



The Horizon

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- OCEAN VIEW: WILD OCEANS AND IGFA TO HOST 7TH INTERNATIONAL BILLFISH SYMPOSIUM 2
- PACIFIC COUNCIL DECISIONS TO INCLUDE CLIMATE SCIENCE 3
- MID-ATLANTIC COUNCIL REQUESTS EMERGENCY ACTION FOR ATLANTIC MACKEREL FISHERY 3
- NEW FELLOWSHIPS AWARDED FOLLOWING 7TH ANNUAL FLORIDA FORAGE FISH RESEARCH PROGRAM WORKSHOP 5
- TURNING THE TIDE: WILD OCEANS NEWS AND ACTIVITIES 6

EMERGING FORAGE FISHERIES CHALLENGE MID-ATLANTIC COUNCIL'S ECOSYSTEM GOALS

Policy Underway for Unmanaged Mid-Atlantic Forage Fisheries

by Anna Weinstein

Wild Oceans has for the last six years been engaged in ensuring strong implementation of the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council's (Council) Unmanaged Forage Omnibus Amendment (UFOA). We did not have to wait long for a challenge to this crucial safeguard for Atlantic coast forage species: in 2021, fisheries managers received a proposal for large-scale "experimental" fishing on Atlantic thread herring (*Opisthonema oglinum*), one of the species protected under the UFOA. (See "Meeting the Challenge of a Shifting Prey Base" in Issue 166 of the *Wild Oceans Horizon*.)

The UFOA, which came about with tremendous public support, "prohibits the development of new and expansion of existing directed commercial fisheries on unmanaged forage species in mid-Atlantic federal waters until the Council has had an adequate opportunity to assess the scientific information relating to any new or expanded directed fisheries and consider potential impacts to

existing fisheries, fishing communities, and the marine ecosystem." Sixteen taxa of forage species are conserved through a 1,700-pound combined possession limit. These forage fish are key parts of the preyscape for our cherished larger fish and wildlife – the food base that is undergoing rapid change with a changing ocean climate.

When creating the UFOA, the Mid-Atlantic Council made it clear that fisheries could eventually be permitted for UFOA species, provided these fisheries comply with the UFOA objective. Exempted Fishing Permits (EFPs) were chosen as the first step for the Council and the Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office (GARFO) of the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) to consider allowing new fisheries or the expansion of existing fisheries. However, the UFOA did not include specific criteria to evaluate EFP applications for consistency with the UFOA objective stated above, and with the Council's long-standing ecosystem policy, "to support the maintenance

Forage Species Identification Guide

This guide provides descriptions and codes for the forage species that vessels and dealers are required to report under the Mid-Atlantic Council's Unmanaged Forage Omnibus Amendment. Find out more about the amendment at: www.mafmc.org/forage.

All federally permitted vessels fishing in the Mid-Atlantic Forage Species Management Unit and dealers are required to report catch and landings of the forage species listed to the right. All species listed in this guide are subject to the 1,700-pound trip limit unless stated otherwise.



These species are subject to the combined 1,700-pound trip limit:

- Anchovies
- Argentines/Smelt Herring
- Greeneyes
- Halfbeaks
- Lanternfishes
- Round Herring
- Scaled Sardine
- Atlantic Thread Herring
- Spanish Sardine
- Pearlsides/Deepsea Hatchettfish
- Sand Lances
- Silversides
- Cusk-eels
- Atlantic Saury
- Unclassified Mollusks (Unmanaged Squids, Pteropods)
- Other Crustaceans/Shellfish (Copepods, Krill, Amphipods)

Following implementation of the Unmanaged Forage Omnibus Amendment in 2017, NOAA Fisheries and the Mid-Atlantic Council published an ID Guide for the region's forage fish, available on the Council's website.

of an adequate forage base in the Mid-Atlantic to ensure ecosystem productivity, structure and function and to support sustainable fishing communities."

Four years after UFOA adoption, an EFP application for a new high-volume purse seine fishery for Atlantic thread herring was submitted to fisheries managers by Lund's Fisheries.

(continued on page 4)

Wild Oceans and IGFA to Host 7th International Billfish Symposium

What science do managers need to better understand and manage billfish stocks? What have we learned from the hundreds of pop-up archival tags that have been deployed on billfish around the world in the last decade? How are a changing climate and warming waters impacting billfish movements and their preferred habitat? It is the answers to these questions and more that we hope to discover at the next International Billfish Symposium. The International Game Fish Association (IGFA) and *Wild Oceans* will be hosting the 7th International Billfish Symposium (IBS) in San Diego, California, tentatively scheduled for early October 2024.

Since its inception in 1972, the International Billfish Symposium is the only conference series of its kind that focuses on issues related specifically to billfish biology and management. Both *Wild Oceans* and IGFA have been involved with the previous International Billfish Symposia with us organizing the 2nd held in Kona, Hawaii in 1988 and IGFA organizing the 6th IBS that was held in Dania Beach, Florida in 2016. In addition to these three, others were held in Cairns, Australia (2001),

Avalon, California (2005) and Taipei, Taiwan (2013). While the first symposium held in 1972 was an effort to gather, publish and disseminate all of the then available information on billfish, the second in 1988 was much more ambitious and broader in scope. In addition to bringing together the latest in research, it looked at management challenges and needs as well. With regards to management, *Wild Oceans* Executive Director at the time Ken Hinman (who organized the conference) stated in an article published in the July 1988 edition of *Saltwater Sportsman* magazine, "...what do we need most to know in order to make the proper decisions, do we have that information, and if not, how do we get it?". These important questions still hold true today and will guide discussions at the next symposium.

The symposium is already off to a great start with the assemblage of a strong steering committee made up of leading billfish experts from four different continents. There have been many published papers on billfish in the seven years since the last symposium and many other research efforts underway. The theme

for the 7th IBS is, "Advancing Science and Management of Billfish in a Changing Ecosystem." The conference will highlight advances across all aspects of billfish science and management while examining evolving climate related impacts.

Some of the conference topics will include:

- **Management**
- **Assessment**
- **Movement and Habitat Utilization**
- **Biology**
- **Recreational and Commercial Fisheries**

This conference is not just for scientists and managers but will also be open to the public. In addition to daily sessions there will be numerous socials for networking with old friends and meeting new ones. Stay tuned to our website [WildOceans.org](https://www.wildoceans.org) for more information on conference dates, travel details, registration, and abstract submission deadlines

– Rob Kramer, President

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

Officers and Staff:

Stephanie Choate, Co-Chair
Peter Truslow, Co-Chair
Tim Ervin, Vice Chairman
Rob Kramer, President
Pam Lyons Gromen, Executive Director
Theresa Labriola, Pacific Program Director

Contact Us:
Wild Oceans
P.O. Box 272122
Tampa FL 33688
office: 727.677.8127
web: [wildoceans.org](https://www.wildoceans.org)

Board of Directors:

Mary Barley (Islamorada, FL)
Bill Boyce (Saugus, CA)
C. J. Bright, Jr. (Kailua-Kona, HI)
Tim Choate (Coral Gables, FL)
Stephanie Choate (Tulsa, OK)
Tim Ervin (Onekama, MI)
Ken Hinman (Lovettsville, VA)
Peter Truslow (St. Petersburg, FL)

Directors Emeritus

Stanley Arkin (New York, NY)
John Heyer (Sedona, AZ)

RISKY BUSINESS

by Theresa Labriola,
Pacific Program Director

Last year, the Pacific Fishery Management Council recognized that increasing climate variability and changing ocean conditions could adversely affect West Coast fisheries and communities and began Fishery Ecosystem Plan Initiative 4 to incorporate ecosystem information into council decision-making.

A primary objective is to develop clear pathways for connecting ecosystem science and management. This is a critical step for moving ecosystem-based fishery management from a scientific concept to Council commonplace. Given the Council has four fishery management plans and dozens of managed stocks with varying biological characteristics and degrees of data robustness, there is likely not a one-size-fits-all pathway to use ecosystem and climate information in management.

With this in mind, the Council began developing a risk classification table as one pathway to supplement stock assessments with climate and ecosystem information. A wide variety of ecological factors could

be considered for inclusion in a risk classification table, including oceanographic drivers, changes in physical habitat, predator and prey dynamics, direct and indirect non-fishing effects (e.g., offshore wind facility development, construction-related habitat modification), and range shifts. If an indicator such as change in ocean temperature showed a high risk to stock productivity, it would signal a need to act more conservatively.

Ideally, indicators should track environmental and ecosystem properties that are important because they have a plausible connection to the stock. Indicators could include direct forcing variables that science has linked to the stock's population dynamics or indirect indicators that inform a population process. An example of the former is the effect of temperature on recruitment, while an example of the latter is the fledgling success of a bird species that preys on the stock (e.g., brown pelican fledgling success linked to the anchovy population).

Indicators should track not only the eco-



Anchovies are the major food source for brown pelicans during nesting season. Anchovy populations are affected by water temperature and upwelling events and are vulnerable to climate change.

system impact on the stock, but the fishery impact on the ecosystem. This is especially important in forage fish management where depletion of forage such as anchovy can have coast-wide and localized impacts on dependent predators.

Maximizing yields while overlooking increasing ocean and climate variability is risky business. Risk tables can be a good tool for managing data-rich stocks where connections between ecosystem change and stocks are well understood. They can also provide an opportunity to identify knowledge gaps. Ultimately, we need the Council to continue developing risk tables while simultaneously exploring other methods that may better align with data-poor stocks in order to put conservation first in fisheries management. ■

Mid-Atlantic Council Requests Emergency Action for Atlantic Mackerel Fishery

On August 10th, the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council convened in Annapolis, Maryland to hear the results of a new Atlantic mackerel stock assessment and set fishery specifications for 2024-2025. The news was not good. The assessment found that the stock biomass is lower than projected in the previous 2021 assessment, at just 12% of the target biomass.

The stock was declared overfished in 2018, and a plan was set to rebuild the stock in 5 years. Then in 2021, an assessment update concluded that the Council's rebuilding plan was not on track because of persistent poor recruitment and chronic overfishing, so a new plan was developed to rebuild the stock in 10 years, the maximum time allowed under the Magnuson-Stevens Act.

Atlantic mackerel is prey for a wide array of predators – striped bass, bluefin tuna, swordfish, sharks, dolphins, pilot whales and gannets – to name a few. For a forage species that plays such an important role in the ecosystem, the depleted biomass has

far-reaching implications. How did it get this bad?

Past assessments were wildly inaccurate, painting a rosy picture of an enormous biomass that spurred millions of dollars in investments in high-volume midwater trawl vessels and shore-side infrastructure. And these assessment had a single-species focus – not accounting for predators dependent on the stock.

To illustrate the inaccuracies of past assessments that allowed for 35 years of overfishing, Council staff highlighted the fact that the 1997 mackerel catch limit was ten times higher than what they now believe the entire spawning stock biomass was that year.

To meet the rebuilding deadline and ensure overfishing does not reoccur, the Council voted to request emergency action to limit commercial fishery catch for 2023 by imposing a catch limit of 20,000 lbs., essentially restricting the fishery to incidental catch. Preliminary specifications for 2024-

2025 would carry forward this catch limit, and for all intents and purposes, prevent directed mackerel fishing for the next two years. Notably, Canada fishes on the same mackerel stock, and in 2021 recognized that it was in critical condition and subsequently closed its commercial fishery for 2022 and 2023.

The Atlantic mackerel fishery saga is a stark reminder that assessments are only as good as the information that is fed into them. Surveys not designed for small pelagic schooling fish contributed to the overly-optimistic estimates that decimated the Atlantic mackerel stock.

In June, NOAA released plans on how it will spend the \$3.3 billion in funding received under the Inflation Reduction Act. Of \$349 million allocated to Climate-ready Fisheries, \$145 million will be used for expanding and improving stock assessments. Forage species assessments that capture predator needs would be a solid investment in the future of fishing. ■

Alarmed by the scope of the request, the potential for bycatch of feeding predators and other small pelagic fish (depleted river herring and shad among them), and the damaging precedent approval of the EFP would set, *Wild Oceans* was joined by the American Sportfishing Association, Coastal Conservation Association, Conservation Law Foundation, Great Egg Harbor Watershed Association, Gotham Whale, International Game Fish Association, Menhaden Defenders, National Audubon Society, Rhode Island Saltwater Anglers Association, Riverkeeper, Inc., Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership and the Virginia Saltwater Sportfishing Association in submitting a letter to the Mid-Atlantic Council's Ecosystem and Ocean Planning (EOP) Committee ahead of a fall, 2021 meeting to review the EFP application. In the letter, we opposed advancing the EFP application for further consideration and recommended the Committee turn its attention to developing criteria for reviewing EFP applications for new or expanding forage fisheries.

We are encouraged the Council has responded in two positive ways. First, the Council declined to provide a letter of support for the EFP to GARFO, which is how the Council would assist with advancing the application. Second, the Council prioritized, through its 2023 Implementation Plan finalized in December 2022, developing criteria, in the form of a "policy or process" for evaluating EFP applications on UFOA species, to be completed by a target date of October 2023.

Work on the Unmanaged Forage policy/process kicked off in April with meetings of the Mid-Atlantic Council's Ecosystem and Ocean Planning Committee and Advisory Panel. *Wild Oceans* rallied our allies to submit comments applauding the Council's decision to develop the policy and/or process, as well as strongly

supporting Council staff's proposal to use the Pacific Fishery Management Council's (Pacific Council) procedure, known as Council Operating Procedure 24, (COP 24) as a template. COP 24 was developed in a close collaboration between NMFS and the Pacific Council, and provides a robust template for the Mid-Atlantic Council. Similar to COP 24, this policy/procedure will provide specifics on how to evaluate an EFP proposal's impacts on the target unmanaged forage species, dependent predators, essential fish habitats, and fishing communities. Notably, the Council cites the development of this policy/process as helping to fulfill its goals for building resilient climate-ready fisheries.

We were pleased that a majority of commenters on the Ecosystem and Ocean Planning Committee and Ecosystem and Ocean Planning Advisory Body – who reviewed our letter and provided feedback on the staff recommendations for the policy/process – were supportive of the staff proposal. This in turn helped to ensure the Council at its June 2023 meeting was on board with staff's intent to present a draft policy/procedure to the Council for potential adoption at its October meeting.

In regard to the Lund's EFP application, we have serious concerns about GARFO's process to date in evaluating the application. Ultimately, authority to approve or deny an EFP application resides with GARFO's Regional Administrator, who must determine that the purpose, design, and administration of the EFP are consistent with management objectives and the Magnuson-Stevens Act. While GARFO in early 2023 informed the applicant it would not approve the EFP application in its current form, the agency has not divulged how it will evaluate the EFP's compliance with the UFOA. Also concerning is the fact that the only publicly available communica-

tion from GARFO to Lund's shows that GARFO has focused its concerns solely on requirements to protect endangered species – not consistency with the UFOA's objectives. Despite our efforts to reach out to several agency representatives through scheduled phone meetings, we have not received satisfactory answers from GARFO about their review and approval process. This is a perfect example of where an EFP policy/process would ensure rigor and transparency when EFP applications are reviewed.

Leading up to the October Mid-Atlantic Council meeting, *Wild Oceans* will continue to work with our allies to get the critical policy/process in place. And, we will continue to watchdog the separate but related process at GARFO in regard to reviewing the Atlantic thread herring EFP application. ■



***Wild Oceans* welcomes Anna Weinstein to our team!** Anna is the principal for Brooks Island Consulting, a company that she founded to provide expertise in marine conservation, fisheries science and management. Anna is a seasoned conservation biologist with numerous policy and community science achievements, including work to support local fishing communities and sustainable, local wild seafood production. Prior to 2023, Anna was director of marine conservation at the National Audubon Society, and before that was an environmental scientist at the San Francisco Estuary Institute. She is working with *Wild Oceans* to further our efforts to foster healthy, balanced, and resilient marine ecosystems through the conservation of forage fish.

New Fellowships Awarded Following 7th Annual Florida Forage Fish Research Program Workshop

In May 2023, the Florida Forage Fish Coalition consisting of the IGFA, The Pew Charitable Trusts, *Wild Oceans*, The American Sportfishing Association, Florida Wildlife Federation, Fish Florida, Angler Action Foundation, and Tampa Bay Estuary Program hosted the 7th Forage Fish Data Workshop at the FWC Fish and Wildlife Research Institute (FWRI) in St. Petersburg, Florida. Presentations were given by Forage Fish Research Program (FFRP) fellows and FWRI priorities for the 2023-2024 fellowships were discussed. This year the fellowship program's data availability expanded with data made available from the Southwest Florida Water Management District (SWFWMD) and new coalition partners at the Tampa Bay Estuary Program (TBEP).

The 2022-2023 fellows, Dakota Lewis and Barry Walton, each presented their impressive results. Dakota, a PhD student at the University of Florida, constructed a combination of machine learning statistical models using FWRI Fishery Independent Monitoring (FIM) data on fish community, seagrass, and water quality. Dakota then used environmental and habitat data to train the models and group communities into sub-basins within Florida Bay to explore simulated future scenarios based on environmental changes created by Everglades restoration.

Barry, a PhD student at Florida State University, is the first FSU student to be awarded an FFRP fellowship, further increasing the program's network of Universities within Florida. Barry's project focused on Apalachicola Bay and couples FWRI's (FIM) catch data with ecological and food chain data to examine prey/forage availability and presence in the diet of redfish and spotted seatrout, as well as investigate predator-predator effects and competition using fatty acids and stable isotopes. Barry's research ex-

plored the hypothesis that redfish and spotted seatrout are partitioning habitat and food resources within Apalachicola Bay.

Potential fellowship candidates were in attendance and, following the workshop, the request for proposals was sent to all major Florida universities. Proposals were due at the end of June, and the coalition received several excellent project ideas. Two candidates were chosen and began their fellowships at the start of August.

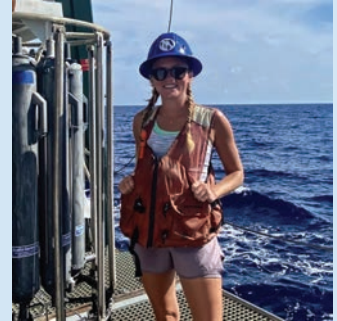
We would like to congratulate this year's 2023-2024 FFRP fellows, Christopher Crowder from the University of Central Florida and Hallie Repeta from the University of South Florida!



Christopher Crowder, University of Central Florida

Christopher's project will focus on the use of a habitat mosaic approach to better understand fish community dynamics in Tampa Bay. By using cutting-edge statistical analyses to assess multiple pressures impacting fish communities simultaneously, this project will quantify changes in forage and sportfish populations in relation to habitat characteristics, environmental factors, and sportfish prey availability. The results from this study will yield a more predictive understanding of forage and sportfish dynamics; provide insight to better inform wildlife managers, habitat management, stock assessment, and restoration efforts; and guide regulators on the status and future of ecologically and economically important fish species on Florida's west coast. Ultimately, this will help

local communities, the state of Florida, and the nation achieve the goal of healthier and more sustainable coastal ecosystems.



Hallie Repeta, University of South Florida

Hallie's project will focus on her lab's ongoing work with the Gulf of Mexico Atlantis model which is a very complex 3-dimensional "end-to-end" ecosystem model capable of exploring predator-prey dynamics between forage fish and predators. The model can simulate fishery and population dynamics as well as the impacts of environmental perturbations. Hallie's project proposes updating the GOM Atlantis model for forage species and their predators using surveys and monitoring data from the (FIM) program and data from the Southeast Area Monitoring & Assessment Program (SEAMAP). This research will improve our understanding of forage fish intrinsic trophic linkages, population dynamics, and the ecosystem services provided by forage fish in estuarine and offshore ecosystems. Further, it will provide predictors of forage fish and ecosystem resilience thresholds under varying natural and anthropogenic pressures, which supports more effective and efficient holistic management.

We look forward to working with our 2023-2024 FFRP fellows!

For more information on the Forage Fish Research Program, please visit floridaforagefish.org. ■

Turning the Tide

Wild Oceans News and Activities

Large Marine Fish Conservation: Strategies that Rebuild and Sustain Big Fish Populations

- *Wild Oceans* President Rob Kramer and Pacific Program Director Theresa Labriola attended several webinars and public presentations on the proposed rule to implement Amendment 15 to the 2006 Consolidated Highly Migratory Species Fishery Management Plan. As reported in the last edition of the *Wild Oceans Horizon*, this Amendment considers ways to modify, collect data, and assess areas that are currently closed to commercial pelagic longline or bottom longline fishing in the Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic. An additional component of the Amendment is a program to transfer all electronic monitoring sampling costs to the pelagic longline industry over a 3-year phased in period. We continue to be engaged in this issue and are currently formulating comments with our partners.
- Summer kicked off a host of international meetings to manage highly migratory species. Theresa is a member of the General Advisory Committee to the U.S. section of the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC) and attended its meeting on June 15 to voice support for a strong harvest control rule for Pacific albacore and Pacific bluefin tuna. She advocated for standards for circle hooks at least as conservative as U.S. standards in order to protect sea turtles, reduce catch of marlins and sharks and other non-target species, and increase post-release survivorship.
- The IATTC and Western Central Pacific Fisheries Commission

(WCPFC) held a Joint Working Group Meeting on Bluefin from July 3-5, and the WCPFC Northern Committee met from July 6-7. Theresa attended as part of the U.S. Delegation where managers agreed to maintain current conservation measures for Pacific bluefin, outlined the boundaries of a bluefin harvest strategy and adopted a North Pacific Albacore Harvest Control Rule which was then ratified by IATTC in August. That's good news for the health of bluefin tuna and for future fishing opportunities in the eastern Pacific.

- In July, the International Scientific Committee for Tuna and Tuna Like Species in the North Pacific Ocean met in Japan to review the latest stock assessments for stocks including North Pacific striped marlin. *Wild Oceans* reviewed the stock assessment, which shows the stock is overfished and subject to overfishing. Theresa met with members of the Billfish Working Group which agreed to include conservation measures such as the use of circle hooks and elimination of longline top hooks in the future rebuilding projections we expect to be completed over winter.

The Kona Project

- In August, Rob traveled to Honolulu, Hawaii to meet with the Director of the Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center (PIFSC) to gain support and funding for the 7th International Billfish Symposium. In addition to the Director, Rob also met with several other PIFSC scientists to discuss progress of the Kona Project and a potential new collaborative research effort to examine over 1,000 larval billfish samples that

were collected by the Center on research cruises conducted between 1997 and 2018. These valuable samples had been stored in the Center's wet specimen archives and never analyzed. It is hoped that the proposed effort could create a fundamental baseline of information on larval billfish presence and associated habitat characteristics off Hawaii as well as improve stock assessments related to spawning and recruitment. The proposed work could also be invaluable to future efforts to explore impacts of changing ocean conditions on preferred larval habitat, and to predict billfish spawning conditions.

Sustainable Fishing Practices: Selective Gear that is Compatible with Ecosystem Health

- In June, Theresa attended the Pacific Fishery Management Council meeting in Vancouver, Washington and ancillary meetings of the Highly Migratory Species Management Team (HMSMT) and Advisory Subpanel (HMSAS). She spoke in favor of continued research into swordfish gear, including the extended buoy gear research plan submitted by the Pflieger Institute of Environmental Research. Theresa also promoted the idea of a Council workshop focused on development of sustainable gear and exempted fishing permit (EFP) criteria. The Council seemed interested in focusing on EFP research and performance criteria and tasked the HMSMT/HMSAS with scoping the workshop further.

Ecosystems: Food Webs, Habitat and Biodiversity

- In May, *Wild Oceans* President Rob Kramer attended the Forage Fish

Research Program (FFRP) 7th Annual Data Workshop in St. Petersburg, Florida. In addition to listening to presentations by Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) scientists, the Florida Forage Fish Coalition, of which *Wild Oceans* is a member, heard from current coalition funded FFRP fellows who gave updates on the progress of their research. (See page 5 for a summary of the workshop.)

- At the June Pacific Fishery Management Council meeting, Theresa provided comments on management of coastal pelagic species, specifically about the need to incorporate the best available science on stock abundance (gathered by the acoustic trawl surveys) into management and prioritizing management of both the northern and southern sardine stock.
- *Wild Oceans* Executive Director Pam Lyons Gromen attended the June 27 New England Fishery Management Council meeting for the Atlantic Herring Committee report when both river herring and shad bycatch and the new near-shore buffer zone action were discussed. Two important motions were passed to support work on the new buffer zone: 1) a problem statement was articulated to provide clear purpose for the action; 2) the 2023 Council priorities list was modified to not limit the new action to the scope of the previous buffer zone that was vacated by the court as a result of an industry lawsuit. The new buffer zone action will take a broader look at all gear types, not just midwater trawls, as alternatives are analyzed for fair allocation of the herring resource and achieving optimum yield, the greatest benefit of the resource to the nation. The Council also passed a motion to add the development of shad/river herring time/area closure options and reconsideration of the basis for catch cap to a draft list of 2024 workload priorities. The priorities list will be finalized in December.
- Pam continued her work as part of the Mid-Atlantic Fishery

Management Council's Ecosystem and Ocean Planning (EOP) Advisory Panel to advance ecosystem-based approaches to fisheries management. The EOP Advisory Panel met with the EOP Committee in July and August to continue revisions to the Mid-Atlantic Council's risk assessment that is used to identify priority areas for addressing ecosystem interactions. The Council is scheduled to review a final draft of the risk assessment at its October meeting in New York. The Council also plans to review and approve a policy/process for reviewing exempted fishing permit (EFP) applications for unmanaged forage species that are conserved under the Unmanaged Forage Omnibus Amendment. (See cover story.)

- In July and August, Pam participated in a series of meetings discussing the recent Atlantic mackerel assessment that found the stock to be in worse shape than estimated by the 2021 assessment. At its August meeting, the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council initiated an Emergency Action request to close the directed mackerel fishery, and it approved preliminary catch specifications for 2024 and 2025 that would limit the fishery to incidental catch. (See *Mid-Atlantic Council Requests Emergency Action for Atlantic Mackerel Fishery* on page 3.)
- Pam traveled to Arlington, Virginia for the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) River Herring Stock Assessment Subcommittee (SAS) Workshop held August 21-24. The SAS reviewed river herring run count, survey and mortality trends and also tackled methods for determining a biologically-based incidental catch cap for ocean fisheries. Pam was able to provide comments, and she focused on the importance of a better method for calculating bycatch caps for the Atlantic herring and Atlantic mackerel fisheries, which are responsible for the loss of over 1 million river herring a year. The SAS anticipates presenting the final assessment at the ASMFC's spring meeting.
- On August 1, the Atlantic Striped

Bass Management Board (Board) voted to extend an emergency action, a 31-inch maximum size limit for recreational fisheries designed to reduce mortality of the strong 2015 year class. Estimated striped bass harvest nearly doubled from 2021 to 2022, putting the rebuilding plan in jeopardy and necessitating the emergency action. At the August meeting, the Board delayed action on a new addendum that would have replaced the emergency action. Instead of approving the addendum for public comment, they called for additional options to be analyzed. The revised addendum (Addendum 2 to Amendment 7 of the Atlantic Striped Bass Interstate Fishery Management Plan) will be presented to the Board at the ASMFC annual meeting in October. Hearings would commence through the late fall and winter, with final action in January if all stays on schedule.

Climate Change: Resilient Ecosystems and Fishing Communities

- On May 15, NOAA Fisheries announced that it was considering changes to the National Standard Guidelines to better address climate change impacts and equity and environmental justice. The National Standards are embedded in the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, and they dictate principles that must be followed in any fishery management plan to ensure responsible fisheries management. Specifically, NOAA Fisheries is considering changes to National Standard 4 (fair allocation), National Standard 8 (fishing communities) and National Standard 9 (bycatch). *Wild Oceans*, as a member of the Marine Fish Conservation Network (Network), assisted with developing comments to submit for the agency's September 12 deadline. Our comments were built from Network policies and goals and emphasized recommendations for resilient fishing communities and fishery resources. ■



Wild Oceans and IGFA are doing it again...

The 7th International Billfish Symposium October 2024 San Diego, California

Call for Sponsors! Sponsors play an important role in the success of the symposium by helping to cover meeting costs, stipends for guest speakers and other event expenses. If you wish to support or know of someone who might be able to provide support, please contact us at info@wildoceans.org for sponsorship opportunities. See *Wild Oceans* President Rob Kramer's Ocean View (page 2) to learn more about the symposium's history and what we have planned.

www.wildoceans.org
Tampa, FL 33688
P.O. Box 272122

