

**Joint Shrimp Advisory Panel,
Coral Scientific and Statistical Committee,
and Coral Advisory Panel Summary
August 3-4, 2016**

Shrimp AP

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Paul Sammarco
George (GP) Schmahl

Coral AP

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Joseph Weatherby, Vice
Chair
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Steve Ross
Portia Sapp
John Talbott

Council and Council staff

Leann Bosarge
Dale Diaz
Doug Gregory
Morgan Kilgour
Jessica Matos
Bernadine Roy
Bryan Schoonard
Camilla Shireman
Carrie Simmons

Others in Attendance

Johnny Nelson
Mrs. Nelson
Erik Cordes
Robert Spaeth
Jay Lucas
Scott Daggett
Tom Frazer
David Dale
Chad Hanson
Sharon McBreen
Mark Sramek

The agenda for the meeting was adopted as modified (reordering of the items) and the minutes from the Shrimp AP meeting (February 2016) and the Joint Coral SSC/AP meeting (May 27, 2015) were approved.

General Conclusions

The group felt that the meeting of the joint APs was beneficial and recommended when more than one species or fishery is involved that the appropriate APs meet jointly in the future.

Areas that were identified as high priority areas were: Pulley Ridge, Long Mound, Many Mounds, North Reed Site, Viosca Knoll 862/906, Alabama Alps Reef, Viosca Knoll 826, L&W Pinnacles and Scamp Reef, Mississippi Canyon 118, AT 357, AT 047, GC 852, Harte Bank, and Southern Bank. Areas that are currently under consideration for the Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary expansion under Preferred Alternative 3 were not recommended at this meeting because the Coral SSC felt that the expansion of the sanctuary to include these areas would provide better protection than HAPC status. Lastly, the group was presented with the Council's Coral Data Portal (<http://portal.gulfcouncil.org/>) and appreciated that these data are available to the public.

Review of Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary Proposed Expansion

There was a brief update on the recently discovered coral and other benthic organisms die off on the east Flower Gardens Bank. The area was about 100 m by 400 m. There were many sessile invertebrates that were observed dead and fish were scarce. The causes of this mortality event are unknown.

Mr. Schmahl presented the proposed expansion of the Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary (FGBNMS). There was discussion on the utility of the maps provided by FGBNMS on the proposed expansion; it was requested that more information such as depth contours (in fathoms) and other identifying features (cities, nautical charts, and latitude and longitude coordinates) be included in all maps. Mr. Schmahl reviewed the current regulations that would be extended to the proposed expansion. There was some discussion on habitat damage due to small boats and if there are any studies on the extent of small boat anchor damage. There was much discussion on the public comment period and what the FGBNMS will address after the comment period. The boundaries for the FGBNMS DEIS Preferred Alternative 3 were discussed. It was suggested that the boundaries should better adhere to the feature and not to have boundaries focus on straight lines. Mr. Schmahl informed the group that the boundaries were drawn based on the topography of the feature and made to have straight lines because basing the boundary on a depth contour is currently outside enforcement capabilities. Boundaries also may have aligned with currently existing lines, such as habitat areas of particular concern (HAPCs) or lease blocks when appropriate. There were three banks that were discussed that had boundaries that would affect fishing; the current HAPC boundary of MacNeil Bank, the northern boundary of Sonnier Bank, and the northeastern boundary of the Bouma Bank complex (Figure 1). The group recommended that these boundaries be redrawn (slight modification) to minimize the effect on the shrimp fishery.

Shrimp AP, Coral AP, Coral SSC Motion: The Shrimp AP, Coral AP and the Coral SSC requests that the discussion and comments made pertaining to the Flower Garden Banks boundary expansions be included in the GMFMC letter to the Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary.

Motion carried with no opposition.

Areas that are currently under consideration for the FGBNMS expansion Preferred Alternative 3 were not discussed at this meeting for prioritization. The Coral SSC felt that the protection of the FGBNMS would outweigh HAPC status if the FGBNMS Preferred Alternative 3 is approved; therefore, the discussion focused on other areas. Some members expressed concern that these areas were important and that removing them from the current consideration of priority areas would be problematic. Many of the areas that are currently in the FGBNMS DEIS Preferred Alternative 3 are already HAPCs; however, many of these existing HAPCs do not have fishing regulations.

Coral SSC Motion: To postpone any work on the recommended HAPCs that are the same as those proposed in Alternative 3 in the Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary expansion DEIS.

Motion carried with one in abstention.

The Coral AP and Shrimp AP chose not to address this issue.

The group noted that limiting the number of priority sites to a specific number is arbitrary. The group also noted that the existing HAPCs are still priority areas, but were not considered at this meeting because it was believed that the preferred alternative for the FGBNMS expansion would prevail. The Coral SSC was concerned that these HAPCs with no regulations would be contradictory to not be considered as priorities. To make sure that the Council was aware that these areas were not ignored, the Coral SSC/AP made the following motion:

Coral SSC Motion: If the FGBNMS expansion DEIS Preferred Alternative 3 does not result in sanctuary expansion, the HAPCs currently in that Alternative be reconsidered as priority areas in the upcoming HAPC document to include adjustment of boundaries to Bouma Bank, Sonnier Bank, and MacNeil Bank.

Motion carried 4-1

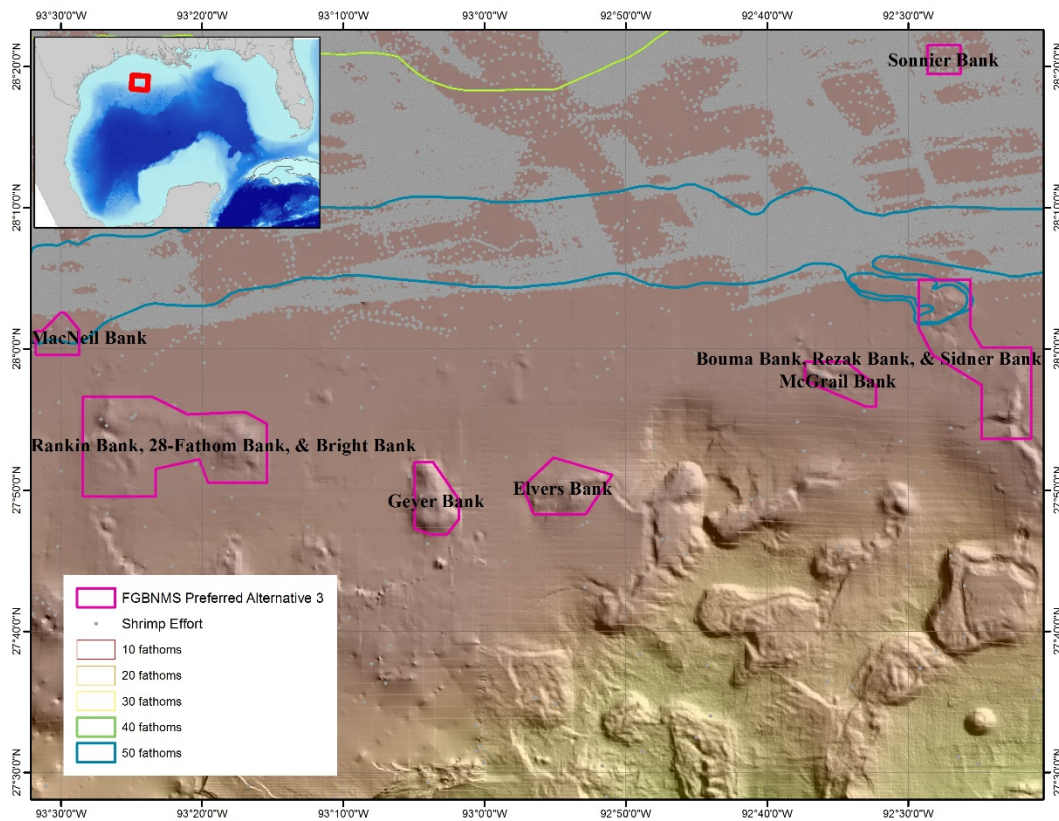


Figure 1. A partial view of the sites in the FGBNMS Preferred Alternative 3. MacNeil, Sonnier, and Bouma/Rezак/Sidner Banks were all identified by the Joint Shrimp AP, Coral AP

and Coral SSC discussion as needing boundary modification to incorporate historical shrimp fishing.

Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary Expansion Update

Mr. Werndli presented the group with the current Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary (FKNMS) status and outlined the different regulations for different areas of the FKNMS. The FKNMS is currently developing a draft environmental impact statement that would expand the sanctuary and could potentially implement regulations for the expanded area. Mr. Werndli presented the areas for proposed expansion. There was concern about previous information that was presented in 2015 that included prime shrimp fishing grounds that have been used by shrimp fishermen. The group was informed that the areas in question are no longer being considered for sanctuary expansion.

The southwestern corner that extends the line of the sanctuary to the south Tortugas of the proposed expansion is currently used for royal red shrimping and has shrimp electronic logbook (ELB) points in it. The group advised that the FKNMS use ELB data to adjust the boundaries in the proposed area to accommodate the royal red shrimping grounds since the rationale for the expansion was just to draw a straight line (Figure 2). At the time of the meeting, the FKNMS was not releasing the coordinates of the proposed expansion, so the group was unable to evaluate how much of the proposed expansion could affect shrimping. There was discussion on some areas that had previously been considered, but the groups was advised that those areas of concern (see map from the May 2015 Joint Coral SSC/AP meeting) have been considered but rejected). Staff will ensure that the group is kept informed about these areas when the FKNMS expansion DEIS is published in early 2017.

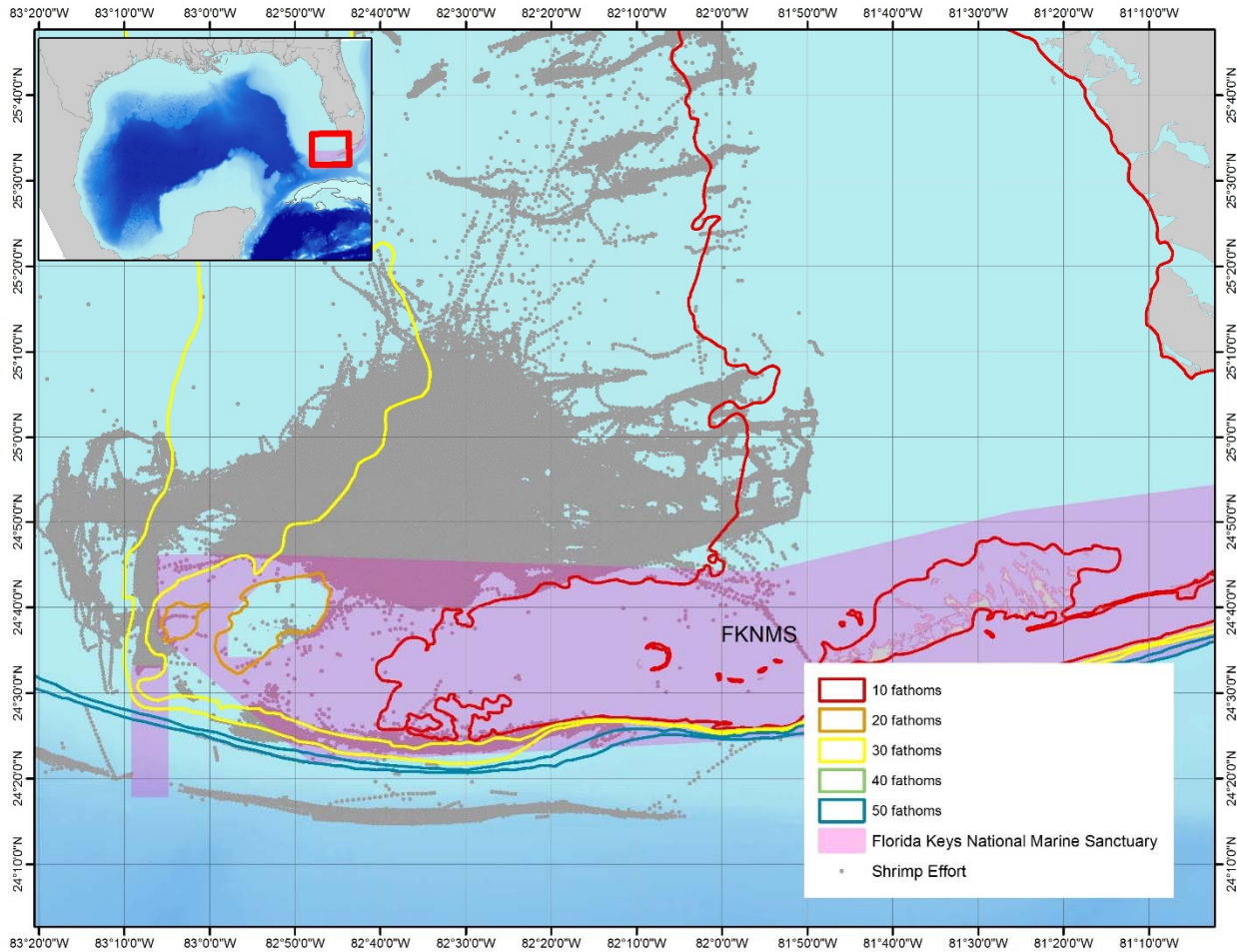


Figure 2. The current extent of the FKNMS with the shrimping ELB points overlay.

Northeastern Gulf of Mexico Areas

Dr. Cordes presented information on the deepwater coral habitats in the Gulf of Mexico. Dr. Cordes discussed that many fine scale models are used to reasonably predict where corals are found and aid researchers in deciding where to go to study corals. Dr. Cordes presented information for many of the areas that are currently recommended for HAPC status. Some of the coral mounds that have been identified are more than 300,000 years old.

The group discussed Viosca Knoll (VK) 862/906 (Figure 3). This area is a prime royal red shrimping ground. Discussion focused on whether to draw boundaries in different areas or to make bottom tending gear exclusions for royal red shrimp fishing. Mr. Nelson, a royal red shrimp fisherman, described how the fishery was prosecuted on VK862/906. The group seemed to think that there would be a mutually agreeable boundary that would protect the corals and still allow the historic royal red shrimping. VK 862/906 is one of the most significant coral areas in the GOM, and there was concern that care should be taken to prevent damaging this area.

Coral AP, Coral SSC, Shrimp AP Motion: To make Viosca Knoll 862/906, with input for boundary revisions from Steve Ross, Erik Cordes, and Johnny Nelson, be made a priority area for HAPC status.

Motion carried with no opposition.

At the May 27, 2015 Coral SSC/AP meeting, staff was requested to amend boundaries of some areas that may have interactions with the shrimp fishery. Staff used the outline of the topographic feature in the recommended boundary and the shrimping effort to revise the boundaries and this was presented to the group. VK 826, Rough Tongue Reef, and Alabama Alps (as modified by staff) were all made priority areas.

Coral AP, Coral SSC, Shrimp AP Motion: To set aside the Alabama Alps as an area for priority using the staff-recommended boundary.

Motion carried.

Coral SSC, Coral AP, Shrimp AP Motion: To make Viosca Knoll 826 a priority area.

Motion carried.

Coral SSC, Coral AP, Shrimp AP Motion: To make Rough Tongue Reef a priority area.

Motion carried.

The group discussed that priorities for the coral group would be different than the priorities for the shrimping group. Areas that were prioritized were done so with the understanding that these areas would eventually lead to regulations. The group discussed modifying the boundary for the L&W Pinnacles and Scamp Reef (another high species richness and biodiversity site) so that the site boundary reflected following the topography and would minimize regulating soft bottom areas.

Coral SSC, Coral AP, Shrimp AP Motion: To adjust the boundaries of L & W Pinnacles and Scamp Reef to the proposed boundary in the FGBMNS DEIS Alternative 5 and that this site be a priority area.

Motion carried with no opposition.

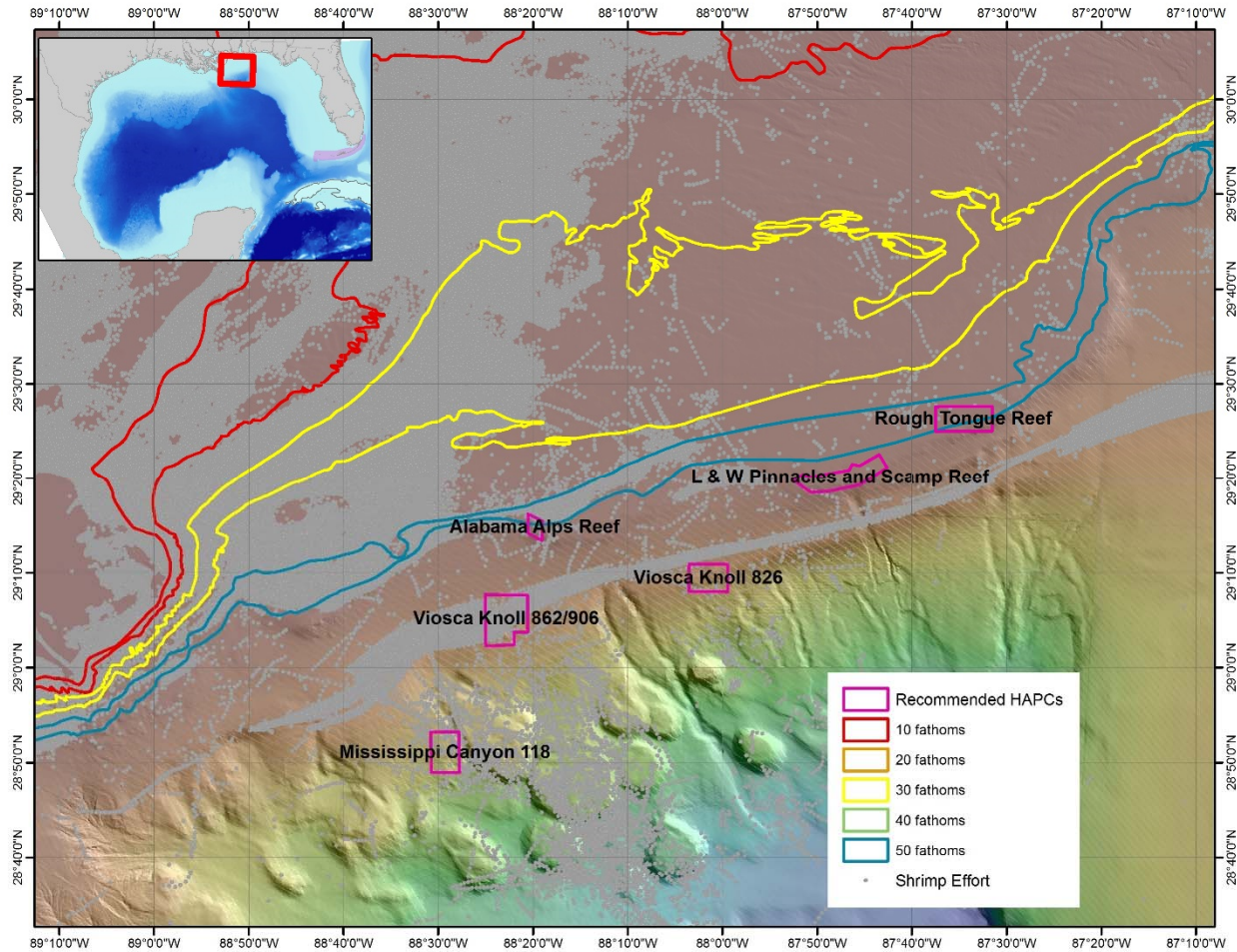


Figure 3. Priority areas for HAPC consideration in the northeastern Gulf of Mexico. These sites include Viosca Knoll 862/906, Viosca Knoll 826, Alabama Alps Reef, L&W Pinnacles and Scamp Reef, Rough Tongue Reef and Mississippi Canyon 118.

Florida Slope

The group discussed the expansion of the current Pulley Ridge HAPC (Figure 4). This area is currently used by bottom longline fishermen. The fishermen only target these areas about three to four months out of the year. The group was reminded that the purpose of the areas was to prioritize the areas. The information and data for this area was presented to the Coral AP/SSC at the May 2015 meeting and a comprehensive Council document will be produced during the amendment stage. Because this is a contentious area, the group felt that a working group should be convened to evaluate and modify the recommended boundaries.

Coral SSC and Coral AP Motion: That the Pulley Ridge proposed expansion for HAPC be placed on the priority list and convene a working group.

Walter Jaap

Sandra Brooke

Rob Ruzicka

Robert Spaeth

Jay Lucas

Scott Daggett

J.P. Brooker or Joseph Weatherby

Motion carried with no opposition.

Sites along the West Florida slope were discussed: Many Mounds, Long Mound and North Reed site. It was proposed to change the boundary of the three sites to one continuous boundary at: 26° 28' N (north boundary), 26° 5' N (south boundary), the east boundary would be along the 400 m contour and the west boundary would be along the 600 m contour. This area is a rocky scarp that extends all the way to Key West. There was concern about extending the boundary because these coordinates were not provided to the group prior to the meeting and there was concern that there could potentially be some fishers in the area that would not have been aware of the potential expansion. A substitute motion to keep the three original sites as priority areas was made.

Coral AP Substitute Motion: The three existing sites (Long Mound, North Reed, and Many Mounds) be made priorities.

Motion carried 4-2

Coral SSC and Shrimp AP Motion: To support the Coral AP's motion.

The three existing sites (Long Mound, North Reed, and Many Mounds) be made priorities.

Coral SSC: Motion carried with no opposition.

Shrimp AP: Motion carried with no opposition.

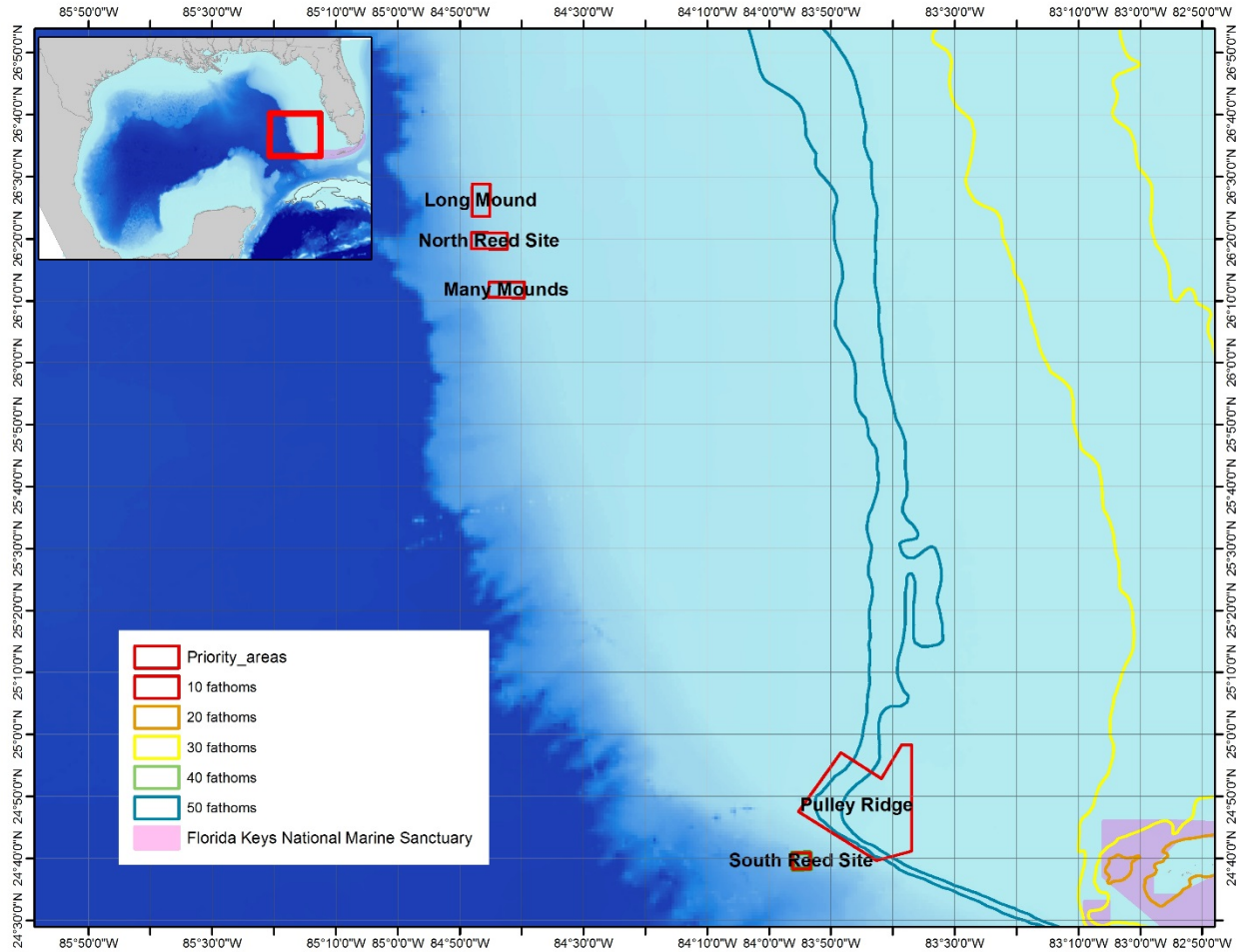


Figure 4. Sites that were identified as priority areas on the West Florida slope. These sites include Pulley Ridge, Long Mound, North Reed Site, and Many Mounds. The South Reed site has been identified as a mid-priority area recommended as a HAPC without regulations.

The group discussed the South Reed site. At the previous Coral AP/SSC meeting this area was thought to be a potential royal red shrimping area. After staff consulted with a royal red shrimper, this area was not a royal red shrimping area.

Coral SSC and Coral AP Motion: To make South Reed Site a mid-priority area for HAPC status with no fishing regulations.

Motion carried with no opposition.

Deepwater Coral Sites

There was discussion about taking some of the sites that are uncontested about their importance as coral areas and that they are not in areas that are fished (Figure 5). Some areas, such as Mississippi Canyon 118, have extensive reef tracts. The group discussed that establishing a HAPC when fishing pressure isn't present is still beneficial to the area. Mississippi Canyon and

AT 357 were identified as important deepwater sites that do not appear to have fishing conflicts associated with them.

Coral SSC, Coral AP, Shrimp Motion: To make AT 047 (Henderson Ridge Mid-South), AT 357 (Henderson Ridge South), GC 852, and Mississippi Canyon 118 priority areas.

Motion carried with no opposition.

There are several deep-water coral areas in the northern Gulf of Mexico that the group discussed. The deep-water areas in the northern Gulf of Mexico were not contentious regarding fishing as little fishing occurs at these sites; therefore, these areas were not considered in the priority category. However, the data and observations in these deep-water areas are sufficient to warrant HAPC status.

Coral SSC and Coral AP Motion: To make GB 535, GB 299, GC 354, GC 140 and 272, GC 234, MC 751 and 885 be made priority areas for HAPC status with no fishing regulations.

Coral SSC motion carried with one abstention.

Coral AP motion carried with no opposition.

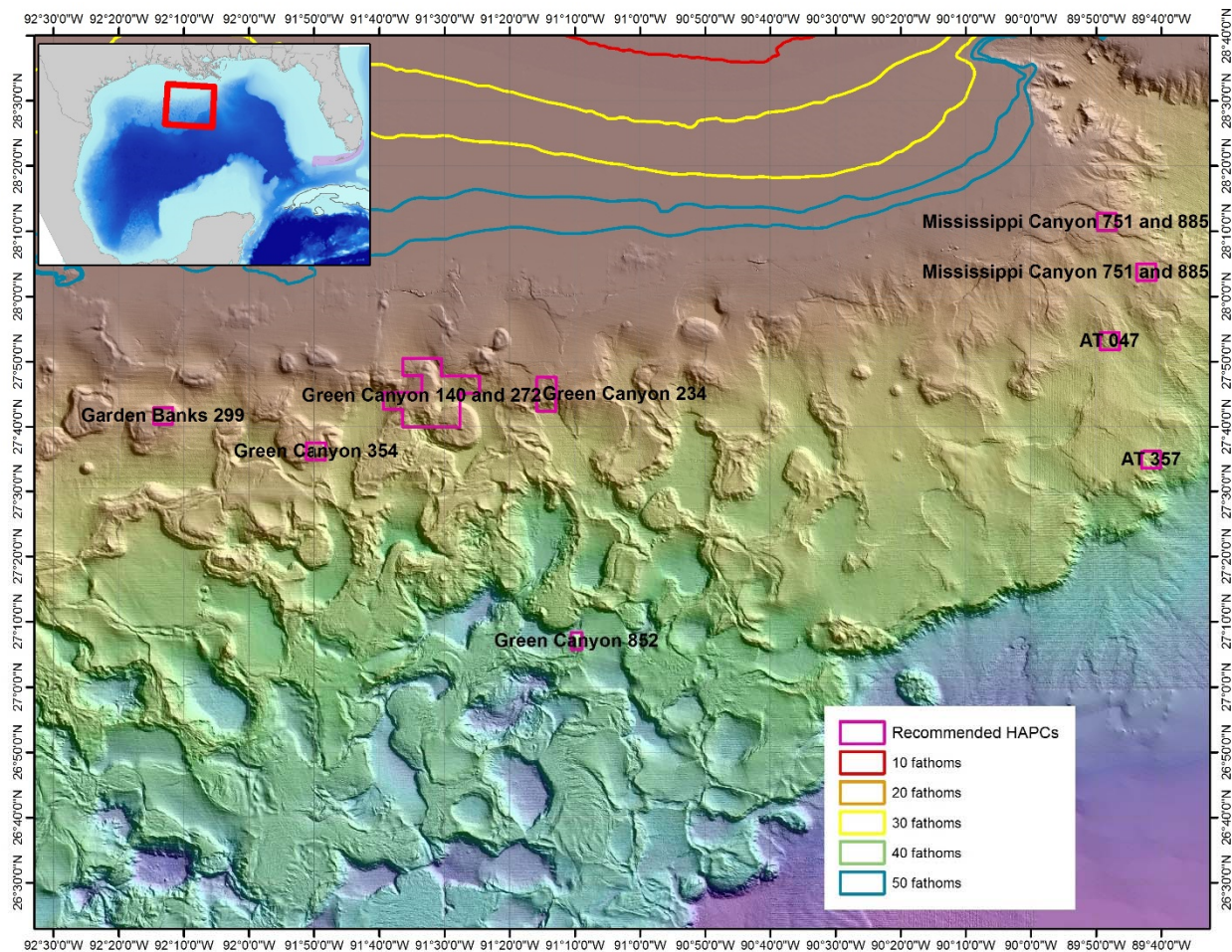


Figure 5. Deepwater coral areas that have been recommended for both priority HAPCs with regulations and HAPCs without regulations. Areas recommended to have regulations are AT357, AT047 and Mississippi Canyon 751 and 885. Deepwater coral areas recommended to be HAPCs without regulations are Garden Bank (GB) 299, Green Canyon (GC) 354, GC 140 and 272, GC 243 and GC 832. GB 535 is farther to the west and not pictured on this map.

South Texas Banks

The South Texas banks are surrounded by heavy shrimp fishing pressure (Figure 6). Closing these areas to shrimping would have negative consequences to the shrimp fishery. A species richness and diversity analysis was used to identify three banks for the group to focus on (Unnamed Bank (Harte Bank), Southern Bank and Hospital Bank). Additionally, prior to the meeting, staff had redrawn boundaries around the identified South Texas Banks to better outline the individual features. When shrimping effort (ELB data) is overlaid on these sites, it is clear that the hardground is avoided by shrimpers. It was clarified that the shrimp tow points that appear over the topographic features were not due to dragging. There was discussion on that closing these areas to fishing with bottom tending gear only prevents commercial fishing; recreational fishing without bottom tending gear would still be allowed. The Unnamed bank (Harte Bank) was identified by the group as an area with little contention from the shrimp fishermen.

Coral SSC, Coral AP, Shrimp AP Motion: To make Harte Bank a priority area for HAPC status.

Motion carried with no opposition.

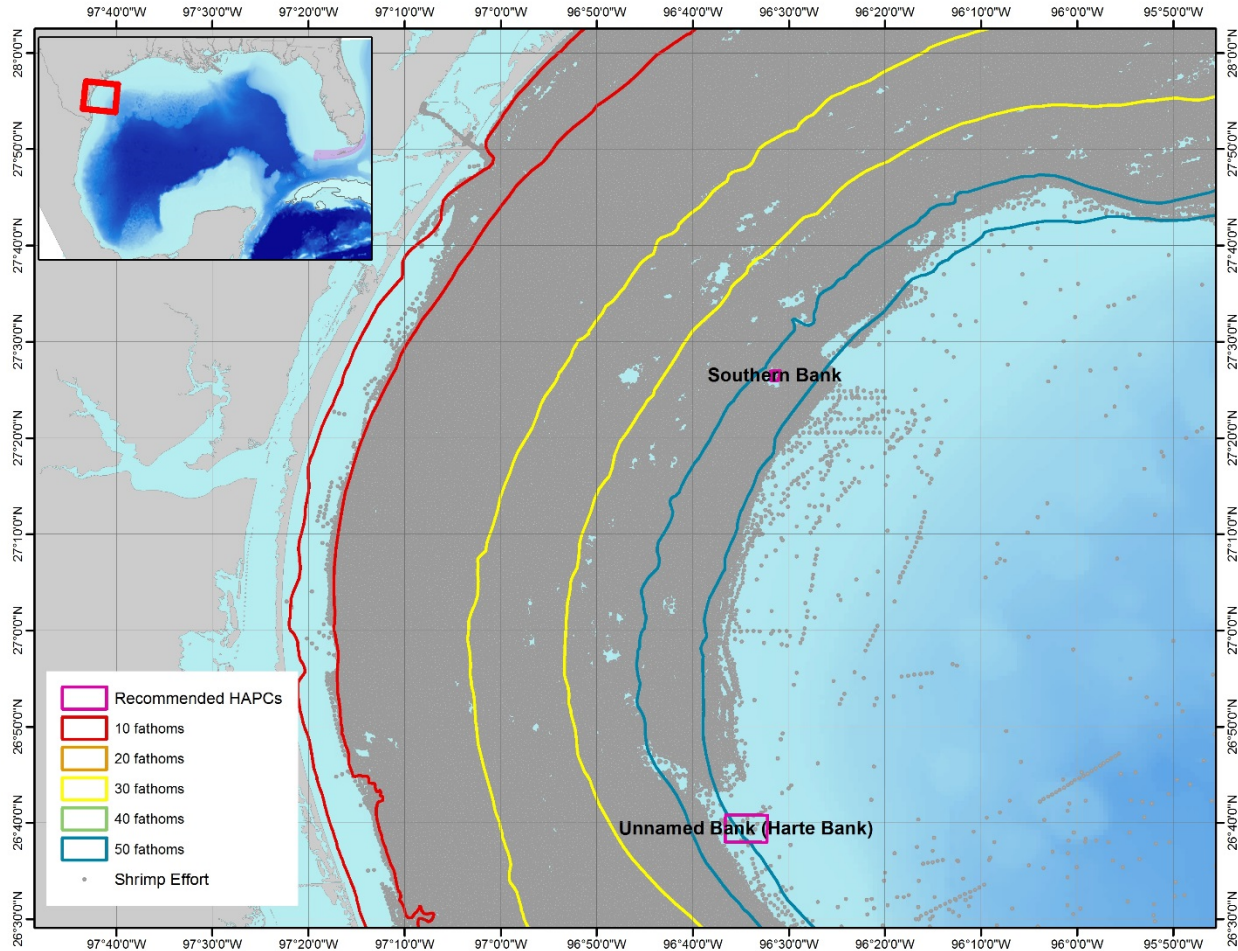


Figure 6. South Texas sites that have been recommended for HAPC priority. Southern Bank and Unnamed Bank (Harte Bank) are depicted in this map.

Another representative bank for the south Texas area was identified as Southern Bank after the fauna on both Southern and Hospital bank were compared taking into consideration the input from the Shrimp AP. Throughout the discussion, Dr. Sammarco noted that areas of high relief generally have high diversity and that should also be considered when prioritizing areas.

Shrimp AP, Coral AP, Coral SSC Motion: To recommend that all South Texas Bank site boundaries use the staff recommended boundaries.

Motion carried with no opposition.

Coral SSC and Coral AP Motion: To make Southern Bank a priority area for HAPC status.

Motion carried with no opposition.

The meeting adjourned at 11:45 am.