

The Horizon

FOR THE FUTURE OF FISHING

Back to the Future

By Rob Kramer

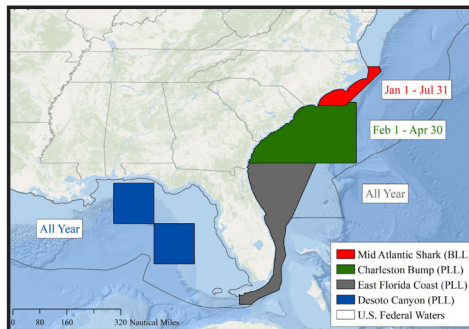
Remaining Vigilant in the Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic



For over a year now, we have been following and commenting on proposed Amendment 15 changes to the 2006 Consolidated Highly Migratory Species Fishery Management Plan. As previously reported in the Horizon, this amendment would modify the boundaries and/or temporal extents of four spatial management areas in the South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico that currently restrict or prohibit commercial longline fishing (the Mid-Atlantic Shark, Charleston Bump, East Florida Coast, and DeSoto Canyon closed areas). NOAA Fisheries (NMFS) states that “these modifications will more efficiently protect bycatch species and would allow for much needed data collection to support analyses on the areas’ effectiveness”. Translation, by allowing limited longlining with additional monitoring requirements the agency intends to evaluate the effectiveness of conservation measures in these areas compared to outside the areas, while providing access to the longline fishery.

When I initially saw this proposed amendment, my gut reaction was that this is a bad idea and allowing indiscriminate gear like longlines back into these areas under any conditions was in no way going to benefit the species that the closures were designed to protect in the first place. And inevitably, that may turn out to be the case. However, a lot has changed in the over two decades since the closures were implemented. Waters have warmed, stocks have moved, new fishery management tools have been developed, and North

Atlantic swordfish stocks are in much better shape. If indeed through “analysis” of these areas we can “more efficiently protect bycatch species”, determining if they are in the right place during the right times is both logical and laudable. As with anything, however, the devil is in the detail.



This amendment is of particular importance to Wild Oceans as we were instrumental in the multi-year fight to obtain the original time-area closures. The primary emphasis back then was on protecting juvenile swordfish. But as we noted at the time, closing known swordfish nursery grounds and surrounding areas would provide additional much needed relief for not just swordfish but also billfish, oceanic sharks, sea turtles and other bycatch species.

So, exactly what are the final details of this complex amendment to the plan and what do we do now? Without going too deep into the 704-page Final Environmen-

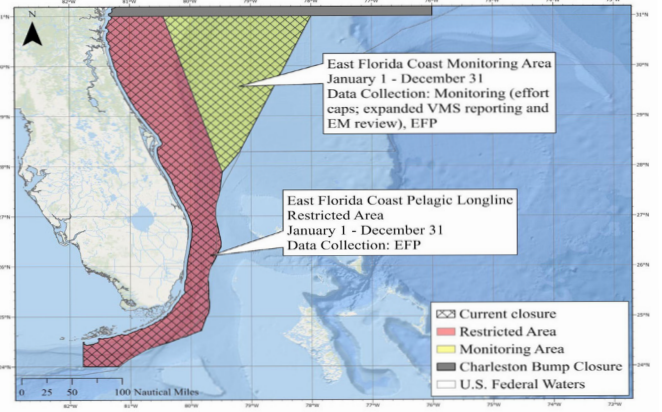
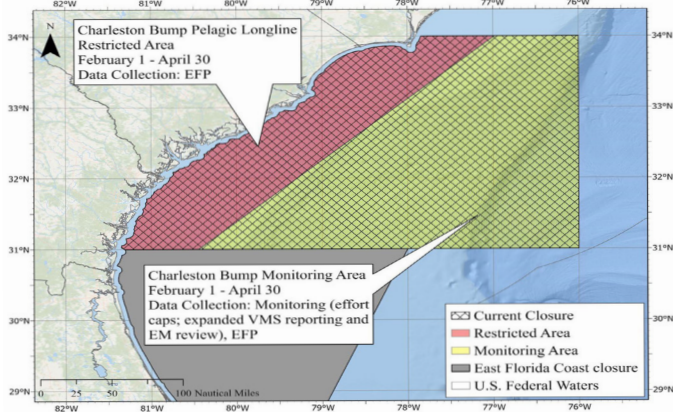
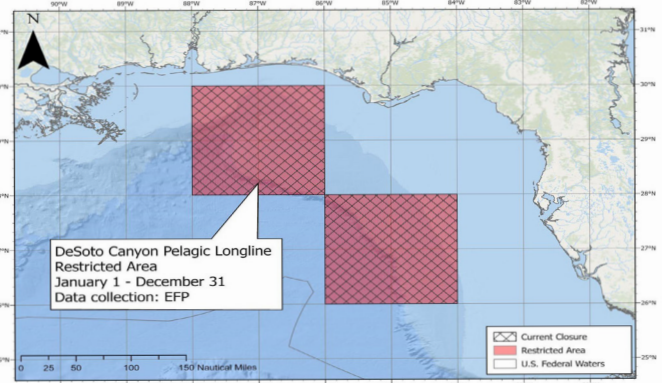
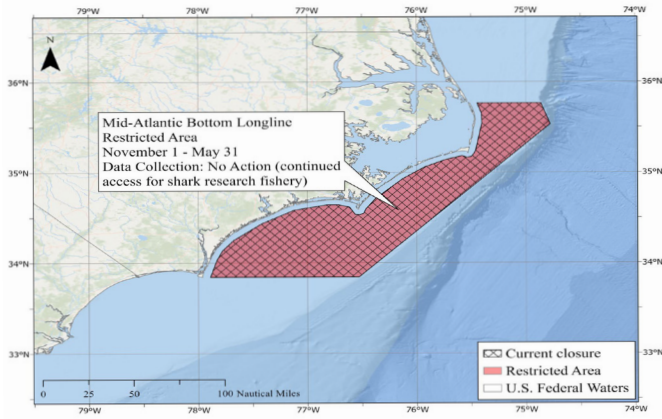
tal Impact Statement (EIS) on the Amendment that NMFS released in May, I will attempt to summarize and answer these questions.

The amendment had two main components. The first is modification, data collection, and assessment of the four “commercial longline spatial management areas”, formally referred to as the “closed areas”. The second component is transferring the administration and funding of the highly migratory species pelagic longline Electronic Monitoring (EM) program to the industry (currently paid for by the agency). The impetus for this derives from NOAA’s cost allocation policy, formalized in 2019, which stipulates that “transition plans should be developed to transition those costs to industry over time (not to exceed 3 years).”

Beginning with the second component, after significant pushback from the

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longline industry during the comment period, the agency has decided to table this part of the amendment for consideration in future rulemaking. However, some components of the EM cost allocation preferred alternatives in the EIS would apply in the new monitoring areas.

The second, more complex component, basically takes the existing closed areas, re-designates them as “monitoring areas” (yellow) and “restricted areas” (red), and changes the allowable activities within their boundaries. To determine which areas would be monitoring areas and which would be restricted areas, NMFS applied a complex HMS Predictive Spatial Modeling tool to predict areas of highest likely bycatch of unintended species. Known as PRISM, this tool combines observer data and environmental data to predict where and when fishery interactions with bycatch species may occur.

Once overlain on the closed areas the agency was then able to project where they felt bycatch interactions were most likely to occur, which in turn would dictate whether an area would be a new “monitoring” area or a “restricted” area. Those longline vessels choosing to fish within “monitoring areas” would be subject to additional Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) requirements and effort caps (number of trips allowed during the open period). They would also be required to have real-time species reporting via VMS for bycatch species interaction (billfish, shortfin mako, loggerhead, leatherback,

etc.) and enhanced EM video review (50% of sets at owners’ expense). These areas could be closed and/or not reopened if NMFS determines that “too many bycatch interactions are occurring”.

Vessels desiring to fish in the “restricted” areas would only be able to do so under a cooperative research agreement with NMFS via an Exempted Fishing Permit (EFP). Fishing in the “monitoring areas” could also be conducted under an EFP.

Vessels seeking to fish in the “restricted” areas via an EFP would also have to meet additional requirements such as effort caps, specific bycatch caps, 100% observer or EM coverage, and avoiding areas of high bycatch or gear conflict possibilities (e.g. no fishing within 45 nm of shore). The entire effort would be evaluated after three years of data are collected.

The final rule is expected in July 2024 with an effective date of January 2025. In many ways, the work is just now getting underway. From the beginning we pushed hard for specific bycatch caps everywhere (not just in the EFPs within the designated restricted areas) which would trigger a shutdown of the “monitoring” (i.e. longlining) in these areas. Unfortunately, NMFS chose to address bycatch with effort controls instead of hard caps in the new monitoring areas by limiting the fishery to a whopping 380 sets in the Charleston Bump monitoring area (Feb-April) and to 250 sets annually in the East Florida Coast area. They also did not specify how much bycatch is acceptable in these areas or

what would trigger a shut down. This all leads to far too much uncertainty, uncertainty that can only be addressed through transparency and public input, not just through the EFP review process, but throughout the implementation of this entire evaluation in all areas.

It is imperative that interim results of this monitoring be shared publicly given the high degree of public interest in this action and its likely implications. With regards to the EFPs, and as we have fought for throughout the decades, they must include specific performance standards with proper experimental design to robustly evaluate the impacts of the closures, including both spatial and temporal extent. They must not simply be a tool to allow the same old multi-mile, multi-hook longlines to fish for swordfish and tunas, but rather tools to actually assess the efficacy of the closures as well as a way to move towards a more sustainable longline fishery, with minimal bycatch of all overfished species.

For over 50 years now Wild Oceans has been a leader in reducing commercial bycatch of non-target fish and other wildlife by promoting changes to more selective, sustainable fishing gears and best fishing practices. When we first advocated for specific time-area closures, in our 1998 report [Ocean Roulette](#), we suggested conducting bona fide bycatch avoidance research, inside and outside closed areas. This new amendment can be and should be all about that. (To see our specific comments on this amendment visit: <https://wild-oceans.org/comment-letters>)

The Final Frontier

By Rob Kramer

In the 1994 Christmas comedy film *The Santa Clause*, young Charlie Calvin tells his father that “just because you can’t see something, doesn’t mean it doesn’t exist”. Well according to a recently published [study](#) in the British scientific journal *Nature*, this apparently applies as much to industrial fishing vessels as it does to Old Saint Nick. In this study, satellite imagery is combined with vessel GPS data and artificial intelligence (AI) deep-learning models to construct maps of industrial vessel activities on the open ocean. What the scientists conducting this study found was quite staggering. It seems that between 72–76% of the entire world’s industrial fishing vessels are not being publicly tracked. Most of the fishing from these vessels is taking place around South Asia, Southeast Asia and Africa. The co-lead author of the study, Research and Innovation Director David Kroodsma with Global Fishing Watch, states “A new industrial revolution has been emerging in our seas undetected – until now. On land, we have detailed maps of almost every road and building on the planet. In contrast, growth in our ocean has been largely hidden from public view.”

There were two things that struck me immediately about this new study. The first being that if we are only able to track a quarter of all industrial fishing vessels

operating in the world, how confident can we be in the accuracy of the catches that are being reported? It also reminded me of just how little we still understand about what is going on both above and below the ocean’s surface, and how critical it is that we invest more in remedying this. Each year we spend tens of billions of dollars on things like space exploration, while shortchanging our oceans. I’m a big fan of space exploration and am in no way suggesting that our investment in this important scientific discipline is not needed. It is just that comparatively speaking, so little goes into understanding our oceans which cover 71% of the earth’s surface. The same oceans that we rely on for our survival as a human race, day in and day out. In 2022 alone, global government spending on space programs hit a record of approximately \$103 billion. The US led in this effort with nearly \$62 billion spent on its space programs in the same year. By contrast, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration’s total budget in 2022 was \$6.35 billion, with only a portion of that specifically dedicated to ocean research and monitoring.

This paucity of scientific funding is even more pronounced when you start looking at marine fish, particularly highly migratory species such as billfish. Over the past several months I have been working

with representatives within NOAA Fisheries to seek financial support for the next International Billfish Symposium that we will be cohosting with the International Game Fish Association this October. It is sobering to hear how little funds are available to support research, let alone billfish research. Subsequently, it is all the more important that we the public press our political leaders to do more for research through the government system as well as support new science and collaboration like the Billfish Symposium through private efforts. The research discussed and published from this conference will enhance our knowledge of billfish, which will facilitate better management and conservation of these important apex predators. It will aid both scientists and managers in adapting to recent climate related impacts on these species, as well increasing our understanding and ability to protect sustainable and healthy open ocean ecosystems in which billfish are a critical part. And while we may never have the level of public or private commitment which is being given to space (think Musk’s SpaceX and Bezos’ Blue Origin), we still have the ability to contribute to unlocking the many mysteries of our oceans that remain. For contrary to Captain Kirk’s iconic line in the television series *Star Trek*, space is *not* the *Final Frontier*.

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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Building Boom

By Theresa Labriola

Pacific Program Director

Congress Funds Regional Ecosystem Based Fisheries Management Projects

The use of ecosystem based fisheries management (EBFM) is widely accepted as the strongest framework for achieving sustainability in fisheries, both in terms of ecological and human well-being. More than a decade ago, the regional fishery management councils began developing Fishery Ecosystem Plans (FEPs) to help incorporate ecosystem science into management decisions. The councils made steady progress pursuant to the FEPs by protecting unmanaged forage fish and developing ecosystem risk tables. Now, we are on the verge of an EBFM building boom, with NOAA Fisheries investing nearly \$200 million in the scientific building blocks and the Council's receiving \$20 million more to realize the architectural plans.

On the science side, the 2022 Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) provided NOAA Fisheries with the opportunity to focus time and energy on moving EBFM from concept to commonplace. In response, NOAA Fisheries decided to strengthen the agency's ecosystem science and survey expertise. The investment will:

- help scientists build a dynamic system that will incorporate climate and ecosystem environmental data,
- provide real-time advice and long-range projections, and
- inform and support management decisions for affected communities

On the management side, the regional councils will receive funds to:

- implement fishery management measures necessary to advance climate ready fisheries by improving climate resiliency and responsiveness to climate impacts, and
- develop and advance climate-related fisheries management planning and implementation efforts in support of underserved communities.

The regional fishery management councils submitted a suite of projects to NOAA Fisheries for funding. Many of the proposals echo Wild Oceans priorities over the past decades.

Specifically, one of the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council proposals includes development of a forecast to reduce bycatch of river herring in the mid-water trawl fishery. This project will produce maps of areas of high river herring bycatch risk weekly during the midwater trawl fishery based on sea-surface temperatures, and work with industry to achieve voluntary avoidance of these areas. Linking river herring habitat to ecosystem indicators can provide managers with ways to protect river herring hotspots in a dynamic ocean. While this information is vital towards our collaborative work to restore river herring populations by reducing their at-sea catch, the voluntary nature could render it ineffective.

Part of the Pacific Council proposal also focused on mitigating bycatch. One of their projects acknowledges that avoiding bycatch will likely become more challenging as climate change results in more extensive shifts in distribution and occurrence of marine species. As a result, more traditional management interventions such as static time area closures may become less effective. Therefore, they are seeking to develop climate-ready fishing methods that mitigate bycatch of non-target, associated species in a changing ecosystem.

Wild Oceans has been working with the Council for many years to build a framework to explore alternative, climate resilient methods for targeting highly migratory species along the U.S. West Coast. In June, we participated in a workshop to brainstorm how to use exempted fishing permits to build sustainable fisheries and how to incorporate new technologies such as dynamic ocean management into bycatch mitigation. The climate science work funded at the national level will prove crucial towards meeting this goal.

NOAA Fisheries has an unprecedented opportunity to mainstream ecosystem information to build a better fishery management framework that can conserve ocean resources and coastal communities into the future. Wild Oceans will continue to provide the critical thinking and stakeholder engagement to ensure NOAA Fisheries seizes this opportunity.



Source: Tate Yoder/Maine Center for Coastal Fisheries

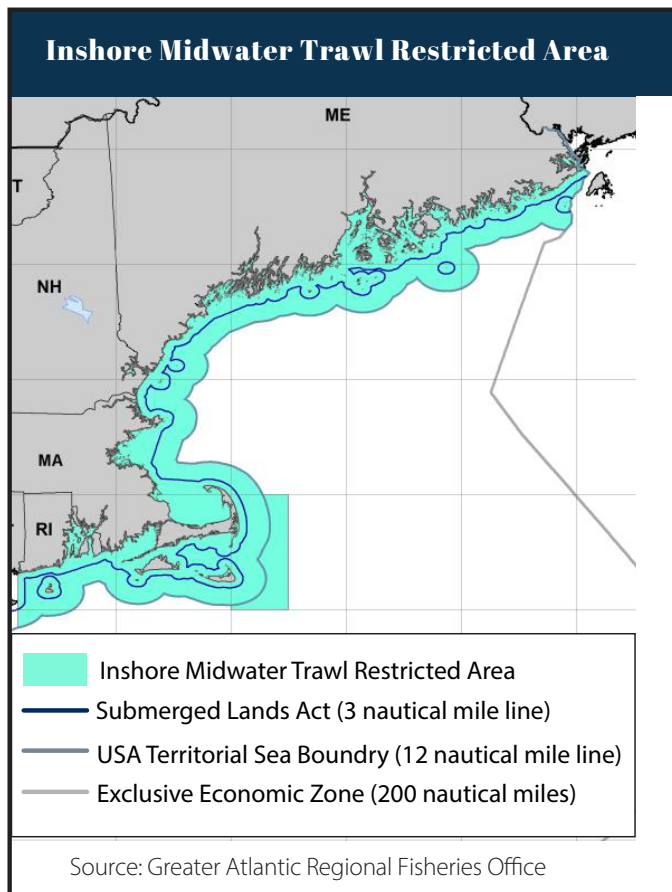
Atlantic Herring Amendment 10 Campaign Update

Addressing Midwater Trawling to Protect the Northeast's Forage Base



Photo: Mike Laptew

Wild Oceans consultant Roger Fleming represented us at several meetings of the New England Fishery Management Council and its Atlantic Herring Committee to advocate for continued development of new spatial and temporal protections for Atlantic herring, river herring, and shad through Amendment 10 to the Atlantic Herring Fishery Management Plan.



- On January 30th, Roger attended the New England Fishery Management Council meeting in Portsmouth New Hampshire where he advocated for revisions to the Amendment 10 public scoping document and hearing schedule to help ensure there were significant opportunities for stakeholders to participate and advocate for needed reforms to the Atlantic herring fishery.

- On March 4th, Roger traveled to Portsmouth, New Hampshire and delivered comments on behalf of Wild Oceans at a public scoping hearing for Amendment 10. Key points he advocated for included: creating a new “buffer zone” that would restrict midwater trawling for Atlantic herring in near shore New England waters to protect this fragile ecosystem and help rebuild overfished Atlantic herring, reducing river herring and shad bycatch, and reducing conflicts between the directed herring fleet with other fishermen. Wild Oceans is also advocating to close Atlantic herring spawning grounds to trawling and to establish protections for river herring and shad incidentally caught by the small mesh bottom trawl fleet in Southern New England where several “bycatch hotspots” have been identified.

- On April 17th, Roger attended the New England Council meeting in Mystic Connecticut where he helped organize participation by over 100 recreational and commercial fishermen, water shed groups, native communities, and many others. In total, Wild Oceans and its partners helped organize the participation of over 900 stakeholders in the public hearing process. Nearly 80 in-person comments were made and over 800 written comments were submitted, including dozens of individual comments on Amendment 10. Wild Oceans’ detailed scoping letter written jointly with the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership can be found here <https://wildoceans.org/comment-letters>

Turning the Tide

News | Activities

LARGE MARINE FISH CONSERVATION

■ In February, Theresa Labriola, our Pacific Program Director, attended a semi-annual meeting of the NGO Tuna Forum in Miami, FL. This coalition of non-profit organizations that work on global tuna conservation discussed priorities for collaborative work in 2024 including the adoption and implementation of robust management procedures for tunas and other targeted stocks, including swordfish and blue sharks, and requiring 100% observer coverage in industrial tuna fisheries.

■ Along with colleagues from the International Game Fish Association, Wild Oceans President Rob Kramer traveled back to San Diego California in April to further work on logistics for the 7th International Billfish Symposium which will be held at Hubbs-SeaWorld Research Institute (HSWRI) on October 8-10, 2024. There the group met with President & CEO Don Kent and Chief Science Officer Danielle Haulsee of HSWRI to go over specifics pertaining to site set up and begin discussions of program content. They also met with personnel from SeaWorld San Diego, who will be providing the catering for on-site meals and coffee breaks during the event. For more information on the 7th International Billfish Symposium, visit <https://bfsymposium.org/>



(Hubbs-SeaWorld Research Institute)

■ Also in May, Rob attended the spring meeting of the Atlantic Highly Migratory Species (HMS) Advisory Panel. Several issues were presented and discussed at the meeting including results of the 2023 ICCAT Annual Meeting and the Atlantic Highly Migratory Species Essential Fish Habitat 5-Year Review. However, as was the case in the past few meetings of the panel, a large portion of the meeting focused on discussion of proposed Amendment 15 to the Atlantic HMS Fishery Management Plan and the newly released Final Environmental Impact Statement. While this new amendment is attempting to better understand and reduce bycatch in the South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico longline fleet through modifications to the existing longline closed areas, many concerns exist regarding its implementation. Wild Oceans will continue to monitor this process to ensure the original intent is met, the closed areas are not compromised, and the use of sustainable fishing gear is encouraged. (see Cover story, page 1)

■ On April 8, Theresa attended a striped marlin stakeholder meeting hosted by NOAA Fisheries to gather U.S. stakeholder input on potential catch scenarios for the Western and Central Pacific striped marlin rebuilding analysis. Theresa advised the U.S. to support an oceanwide catch limit that incorporates a substantial, measurable reduction of fishing mortality at the onset, rather than relying on incremental small reductions over time. Her recommendation to evaluate a constant catch scenario that begins in 2025 rather than a phased scenario was supported by

numerous other stakeholders. The International Scientific Committee for Tuna and Tuna-like Species in the North Pacific Ocean will review the rebuilding analysis at their June meeting.

SUSTAINABLE FISHING PRACTICES

■ In January, the Pacific Fishery Management Council's Highly Migratory Species (HMS) Management Team met to prepare a final draft of the goals for the HMS Roadmap. Theresa attended their meeting and provided comments to ensure the HMS Roadmap goals include the stewardship of our living marine resources and support of recreational opportunities. In March, she provided additional comments to the Council which adopted the following goals:

- Support innovation and development of multi-species HMS fishing methods for West Coast based vessels to increase the domestic supply of and meet the demand for swordfish and other marketable species.
- Support and test fishing practices that have the potential to be economically viable while also minimizing unmarketable, prohibited, and protected species bycatch.
- Support the economic viability of West Coast HMS commercial fisheries for swordfish and other associated marketable species through a diverse range of HMS fishing methods.
- Promote Climate-Ready Fisheries and fisheries resilience by supporting developing flexibility in management and other tools to account for changes in HMS distributions, ecosystems structure and function, and the communities dependent on HMS fisheries.
- Engage traditional fishery participants to preserve knowledge and help bolster resilience in future fisheries.
- Support recreational HMS fishing opportunities.

■ The Permanent Advisory Committee which advises the U.S. Commissioners to the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) met via webinar on May 13th. Theresa, as a member of the committee, shared Wild Oceans priorities for WCPFC in 2024, including adoption of limit reference points and a rebuilding plan for Western and Central Pacific striped marlin, a harvest control rule for Pacific bluefin tuna, limit reference points for blue shark, increased observer coverage, and an ocean-wide catch limit for swordfish.

ECOSYSTEMS

■ Still contributing to the good work she has done for years as a member of the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council's Ecosystem and Ocean Planning (EOP) Advisory Panel, Wild Oceans Executive Director Pam Lyons Gromen attended the joint meeting of the Council's Ecosystem and Ocean Planning Committee and Advisory Panel in April. At the meeting, the group reviewed the prior years' unmanaged landings reports and associated data. The Council has requested annual updates on commercial landings of unmanaged species as a follow-on action to the Unmanaged Forage Omnibus Amendment. The goal is to monitor for signs of developing unmanaged commercial fisheries in the Mid-Atlantic. New or growing fisheries could develop in response to changing species distributions, changing markets, changes in other fisheries, or for other reasons. The information contained in these annual reports can serve as a high-level summary to help determine if further evaluation is needed and if consideration of a management response may be warranted. In addition to reviewing the landings reports, the Committee and AP members discussed defining landings thresholds or other metrics to trigger

further evaluation for a potential management response as well as other potential improvements to the unmanaged landings reports.

■ In March, Theresa was appointed co-chair of the Pacific Fishery Management Council Ecosystem Advisory Subpanel (EAS). She attended their meeting in Fresno, CA on March 7-8 where the EAS received a briefing on the Annual California Current Ecosystem Status Report provided by NOAA Fisheries Integrated Ecosystem Assessment program. A highlight was the presentation of improved seabird diet data and attempts to connect this with marine environmental conditions and how seabird diets may illuminate productivity and availability of forage within specific regions. The EAS supported the continued work to develop and use risk tables to set harvest specifications.

■ The Florida Forage Fish Coalition hosted the 8th Annual Forage Fish Data Workshop at the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's Fish and Wildlife Research Institute (FWRI) in St. Petersburg, Florida on May 22nd. As a coalition member, Wild Oceans President Rob Kramer attended the workshop, which included presentations by FWRI scientists, as well as current Forage Fish Research Program fellows Hallie Repeta and Christopher Crowder, who updated participants on the progress of their research. Hallie, who is studying at the University of South Florida is working on the Gulf of Mexico Atlantis model which is a complex 3-dimensional "end-to-end" ecosystem model capable of exploring predator-prey dynamics between forage fish and predators. Christopher, who is a student at the University of Central Florida, is working on the habitat mosaic approach to better understand fish community dynamics in Tampa Bay. At the workshop, coalition members also discussed the fellowship program's goals and expectations as well as proposal development for the 2024-2025 fellowships. March and April where we will provide comment.

■ In May, Rob and new Atlantic Coast Programs Coordinator Zane Ruzicka remotely attended the Atlantic Coast River Herring Collaborative Forum. The Forum is an information exchange venue to bring together river herring practitioners, managers, researchers, and community groups from across the species range, and is co-chaired by NOAA Fisheries and the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries (ASMFC) staff. While a new river herring stock assessment was expected, it was not ready and will be presented at the next forum meeting in November. The Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council representative reported that they were continuing to work on a portal project for community upload of river herring and shad run information, and that the Council has applied for Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) funding for a herring environmental risk modeling project which will be a tool to address bycatch issues. Lastly, the New England Fishery Management Council representative stated that they are currently reviewing public comments from the scoping phase of Amendment 10 and will present a summary of their findings at their June 24th-27th council meeting. Prior to the meeting, Pam contacted forum organizers to ensure that all public comments were made available to participants, as opposed to a select few. Wild Oceans will continue to monitor herring stock assessments and initiatives as they develop.

■ On April 9th, Wild Oceans consultant Roger Fleming attended the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council Meeting webinar for presentations by NOAA Fisheries on its 2024 State of the Ecosystem Report and the Mid-Atlantic Fisheries Management Council's update on its Ecosystem Approaches to Fisheries Management Risk Assessment. Council staff is currently incorporating data and analysis from the 2024 State of the Ecosystem Report into the Risk Assessment and anticipates completing the Risk Assessment for use in management by the end of 2024.

■ On May 6th and 7th, Roger traveled to Annapolis Maryland to participate in an Atlantic Menhaden strategy meeting at the Chesapeake Bay Foundation. Leaders from recreational fishing and conservation groups met to discuss the current poor status of the East Coast's forage base overall, and to begin planning for future efforts to conserve Atlantic menhaden in Chesapeake Bay and along the East Coast. These conversations were initiated given that upcoming stock assessments are likely to show a distressed and shifting menhaden stock distribution and continued threat from the menhaden reduction fishery.

■ From May 21st-May 23rd, the Council Coordination Committee (CCC) met in San Juan, Puerto Rico. This Committee consists of the chairs, vice chairs, and executive directors from each of the eight regional fishery management councils and meets twice each year to discuss issues relevant to all councils. Zane attended meetings via webinar on May 22nd to continue Wild Oceans' efforts to track Council funding priorities with funds made available through the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA). Zane has been tracking IRA proposals to document the status of ecosystem-based management techniques in each Council and identify where Councils are proposing to apply this funding for addressing climate change. NOAA has approved \$375,000 in Phase I funding to Councils but is still working with the Councils to refine Phase II funding proposals by September 2024. The presentation also provided a summary of some of the major initiatives Councils have proposed. Wild Oceans continues its work to identify areas where ecosystem-based management can be strengthened.



Wild Oceans Board members Tim Choate, Will Tomlinson and Bill Boyce

■ The entire Wild Oceans team and Board of Directors gathered in Miami, Florida on May 3rd for their Annual Board meeting. At the start of the meeting, the Board ratified the actions of the Executive Committee by welcoming its newest Board member Mr. Will Tomlinson (see back cover for Will's bio). During the meeting, the Board received updates on programmatic work as well as fundraising efforts from President Rob Kramer and Pacific Program Director Theresa Labriola. In the morning session, Wild Oceans consultant Roger Fleming with Blue Planet Strategies joined the meeting via Zoom to provide the Board an update on our efforts with the Atlantic Herring Campaign in New England (see Roger's cover story article in our Winter 2024 edition of the Horizon). In the afternoon, Rob gave an update on Wild Oceans Kona Project research efforts, including a new research contract with NOAA's Pacific Island Fisheries Science Center. Also in the afternoon, invited guest Dr. Martini Arostegui of the renowned Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution gave a presentation on a new potential collaborative research project between WHOI and Wild Oceans to map billfish bycatch hotspots in the northern Pacific. The Board held informal discussions at two wonderful dinners on the 2nd and 3rd hosted by Co-Chair Peter Truslow and former Chairman Tim Choate, respectively.

Wild Oceans Welcomes New Team Members

Will Tomlinson to the Board of Directors



We are excited to welcome Will Tomlinson and his life-long passion for fishing, ocean conservation, and business development to the Wild Oceans Board of Directors. Growing up in Cairns, Australia, Will spent most of his childhood on and under

the water of the Great Barrier Reef. This has led to a deep sense of responsibility to protect marine fisheries all over the world. Based in the Bahamas since 2012, Will has been the local representative for the International Game Fish Association working with fishermen and governmental bodies to improve and preserve the marine landscape for generations to come. Will has also volunteered countless hours over the years to multiple nonprofit organizations, helping others wherever and whenever he can. In his spare time Will fishes all over the planet, focusing on chasing billfish on light tackle.

Zane Ruzicka as the Atlantic Coast Programs Coordinator



As a military brat, Zane Ruzicka grew up along the entire Atlantic Coast, living as far south as Georgia and as far north as Rhode Island. Zane first fell in love with the ocean while living just 100 yards from the Chesapeake Bay where he would catch sand fiddler crabs with his sisters. Zane's first exposure to wildlife conservation work was as a BSA Camp Counselor helping educate youth about local wildlife and conservation.

Zane graduated from Brown University in 2023 with a degree in International and Public Affairs and now attends the University of Virginia to earn a Masters of Public Policy. In the past, Zane has held policy positions at the Virginia Department of Military Affairs, U.S. House of Representatives, Corporate Accountability, and Virginia Sea Grant. Projects he has worked on in past roles have included investigating community sentiments to MPAs in the Pacific and identifying coastal community climate response best practices. He is now bringing his research, policy, and campaign skills to our Wild Oceans team and will be specifically plugged into our forge fish and Ecosystem Based Fisheries Management efforts during the summer. We are ecstatic to have Zane's expertise working for Wild Oceans!

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