Summary of Ecosystem SSC meeting on Feb. 25, 2015

Who were there

Members Present
Cameron Ainsworth, Vice-chair
Joan Browder
Columbus Brown
Stephen Holiman
Alan Matherne
Glenn Thomas
Wei Wu

Council Staff
Morgan Kilgour
Charlotte Schiaffo

Council Member
Roy Williams

NMFS-SERO Staff
Nick Farmer

Others present
J.P. Brooker
Felicia Coleman
Chad Hanson
Frank Helies
Will Heyman
Chris Hoenig
Tom Wheatley

Madison-Swanson and Steamboat Lumps Marine Reserves Reports

The Ecosystem SSC was presented information on the shelf-edge fishing reserves in the Southeastern U.S. from 2003-2009.

Shelf-edge reserves can protect threatened reef fish species and fishery production (Chris Koening and Felicia Coleman)

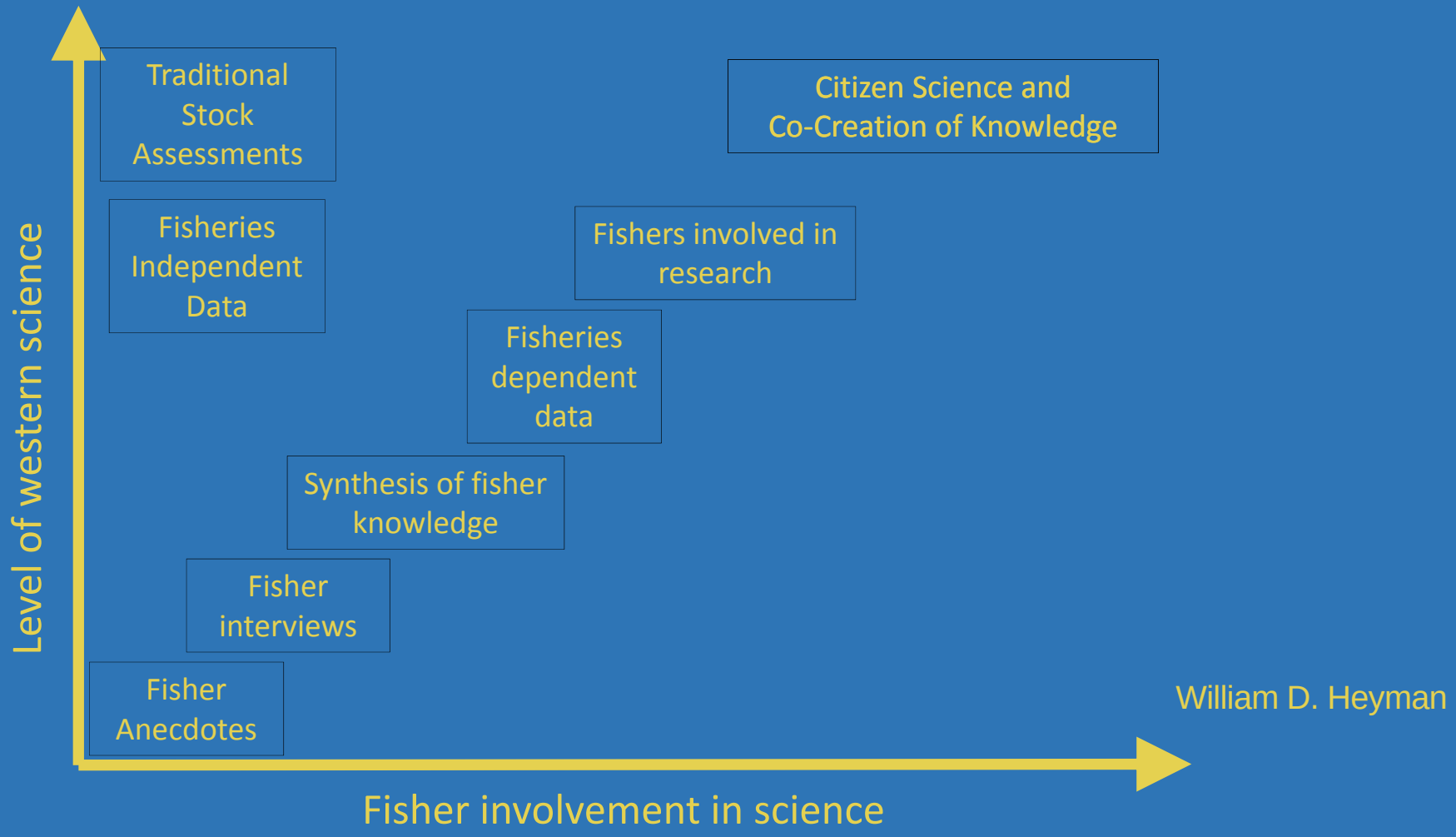
- Benefits for threatened & critically endangered species:
  - Protect juvenile, adult and spawning habitat
  - Provide research opportunities to increase protection & recovery.
- Benefits for shallow water species.
  - Protect sex ratios, and reproductive output of Gag
  - Protect age & size structure of spawners (BOFFS).
  - Protect reproductive output of other species (e.g., Red Snapper)
- Benefits to fishermen
  - Spillover: increase fishery production around reserves.
  - Protection of future recruitment.
- Benefits to scientific research and management
  - Monitor shifting baselines (reserves must be large enough)
  - Habitat protection
  - Controls for environmental impacts (e.g., oil spills)
  - Ecology of exploited species
  - Fishery impacts on trophic cascades etc.
  - Impacts of invasive species (e.g., Lionfish)

Performance of MPAs

(Andrew David)

- Indices of abundance have a high variance so trends are difficult to detect. No statistically significant differences were detected between areas, however within areas some years were different from others.
- The average abundance for gag appears to be higher in Madison-Swanson than the other survey areas, but is not significant. Similarly red grouper abundance appears higher in Steamboat Lumps than other areas, but is also not significant. Red snapper means show greater interannual variability.
- Gag, red grouper and red snapper were larger within MPAs compared to the eastern Gulf. Within the MPAs, gag and red snapper lengths were similar, however red grouper were larger in in Madison-Swanson than Steamboat Lumps. All show apparent gradual increases during the survey period.
- Compliance with fishing regulations has varied, along with the level of enforcement. VMS for commercial vessels was instituted in 2008.

Maximizing legitimacy of information



William D. Heyman

Recommendation 1

To have the Council have the Law Enforcement Committee look at options for improving enforcement including looking at the tables of penalties for fishing in Marine Protected Areas and at problems associated with building viable cases for prosecution.

Motion carried with no opposition.

Recommendation 2

To have the Council have the Outreach & Education Committee review mechanisms for public outreach with respect to benefits of MPAs and compliance with MPA regulations.

Motion carried with no opposition.

Recommendation 3

On the basis of the encouraging news the SSC heard from two scientific studies on reef fish stock recoveries in Madison Swanson and Steamboat Lumps MPAs, the Ecosystem SSC recommends that the Council consider other opportunities to establish MPAs.

Motion carried with no opposition.

Recommendation 4

The Ecosystem SSC recommends that the Council establish year-round closures for all species in the Madison Swanson, Steamboat Lumps, and the Edges Reserves.

Approved by consensus.

Recommendation 5

The Ecosystem SSC recommends that the Council recommend to the HMS Management Division that they close the following Reserves (Madison-Swanson, Steamboat Lumps, and the Edges) to fishing year round.

Approved by consensus.

Recommendation 6

Borrowing from a powerful approach to identifying and protecting spawning aggregations of reef fish and other associated species already implemented in Belize and elsewhere in the Caribbean and underway in the South Atlantic, the Ecosystem SSC recommends that the Council form an MPA Working Group made up of scientists, fishermen, law enforcement, managers and other stakeholders to work together, each using their best tools and knowledge, to make recommendations for the creation of an effective MPA network in the Gulf of Mexico.

Approved by consensus.

Recommendation 7

That the Ecosystem Based Fishery Management Working Group continue working on developing a set of suggested goals and objectives of an ecosystem based fisheries management plan that considers measurable targets.
Motion carried with no opposition.

Approved by consensus.