Species Recovery Grants:
FY24 Greater Atlantic Region Priorities

This document was prepared by the Protected Resources Division, NMFS Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office. The purpose is to identify some of the top regional management and research priorities for FY24 Species Recovery Grant programs. Species and projects are in no particular order. Submitting a proposal in response to this list does not guarantee funding. Further, projects not on this list may receive higher review scores, and may therefore receive funding. For more information, please contact Carrie Upite, GARFO Section 6 State Coordinator, at Carrie.Upite@noaa.gov for Species Recovery Grants to states, or Ellen Keane, GARFO tribal liaison, at ellen.keane@noaa.gov for Species Recovery Grants to tribes.

Atlantic Salmon (Gulf of Maine DPS) - Species in the Spotlight

- In 2021 NOAA-Fisheries reaffirmed its commitment to the restoration of Atlantic salmon through its renewal of the Species in the Spotlight initiative and the release of its priority action plan. Our top priority is to support the implementation of projects from the SHRU-specific 5- year workplans that address the priority areas described in the action plan. This includes supporting freshwater restoration activities in designated critical habitat that will restore access and improve smolt productivity. Priority actions are ones that contribute to progress towards the downlisting and delisting criteria included in the 2019 Recovery Plan.
- The following science and assessment projects are also priorities:
  - Identification of climate-resilient habitats for Atlantic salmon and other sea-run fish in freshwater.
  - Characterization of direct and indirect effects of dams on Atlantic salmon and the ecosystems on which they depend.
  - Improve our understanding of human-caused geomorphic change in the freshwater range of the GOM DPS over the last 200 years.
  - Advancing the scientific underpinnings of the multi-species approach to salmon recovery.

Atlantic Sturgeon

- Conduct research to identify protocols and methods necessary for establishing regional (river or DPS-specific) and coastwide fishery-independent surveys to monitor Atlantic sturgeon abundance (for both spawning adults and early juveniles) or expand existing regional surveys to include annual Atlantic sturgeon monitoring. Research can include testing novel methods and equipment (e.g., use of sonar). Particular consideration should be given to identifying and establishing methods that are reasonably cost-effective, can be implemented across the range of each DPS, and have a reasonable likelihood of establishing a long-term (e.g., multi-decades) time series of data for one or more of the Atlantic sturgeon DPSs, or for river-specific populations as necessary to inform recovery of a DPS.
- Conduct research to collect DPS-specific age, growth, fecundity, and maturity information.
- Conduct research to address the threat of vessel strikes. Research topics can include, but are

not limited to, research that informs: the number of vessel strikes to a DPS or river-specific population; mortality estimates; factors contributing to vessel strikes; and, the development of strategies to minimize impacts on Atlantic sturgeon.

- Conduct research to inform the physical or biological features in marine waters, bays, and sounds that are essential to one or more of the DPSs.
- Evaluate bycatch and bycatch mortality at the state and coastwide level, including international fisheries where appropriate (i.e., the Canadian weir fishery), and/or identify cost-effective methods that can be used to better inform bycatch and bycatch mortality at the state and coastwide level.
- Maintain and support current networks of acoustic receivers and acoustic tagging programs, and further investigate new applications using the data to address data deficiencies for basic life history parameters of each DPS, including improving the estimates of total mortality.
- Investigate the effects of global climate change to DPS and river-specific populations.
- Identify and implement methods that promote public engagement of the conservation of Atlantic sturgeon as well as public knowledge of Atlantic sturgeon such as through education and outreach programs, carcass reporting programs, etc.
- Investigate and assess the effects of non-native fish on Atlantic sturgeon populations in state waters, e.g., the effects of existing invasive, non-native species known to occur in Atlantic sturgeon habitat; potential effects of non-native species that could occur (e.g., expanding ranges); and potential effects of non-native, non-ESA listed, sturgeon species that are currently unregulated in the pet trade.

Shortnose Sturgeon

- Evaluate coastal migrations and interbasin movements of shortnose sturgeon including the occasional use of smaller rivers near known spawning populations. Explore the potential for colonization across river systems.
- Determine abundance of river spawning populations.
- Conduct the research necessary to determine the protocols and methods necessary for establishing fishery-independent time series that will inform abundance and trends, existing or emerging threats to shortnose sturgeon, habitat use, or any other aspect that reasonably provides information needed to recover the species. More than one approach may be appropriate and necessary given the objective (e.g., to assess regional abundance or river-specific abundance).
- Further research the susceptibility and impacts of the threats to shortnose sturgeon populations including but not limited to bycatch, vessel strikes, and global climate change.
- Identify and implement methods that promote public engagement of the conservation of shortnose sturgeon as well as public knowledge of shortnose sturgeon such as through education and outreach programs, carcass reporting programs, etc.
- Investigate and assess the effects of non-native fish on shortnose sturgeon populations in state waters, e.g., the effects of existing invasive, non-native species known to occur in shortnose sturgeon habitat; potential effects of non-native species that could occur (e.g., expanding ranges); and potential effects of non-native, non-ESA listed, sturgeon species that are currently unregulated in the pet trade.

Sea Turtles (Loggerhead, Green, Kemp's ridley, and Leatherback)

- Continued research into the population abundance and trends for all species in Greater Atlantic Region waters and the drivers behind any declining nesting trends. While information on all sea turtle species is desired, particular focus is on loggerheads and leatherbacks.
- Assessment of threats in state waters, focusing on co-occurrence with fishing gear and impacts of those interactions.
- Continued research into the distribution, behavior, and ecology of sea turtles and changes with climate change.
- Research to develop and/or expand the use of stable isotope, genomics, eDNA, and other emerging technologies to increase our knowledge of habitat use (including identification of high quality habitat), population connectivity, ontogenetic habitat shifts, and foraging ecology.
- Assess whether/how prey availability/prey shifts due to anthropogenic activities (including commercial harvest of prey species) affect sea turtles.
- Identify, develop and test gear modifications or other measures that prevent or reduce sea turtle entanglements in vertical fishing lines and other fixed gear (e.g., aquaculture).
- Identify and implement outreach and/or mitigation measures to reduce sea turtle vessel interactions and impacts of marine debris.
- Support sea turtle stranding response, post-mortem examination, and identification of mortality.

North Atlantic Right Whale - Species in the Spotlight

- Protect North Atlantic right whales from entanglement in fishing gear.
- Protect North Atlantic right whales from vessel strikes.
- Investigate North Atlantic right whale population abundance, status, distribution and health (e.g., mid-Atlantic distribution).
- Understand how new and emerging marine activities may impact North Atlantic right whales (e.g., climate, wind energy, aquaculture, noise).