these vital forage fish left in the water in 2013 to feed Atlantic striped bass, bluefin tuna, osprey, whales and myriad other marine animals, because of a new east coast menhaden conservation program that took effect last year.

The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission reported at its spring meeting that 2013 landings of Atlantic menhaden were 25% below the total catch for 2012. "That means 56,602 tons of menhaden that otherwise would have been caught and landed in commercial fisheries were instead allowed to serve their essential role as prey in the ecosystem," said *Wild Oceans* president Ken Hinman, a member of the ASMFC's Menhaden Advisory Panel. He said the commission, including all its 15 member-states, deserves credit, first for adopting the new, conservative catch limits and just as importantly, for coming together to keep the fishery within its first-ever coast-wide quota.

With implementation of the catch limits, now in their second year, the commission is looking ahead to the results of a new stock assessment, due in early 2015, and next steps toward meeting its long-standing commitment to establish an ecologically-based target population of menhaden to balance fishing and predator needs long into the future. ■

Wild Oceans' vision for the west coast swordfish fishery

Earlier this year, the Pacific Fishery Management Council agreed to shift the west coast swordfish fishery away from indiscriminate mile-long drift nets and towards more environmentally and economically sustainable gear. It's time to chart a path to achieve this goal.

Over the past ten years, the drift net fishery targeting swordfish and thresher sharks discarded more than 60% of its catch, including marlins, sharks, tuna, and countless other fish along with marine mammals. Imagine instead a fishery that brings more prized swordfish to market, but with far less bycatch and discard mortality, fewer management costs and greater profit to the fleet. That's our vision for the future of the west coast swordfish fishery. And the way we get to this goal is by making more holistic choices about how the swordfish fishery should interact with the rest of the California Current ecosystem.

"A goal without a plan is just a wish."

— Antoine de Saint-Exupéry

Step 1: Choose more selective fishing gears that yield a greater percentage of target species.

The future belongs to safer, more selective, more sustainable fishing methods that are not only friendly to the environment, but friendlier to fishermen and fishing communities, too. Step one to achieving our vision is to invest in actively tended gears like buoy-gear and harpoon gear. Almost all of what they catch is swordfish. Unlike drift nets, blue marlin, turtles, marine mammals, bluefin tuna and other vulnerable species are rarely if ever caught.

Step 2: Choose gears that allow for the release and survival of non-marketable, non-target and protected species.

If step one is using more selective gear, step two is making sure that the gear or the way it is fished allows for the live release and survival of non-target species that can't be avoided.

Fishermen set drift nets to "soak" overnight. The longer the nets stay in the water, the greater the chance that bycatch will be hauled in dead. Many animals fall out of the net, dead, and are never brought onboard.

Conversely, deep-set buoy gear, for example, is an actively tended gear. Fish or other wildlife hooked by mistake can be released soon after, alive.

Step 3: Look at the net benefits to the nation.

Swordfish and all the fish and other wildlife off the west coast, if they belong to anyone, belong to the public. The public subsidizes destructive fishing gears by paying the high management costs – complex regulations, intensive monitoring (including observers) and enforcement – of mitigating the damage they do to non-target species.

It's time to consider the net benefits to the nation that come with more selective gears, such as buoy-gear and harpoons. Such "small-scale" fishing gears become more economically viable when we consider the enormous benefits of management costs avoided. In turn, the costs of managing indiscriminate fishing methods with a high rate of bycatch, discards and waste, should be weighed against the economic return to the fishery.

Step 4: Set enforceable catch caps.

Step 4 is to set scientifically-based hard caps on bycatch of vulnerable species. Just this year, NOAA Fisheries declared that the Pacific striped marlin is overfished and the Pacific hammerhead shark is endangered. A recent stock assessment for bluefin tuna shows the stock hovering at 4% of historic levels. By setting precautionary caps for these and other fish species, fisheries can be closed before these predator populations are further harmed.

Caps provide a strong incentive for fishermen to choose gear that interacts less frequently with endangered marine mammals and turtles as well as vulnerable species such as marlins, sharks and tuna, allowing them to fish without the threat of an early closure.

Step 5: Start NOW!

For more than 15 years now, we've watched the Council struggle to minimize the irresolvable bycatch problems that come with drift nets while failing to seriously promote alternatives. This history of good intentions but little progress underscores how vitally important it is to start now, by setting a goal and a timeline, developing a plan, and committing to making the transition to safe and sustainable fishing for the future. ■

- Theresa Labriola,
West Coast Fisheries Project Director

Staff travel log

Our recent travels to fight for the future of fishing...

Theresa Labriola, Wild Oceans West Coast Fisheries Project Director, attended the Pacific Fishery Management Council's Highly Migratory Species (HMS) Management Team meeting in **Carlsbad, California** on May 7, 8 and 9. The HMS Team began developing a protocol for research into alternative gears to replace the drift net fishery for swordfish.

President Ken Hinman attended the ASMFC Menhaden Management Board meeting May 15th in **Alexandria, Virginia** and presented a briefing paper on Ecological Reference Points for Forage Species. In his testimony, Ken recommended that the Board and its technical advisors review the state-of-the-science guidance described in the paper, while the 2014 benchmark stock assessment is completed, and initiate an addendum for the adoption of new population targets and fishing limits that better respect menhaden's ecological role beginning in 2015.

Executive Director Pam Lyons Gromen was in **Freehold, New Jersey** June 10-12 attending the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council meeting where the Council significantly reduced the allowable bycatch of imperiled blueback herring, alewives and shad for the 2015 Atlantic mackerel fishing year to help these important prey species recover.

On June 11th, Ken was invited to **Washington, D.C.** by staff members of the Senate Subcommittee on Oceans, Atmosphere, Fisheries and Coast Guard to discuss reauthorization of the Magnuson-Stevens Fisheries Conservation and Management Act. The discussion centered on recommendations made in a May 21 Wild Oceans letter to the Subcommittee suggesting priorities for future directions in federal management of marine fisheries. (see related story, page 10)

From June 19-23, Theresa attended the Pacific Fishery Management Council meeting in **Garden Grove, California** and the concurrent HMS Team meeting on June 19-21. She testified before the Pacific Council to urge them to develop performance criteria to guide research and approval of new gears in the Pacific swordfish fishery. She also urged the Pacific Council to take a leading role in protecting the Pacific bluefin tuna stock which is at just 4% of historic levels.

On July 16th, Pam traveled to **New York, New York** to meet with like-minded conservation groups to discuss plans to protect deep sea corals in the mid-Atlantic canyons. (see story, page 1)

The Mid-Atlantic Council convened in **Washington, D.C.** on August 11th where they voted unanimously to seek public comment on a suite of alternatives to minimize the impacts of fishing on fragile deep water corals. Pam attended the meeting, voicing Wild Oceans' support for moving forward.

Theresa attended the Pacific Council's HMS Team meeting in **La Jolla, California** on August 12 and 13. The team discussed reducing the recreational catch of bluefin tuna and methods for setting bycatch caps in the commercial swordfish fishery to limit the catch of marine mammals, sea turtles, and vulnerable fish such as marlin, shark and tuna. ■

Corallimorphs collected by ROV Jason photographed under a blacklight to demonstrate florescence. *Image courtesy of Art Howard, Deepwater Canyons 2013 - Pathways to the Abyss, NOAA-OER/BOEM/USGS.*

Come senators, congressmen please heed the call

As our lawmakers undertake another review of the Magnuson-Stevens Act and consider making changes to address the current state of the seas (see "A Play in Two Acts" on page 3), *Wild Oceans* is asking Members of Congress to embrace the following among their priorities:

- Identify and safeguard the core provisions of the existing statute, particularly those designed to prevent overfishing and rebuild overfished stocks, and support these provisions while opposing efforts to weaken them.
- Support changes in the law to advance ecosystem-based fishery management at the regional councils, including a requirement that councils adopt regional Fishery Ecosystem Plans while implementing strict new conservation standards for forage species.
- Support community-based fishing and fishing communities, by making it a national goal to maintain access to fishery resources for independent, small-boat commercial fishermen, recreational anglers, and subsistence and indigenous fishers.

We are also urging changes in the "bycatch" section to emphasize avoiding non-target species and the use of selective, environmentally safe and cost-effective fishing gear and techniques; addition of a new National Standard to protect fish habitat; a provision for flexibility in crafting management measures for recreational fisheries while ensuring they satisfy the Act's overarching objectives; and improving transparency by requiring webcasts of council meetings for those stakeholders unable to attend. ■

Your mailing label includes your membership renewal date.

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