



**NOAA**  
**FISHERIES**

**FY 2023**

# **Southeast Regional Office Priorities & Planned Accomplishments**

Barataria Marsh Creation, July 2022

Photo Credit: Patrick M. Quigley

# Introduction

This document informs Southeast Regional Office (SERO) staff, partners, and stakeholders about the region's priorities and planned accomplishments for FY23 as identified by our Annual Activity Planning Process. The priorities in this plan help guide our annual activities, performance plans, and strategic communication across the Region. The identified priorities take into account our major mission functions, fiscal support, external drivers, and identified risks and opportunities.

## A Message from Andy Strelcheck, Regional Administrator

Dear Colleagues,

I am pleased to share SERO's FY23 regional priorities and planned accomplishments with you and our stakeholders. These priorities represent our collective work to advance NOAA Fisheries' national priorities and our Southeast Geographic Strategic Plan 2020-2023 in a way that best serves our regional constituencies and the resources we manage.

Our planned accomplishments will promote sustainable and economically competitive fisheries and domestic aquaculture to strengthen the Blue Economy; safeguard and recover protected species through proactive and innovative recovery and conservation strategies; conserve and restore the habitat our fishery and protected species require to thrive; build a more diverse and inclusive

organization; and strive to advance equity and environmental justice in the communities we serve.

In addition, these forward looking planned accomplishments will help the nation prepare for the very real impacts of climate change by informing the development of offshore wind energy, coastal resiliency, and other major infrastructure projects. Our goal is to proactively engage in such projects to avoid, minimize, and mitigate impacts and ensure the greatest conservation value and benefits to the marine resources, species, and habitats entrusted to our care. This work requires continued collaboration and innovation to overcome challenges such as data and resource limitations.

We look forward to working with you and others to navigate these challenges, as we strive to accomplish our mission to ensure stewardship of the nation's ocean resources and their habitat through sound science.

## Priorities & Planned Accomplishments

The following outlines SERO's priorities and planned accomplishments for FY23. Action items are organized in relation to the [Southeast Region \(SER\) Geographic Strategic Plan 2020-2023](#) and the NOAA Fisheries 2022-2025 Strategic Plan (In Press).

### Cross-Cutting Priorities

Cross-cutting priorities are activities supported by staff in multiple programs across our Protected Resources (PR), Habitat Conservation (HC), Sustainable Fisheries (SF), and Operations, Management and Information (OMI) Divisions; and are identified throughout the document:

#### **AQ – Aquaculture**

Promote development of domestic aquaculture while conserving and protecting trust resources and their habitat

#### **CCEM – Climate Change & Ecosystem Based Management**

Address the impact of climate change on our fisheries and protected resources and work toward an ecosystem-based management approach

#### **ET – Electronic Technologies**

Modernize fisheries data and information management

#### **OE – Organizational Excellence**

Support a diverse and inclusive environment and employee growth

#### **OWE – Offshore Wind Energy**

Support Administration energy goals while upholding environmental stewardship mandates



## Goal 1 Adaptively manage fisheries for sustainability and economic competitiveness to grow the Blue Economy

### Manage stocks for optimum yield and build climate and economic resilience in U.S. fishing and seafood sectors (NOAA Fisheries Strategy 1.1)

#### *Work with Regional Fishery Management Council (Council) and partners to develop strategies [to manage stocks for optimum yield] (SER 1.1)*

- Develop and implement rulemaking to end overfishing and/or rebuild overfished stocks including Gulf greater amberjack and gag; and South Atlantic red porgy, snowy grouper, gag, and red snapper.
- Implement Gulf state and federal red snapper annual catch limits (ACL) and calibration measures
- Explore management options to reduce discards in the South Atlantic snapper-grouper fishery
- Publish final rules regarding buoy gear and spiny lobster ACLs in the Caribbean
- Develop an amendment to protect habitat and reduce discard mortality in the Caribbean

#### *Increase US marine aquaculture production and support federal partners in updating interagency guidance documents for aquaculture projects (1.2) AQ*

- Support permitting processes for pilot and commercial aquaculture initiatives
- Inform Marine Resource Education Program (MREP) Aquaculture goals, objectives, and curriculum
- Initiate a programmatic environmental impact statement for [Aquaculture Opportunity Areas](#) (AOAs) in the Gulf
- Complete the consultation supporting Florida's efforts to expand the scope of marine aquaculture in state waters
- Work with federal partners to update and revise an interagency memorandum of understanding for offshore aquaculture in federal waters.

#### *Modernize fishery information collection, management, and dissemination; enhance cooperative data collection and sharing (1.4)*

- Automate bycatch estimation that considers distribution of highly migratory species

- Develop a web-based permit reporting tool to improve public access to permit questions **ET**

### Advance climate science and ecosystem-based fishery management (EBFM) to increase the sustainability of marine fisheries and address changing habitat needs (1.2 and 1.3)

#### *Develop and Implement Council Fishery Ecosystem Plans (1.4) CCEM*

- Develop Gulf Fisheries Ecosystem Plan and Caribbean EBFM strategy

#### *Enhance regulatory efficiencies on high-priority infrastructure and energy projects through early engagement and technical advice on avoiding and minimizing impacts to trust resources (2.2)*

- Collaborate with the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management and NOAA's National Ocean Service to provide information on offshore wind energy impacts on fisheries, protected resources, and habitat in the South Atlantic and Gulf **OWE**
- Consult on large-scale coastal storm reduction and ecosystem restoration studies such as the Texas Coastal Study, Sabine Pass to Galveston Bay Coastal Storm Risk Management Program, and Collier County Coastal Storm Risk Management Study
- Consult on coastal resiliency, storm, and flood protection projects such as Lake Pontchartrain and Vicinity Hurricane Protection Project, Plaquemines Parish Non-Federal Levee and New Orleans to Venice Project, and Morganza to the Gulf Hurricane Protection System



#### *Support public compensation for injuries to trust resources, inform injury assessments, and determine restoration needs. Support reducing or mitigating the impacts of hypoxia and diversion projects (2.1, 2.4) CCEM*

- Coordinate environmental compliance activities for Resources and Ecosystems Sustainability, Tourist Opportunities, and Revived Economies (**RESTORE**) Council; Coastal Wetlands Planning Protection and Restoration Act (**CWPPRA**); and Natural Resource Damage Assessment (NRDA) Deep Water Horizon projects
- Develop engineering designs for Oyster Lake, Fritch Marsh, East Delacroix, and North Delacroix to prepare for CWPPRA Phase 2

- Complete construction of Breton West Landbridge to restore 561 acres of marsh

### ***Collaborate on climate-related initiatives for fisheries (3.5) CCEM***

- Assist Southeast Fisheries Science Center (SEFSC) in developing a community climate change vulnerability index
- Finalize [Climate Regional Action Plan](#)
- Host a regional climate workshop
- Chair the Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary work group to summarize activities related to [Executive Order 14008](#) and inform EBFM and future fisheries climate work
- Participate in east coast [climate change scenario planning](#) to develop management recommendations for shifting stocks
- Contribute to the completion of Essential Fish Habitat National Climate Change and Mitigation Policies

### ***Diversify our data collection technologies and expand data products and services in support of the New Blue Economy (1.4)***

#### ***Develop and implement electronic reporting for commercial and recreational fisheries (1.3, 3.5) ET***

- In coordination with the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council, develop new electronic monitoring logbook requirements for federally permitted shrimp vessels
- Further develop commercial electronic logbooks and reduce vessel monitoring system reporting restrictions (e.g., hail outs) in the reef fish and coastal migratory pelagic fisheries
- Continue information technology improvements to the Southeast For-Hire Integrated Electronic Reporting Program ([SEFHIER](#)) and Online Catch Share system

## **Goal 2 Safeguard protected species and propel their recovery**

### ***Continue to implement actions to recover listed endangered and threatened species (2.1) PS***

#### ***Stabilize priority protected species, review status of those species meeting delisting or downlisting criteria (2.1, 2.2, 2.9)***

- Update status of all 7 corals listed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA)
- Identify manta ray aggregations by supporting SEFSC satellite tagging and update distribution models

- Draft an ESA consultation framework for Queen Conch, Nassau grouper, and Oceanic Whitetip shark; and a status of the species for Nassau Grouper
- Develop final rule to list Queen Conch as threatened
- Draft 5-yr review of Atlantic sturgeon and update recovery plan for shortnose sturgeon and smalltooth sawfish

### ***Lead NRDA projects to advance managing the stressors impacting protected resources and evaluate stock status and recovery priorities (2.1)***

- Identify factors contributing to sea turtle incidental captures in the reef fish bottom longline fishery
- Engage in NRDA-reimbursable restoration opportunities for Gulf sturgeon



### ***Protect and restore habitats necessary for the recovery of endangered marine species (2.4)***

#### ***Stabilize highest priority protected species (2.1)***

- Publish proposed rule to designate green sea turtle critical habitat
- Publish final rule to designate critical habitat for Nassau grouper and ESA listed corals
- Draft critical habitat designation for Rice's whale
- Balance regional water needs through completion of Augusta Canal Biological Opinion (BiOp) **CCEM**
- Help secure Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act ([IIJA](#)) funds for fish passage at East Juliette
- Assist the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) with Implementing fish passage at New Savannah Bluff lock and dam
- Assist USACE with completing sediment studies at Port Everglades and Port Miami

#### ***Enhance regulatory efficiencies on high-priority infrastructure projects with early engagement and technical advice on avoiding and minimizing impacts (2.2)***

- Recommend actions to avoid and minimize adverse impacts to essential fish habitat during sediment diversion, port expansion, and wind projects **OWE**
- Complete environmental windows studies for Cape Fear and Morehead City

***Help reduce or mitigate impacts of hypoxia and Mississippi River diversion projects (2.4)***

- Assist with environmental review of the Mid-Breton Sediment Diversion Project
- Coordinate assessment of lower trophic level resources in Barataria Estuary and develop monitoring and stewardship measures for marine mammals in response to the Mid-Barataria Bay Sediment Diversion

***Respond to the disease outbreak affecting corals in the southeast region (2.1)***

- Support [NOAA Coral Reef Conservation Program](#) turbidity, herbivory, and fish spawning aggregation work groups, and Stony Coral Tissue Loss Disease Working Group

***Protect marine species while supporting the Blue Economy (2.5)***

***Prioritize regulatory efficiencies on high-priority infrastructure and energy projects. Provide early engagement and technical advice on ways to avoid and minimize impacts to trust resources (2.2)***

- Complete BiOp for Port Everglades, Port of Corpus Christi Channel Improvement, and Martin County Artificial Reef Projects
- Complete informal consultation on Gulf Offshore Wind Energy Siting and Assessment Plans **OWE**
- Complete informal programmatic consultation on U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service water control improvements in Texas

***Collaborate with Councils to apply bycatch reduction measures (2.3)***

- Address smalltooth sawfish bycatch concerns due to trawling
- Plan for research and public input on marine mammal depredation deterrent options
- Publish the final rule amending the Pelagic Longline Take Reduction Plan

## **Goal 3 Diversify our workforce and support our mission through organizational excellence**

***Ensure Worker Wellness, Workforce Diversity, and an Inclusive Environment (3.1 and 3.2) OE***

***Share expertise among SERO, SEFSC, and agency partners through temporary personnel assignments. Promote an inclusive and safe workplace, recognize innovation and excellence, and maintain a harassment-free workplace (3.1, 3.3)***

- Develop cross-office detail opportunities

- Promote a positive and inclusive work environment through regular communication, support of personal work-life balance, and recognition of achievements
- Provide tools and activities to staff in support of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion & Accessibility (DEIA)

***Promote an inclusive, safe workplace by completing workplace improvement initiatives, and emphasizing effective communication and collaboration (3.1)***

- Continue the Workplace Improvement, Employee Advisory, and DEIA Committee activities to improve worker wellness and inclusion.

***Develop Workforce Skills (3.3) OE***

***Provide training opportunities and empower employee growth to enhance professional development, leadership, and work skills (3.1)***

- Identify training needs and ensure required and value-added training opportunities
- Support professional development through temporary promotions, details, and participation in leadership development programs

***Plan for annual staffing and succession and use special authorities to hire a diverse workforce (3.1)***

- Conduct hiring training and plan hiring actions to meet needs through special hiring authorities, internships, and other developmental positions

***Embrace a New Workplace Paradigm (3.4) OE***

***Match a diverse workforce to mission needs and institutionalize prioritization and performance management (3.1, 3.3)***

- Assist and contribute to strategic plans, operating plans, science priorities, organizational priority-setting, and other related activities

***Provide access to facility-related services to ensure field and off-site work productivity (3.2)***

- Improve customer service including increasing network bandwidth
- Enhance audio and video technology for hybrid on-site and off-site work

