

**ANNUAL REPORT**

**TO THE**

**TECHNICAL COORDINATING COMMITTEE**

**GULF STATES MARINE FISHERIES COMMISSION**

**OCTOBER 1, 2025 TO SEPTEMBER 30, 2026**

**SEAMAP Subcommittee**

**Ted Switzer, Chairman**

**Jeffrey K. Rester**

**SEAMAP Coordinator**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The Southeast Area Monitoring and Assessment Program (SEAMAP) is a State/Federal/University program for the collection, management, and dissemination of fishery-independent data and information in the southeastern United States. The program presently consists of three operational components: SEAMAP-Gulf of Mexico, which began in 1981; SEAMAP-South Atlantic, implemented in 1983; and SEAMAP-Caribbean, formed in 1988.

Each SEAMAP component operates independently, planning and conducting surveys and information dissemination in accordance with administrative policies and guidelines of NOAA Fisheries' Southeast Regional Office (SERO).

Federal programmatic funding for SEAMAP activities and administration was appropriated in Federal Fiscal Years 1985-2026 (October 1 through September 30). State and Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission (GSMFC) funding allocations for FY1985-FY2026 were handled through State/Federal cooperative agreements, administered by SERO and the Southeast Fisheries Science Center (SEFSC), NOAA Fisheries.

In FY2026, SEAMAP operations continued for the forty-fifth consecutive year. SEAMAP resource surveys included the Fall Shrimp/Groundfish Survey, Spring Plankton Survey, Summer Shrimp/Groundfish Survey, Reef Fish Survey, Bottom Longline Survey, Fall Plankton Survey, and plankton and environmental data surveys. Other FY2026 activities included SEAMAP information services and program management.

This report is the forty-third in a series of annual SEAMAP Subcommittee reports to the Technical Coordinating Committee (TCC) of the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission. It is intended to inform the TCC of SEAMAP-Gulf of Mexico activities and accomplishments during FY2026 and proposed SEAMAP activities for FY2027.

Appreciation is gratefully extended to the staff of the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission for their considerable assistance in the preparation of this document.

## **FY2026 SEAMAP RESOURCE SURVEYS**

The surveys conducted during the year address distinct regional needs and priorities and provide information concerning the marine resources in the Gulf of Mexico. Other activities included SEAMAP information services and program management.

### **Fall Shrimp/Groundfish Survey**

The Fall Shrimp/Groundfish Survey was conducted from October 1 to November 26, 2025, from off southwest Florida to the U.S.-Mexican border. NOAA Fisheries, Florida, Alabama,

Mississippi, and Louisiana sampled two hundred forty-three trawl stations during the survey. Vessels sampled waters out to 60 fm with trawls in addition to environmental sampling. The objectives of the survey were to:

- (1) sample the northern Gulf of Mexico to determine abundance and distribution of demersal organisms from inshore waters to 60 fm;
- (2) obtain length-frequency measurements for major finfish and shrimp species to determine population size structures; and
- (3) collect environmental data to investigate potential relationships between abundance and distribution of organisms and environmental parameters.

### **Spring Plankton Survey**

The SEAMAP Spring Plankton Survey was conducted by NOAA Fisheries from April 25 – May 26, 2026. Ninety stations were sampled during the survey. The objectives of the survey were to assess, using neuston and bongo nets, the occurrence, abundance and geographical distribution of the early life stages of spring spawning fish, especially Atlantic Bluefin Tuna, from mid-continental shelf to offshore Gulf of Mexico waters in support of annual stock assessments and collect environmental data at all ichthyoplankton stations.

Plankton samples were taken with standard SEAMAP bongo and neuston samplers. The bongo sampler consisted of two conical 61-cm nets with 333-micron mesh. Tows were oblique, surface to near bottom (or 200 m) and back to surface. A mechanical flowmeter is mounted off-center in the mouth of each bongo net to record the volume of water filtered. Volume filtered ranges from approximately 20 to 600 m<sup>3</sup> but is typically 30 to 40 m<sup>3</sup> at the shallowest stations and 300 to 400 m<sup>3</sup> at the deepest stations. A single or double 2x1 m pipe frame neuston net fitted with 0.947 mm mesh netting is towed at the surface with the frame half-submerged for 10 minutes. Samples are taken upon arrival on station, regardless of time of day. At each station, either a bongo and/or neuston tow are made depending on the specific survey. Preservation protocol called for the right bongo samples to be preserved in 10% formalin and then transferred to fresh 95% ethanol after 36 hours. The original standard SEAMAP method of initial preservation in 10% formalin for 48 hours was changed to 36 hours in order to improve long term storage for genetic analysis. The left bongo and neuston samples are initially preserved in 95% ethanol and then transferred to fresh 95% ethanol after 24 hours. In addition, hydrographic data (surface chlorophyll, salinity, temperature, and dissolved oxygen from surface, midwater, and near bottom, and Forel-Ule color) were collected at all stations.

Right bongo and neuston samples collected from SEAMAP stations were transshipped to the Polish Sorting and Identification Center. Left bongo samples were archived at the SEAMAP Invertebrate Plankton Archiving Center (SIPAC).

## **Bottom Longline Survey**

The SEAMAP Bottom Longline Survey is a nearshore survey that complements an existing long-term fisheries independent longline survey being conducted by NOAA Fisheries, by targeting shark and finfish species within the shallow waters of the Gulf of Mexico. The objectives of the survey are to collect information on shark and finfish abundances and distribution with a 1-mile longline and to collect environmental data.

The Bottom Longline Survey samples during three seasons, Spring (April-May), Summer (June-July), and Fall (August-September). Sampling is conducted in waters defined by the 3-10m depth contour across the entire U.S. Gulf of Mexico. NMFS Statistical Zones are used as guides to ensure effective distribution of sampling effort. Stations are proportionally allocated and randomly distributed within the 3-10m depth contour in each statistical zone based on the proportion of those depths present. Since the 3-10m depth strata is smaller in some statistical zones relative to other statistical zones, each statistical zone is allocated at least two stations during each season in order to ensure adequate sampling coverage. Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Texas collected data at 257 stations during the survey this year from April 5 to September 22, 2026.

## **Reef Fish Survey**

The objectives of the survey are to assess the relative abundance of reef fish on the continental shelf edge-banks of the northern Gulf of Mexico, reef fish associated with oil and gas platforms, and reef fish associated with artificial reefs; map areas using a side scan sonar system; collect water samples for eDNA analysis; and collect environmental data. Stations are sampled with camera arrays baited with Atlantic Mackerel and squid prior to deployment. Each camera array is allowed to soak at the bottom for a minimum of thirty-five minutes to ensure that twenty minutes of continuous video and stereo images are recorded. Camera arrays are only deployed during the day and habitat mapping is conducted at night. Vertical line sampling is also conducted to collect biological samples for life history information. Water samples are taken at approximately 100 stations per year for eDNA analysis. In addition, water temperature, salinity, dissolved oxygen, and transmissivity are collected at all stations.

Beginning in March, NOAA Fisheries sampled 911 camera stations and collected 122 water samples for eDNA analysis. Florida sampled 724 camera stations from April through September. Louisiana sampled 47 camera stations from June through September, and Texas sampled 51 camera stations from June through September.

## **Summer Shrimp/Groundfish Survey**

The Summer Shrimp/Groundfish Survey began June 1 and sampling concluded July 17, 2026. Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana and NMFS collected data at 384 stations. SEAMAP sent out weekly real time plots of total catch and brown, pink, and white shrimp distribution during the Summer Shrimp/Groundfish Survey.

Objectives of the Summer Shrimp/Groundfish Survey were to:

- (1) monitor size and distribution of penaeid shrimp during or prior to migration of brown shrimp from bays to the open Gulf;
- (2) aid in evaluating the “Texas Closure” management measure of the Gulf Council's Shrimp Fishery Management Plan; and
- (3) provide information on shrimp and groundfish stocks across the northern Gulf of Mexico from inshore waters to 60 fm.

### **Fall Plankton Survey**

The Fall Plankton cruise took place from September 14-30, 2026. NMFS and Louisiana completed 71 stations during the survey. The objective of this survey was to collect ichthyoplankton samples with bongo and neuston gear for the purpose of estimating abundance and defining the distribution of eggs, larvae, and small juveniles of Gulf of Mexico fish, particularly King and Spanish Mackerel, lutjanids and sciaenids. Plankton samples were collected in the same manner as during the Spring Plankton Survey.

## **INFORMATION SERVICES**

Information from the SEAMAP activities is provided to user groups through the program administration and three complementary systems: the SEAMAP Information System, SEAMAP Archiving Center, and SIPAC. Products resulting from SEAMAP activities can be grouped into two major categories: data sets (including broadly, digital data and collected specimens) managed by the SEAMAP Information System, SEAMAP Archiving Center and SIPAC; and program information. Program information is discussed in the *PROGRAM MANAGEMENT* Section of this report.

### **SEAMAP Information System**

Biological and environmental data from all SEAMAP-Gulf surveys are included in the SEAMAP Information System, managed in conjunction with NOAA Fisheries-SEFSC. Raw data are edited by the collecting agency and verified by the SEAMAP Data Manager prior to entry into the system. Data from all SEAMAP-Gulf surveys during 1982-2026 have been entered into the system and data from the 2026 surveys are in the process of being verified, edited, and entered for storage and retrieval. Verified, non-confidential SEAMAP data are available conditionally to all requesters, although the highest priority is assigned to SEAMAP participants.

Requested SEAMAP data were used for a multitude of purposes in 2026:

- Evaluating the abundance and size distribution of penaeid shrimp in federal and state waters to assist in determining opening and closing dates for commercial fisheries;
- Evaluating and plotting the size of the hypoxic (Dead Zone) area off of Louisiana;
- Assessing shrimp and groundfish abundance and distribution and their relationship to such environmental parameters as temperature, salinity, and dissolved oxygen; and
- Identifying environmental parameters associated with concentrations of larval finfish.

### **Real-time Data**

A major function of the SEAMAP Information System is the processing of catch data from the Summer Shrimp/Groundfish Survey as near-real-time data. Plots of station locations and catch rates of shrimp, squid and dominant finfish species were prepared, edited, and processed by GSMFC for weekly distribution to management agencies, fishermen, processors and researchers. SEAMAP real-time data plots were produced during the 2026 Summer Shrimp/Groundfish Survey. Seven weekly mailings were produced and distributed to approximately 83 interested individuals. These plots were also available through the SEAMAP web page.

## **PROGRAM MANAGEMENT**

The SEAMAP program is administered by the SEAMAP Subcommittee of the TCC through the SEAMAP Coordinator, who is under the technical direction of the Subcommittee Chairman and administrative supervision of the GSMFC Executive Director.

Personnel associated with SEAMAP program management include the Coordinator, Data Manager, SEAMAP Archiving Center Curator, SIPAC Curator and the Program Monitor from NOAA Fisheries-Pascagoula Laboratory.

### **Planning**

A SEAMAP-Gulf Subcommittee meeting was held in October 2025 with participation by various work group leaders, the Coordinator, the Program Monitor, and other GSMFC staff. Representatives from the Gulf program also met with the South Atlantic and Caribbean representatives at the March 2026 meeting to discuss respective program needs and priorities for FY2026.

Coordination of program surveys and distribution of quick-report summaries of a Gulf-wide survey to management agencies and industry were major functions of SEAMAP management in 2026. Other important management activities included coordinating data provision and specimen loans, preparing publications and documents and assisting in the preparation of State/Federal

cooperative agreements, including amendments to permit extension of activities previously not detailed in the agreements.

### **Information Dissemination**

The following documents were published and distributed during this reporting period:

- *SEAMAP Subcommittee Report to the GSMFC Technical Coordinating Committee - October 1, 2024 to September 30, 2025.* A detailed summary of program accomplishments, emphasizing survey design, material collected, data dissemination, budget information, and future survey activities.
- *Joint Annual Report of the SEAMAP Program – January 1, 2025 to December 31, 2025.* A summary of FY2025 activities and proposed FY2026 events for the SEAMAP-Gulf, South Atlantic, and Caribbean Programs.

### **Proposed 2027 Activities**

Preliminary 2027 SEAMAP-Gulf budget allocations are shown in Table 3. Last year, total program allocations for all three SEAMAP components, Gulf, South Atlantic, and Caribbean, were approximately \$6.38 million. At the March meeting, the SEAMAP components based their allocations for 2026 on level funding. At this level, the share to be allocated for SEAMAP-Gulf activities (including GSMFC) will be \$2,519,060. Proposed FY2027 activities for all Gulf participants are shown in Table 4.

### **FY2026 Financial Report**

Total allocations for FY2026 program administration were \$582,215. The GSMFC has arranged and paid for all expenses associated with personnel, meetings, travel, and operating expenses to date. The remaining balance will be used to provide administration of the SEAMAP-Gulf program through December 31, 2026.

**TABLE 1. SEAMAP REPRESENTATIVES FOR FY2026**

Ted Switzer, Chairman  
Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission  
Florida Fish and Wildlife Research Institute

John Mareska  
Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources

Zach Zuckerman  
Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries

Jill Hendon  
University of Southern Mississippi  
Gulf Coast Research Laboratory

Fernando Martinez-Andrade  
Texas Parks and Wildlife Department

Frank Hernandez  
NOAA Fisheries  
Pascagoula Laboratory

John Froeschke (non-voting)  
Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council

**TABLE 2. SEAMAP WORK GROUP MEMBERS FOR FY2026**

**DATA COORDINATING WORK GROUP**

Michael Brochard  
SEAMAP Data Manager  
Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission

Jill Hendon  
University of Southern Mississippi  
Gulf Coast Research Laboratory

David Hanisko  
NOAA Fisheries  
Pascagoula Laboratory

Michael Harden  
LA Department of Wildlife and Fisheries

Megan Schrandt  
Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation  
Commission

**ENVIRONMENTAL DATA WORK GROUP**

Chris Levron  
Louisiana Department of Wildlife and  
Fisheries

Faith Robinson  
NOAA Fisheries  
Pascagoula Laboratory

Jason Herrmann  
Alabama Department of Conservation and  
Natural Resources

Tiffany Weidner  
Gulf Coast Research Laboratory  
University of Southern Mississippi

Ryan Caillouet  
NOAA Fisheries  
Pascagoula Laboratory

Grant Maresh  
Texas Parks and Wildlife Department

Julia Goodman  
Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation  
Commission

### **PLANKTON WORK GROUP**

Suzy Delaune  
Louisiana Department of Wildlife and  
Fisheries

Paul Larson  
Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation  
Commission

Janessa Fletcher  
Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation  
Commission

Jill Hendon  
University of Southern Mississippi  
Gulf Coast Research Laboratory

Jason Herrmann  
Alabama Department of Conservation  
and Natural Resources

Sara LeCroy  
SEAMAP Invertebrate Plankton  
Archiving Center  
University of Southern Mississippi/Gulf  
Coast Research Laboratory

Mark Benfield  
Louisiana State University

Glenn Zapfe  
NOAA Fisheries  
Pascagoula Laboratory

### **SHRIMP/GROUNDFISH WORK GROUP**

Evan Anderson  
National Marine Fisheries Service  
Pascagoula Laboratory

Fernando Martinez-Andrade  
Texas Parks and Wildlife Department

Suzy Delaune  
Louisiana Department of Wildlife and  
Fisheries

Lillian Collins  
University of Southern Mississippi  
Gulf Coast Research Laboratory

Jessica Marchant  
Alabama Department of Conservation and  
Natural Resources

Ryan Jones  
FWC/Florida Fish and Wildlife  
Research Institute

### **LONGLINE WORK GROUP**

Danielle McAree  
MSU Coastal Research & Extension Center

Grant Maresh  
Texas Parks and Wildlife Department

Anna Millender  
University of Southern Mississippi  
Gulf Coast Research Laboratory

Robert Boothe  
Louisiana Department of Wildlife and  
Fisheries

Trey Driggers  
NOAA Fisheries  
Pascagoula Laboratory

Brent Winner  
FWC/Florida Fish and Wildlife  
Research Institute

### **REEF FISH VIDEO WORK GROUP**

Mandy Tyler-Jedlund  
FWC/Florida Fish and Wildlife  
Research Institute

Zach Zuckerman  
Louisiana Department of Wildlife and  
Fisheries

Tiffany Weidner  
University of Southern Mississippi  
Gulf Coast Research Laboratory

Darin Topping  
Texas Parks and Wildlife Department

Eric Gigli  
Mississippi Department of Marine  
Resources

Craig Newton  
ADCNR/Marine Resources Division

Matthew Campbell  
NOAA Fisheries  
Pascagoula Laboratory

### **HABITAT MAPPING WORK GROUP**

Sean Kennan  
FWC/Florida Fish and Wildlife  
Research Institute

Lindsey George  
Texas Parks and Wildlife Department

Paul Grammer  
University of Southern Mississippi  
Gulf Coast Research Laboratory

Russell Rigby  
ADCNR/Marine Resources Division

Clint Edds  
Louisiana Department of Wildlife and  
Fisheries

Isabella Masarik  
NOAA Fisheries  
Pascagoula

**TABLE 3. PRELIMINARY 2027 PROGRAMMATIC BUDGET**

|             | FY2027 Funding |
|-------------|----------------|
| GSMFC       | \$582,215      |
| Alabama     | \$170,000      |
| Florida     | \$614,589      |
| Louisiana   | \$484,200      |
| Mississippi | \$590,588      |
| Texas       | \$ 77,468      |
| Total       | \$2,519,060    |

**TABLE 4. PROPOSED SEAMAP-GULF ACTIVITIES, 2027**

|                                   | Fall | Winter | Spring | Summer |
|-----------------------------------|------|--------|--------|--------|
| <b>Resource Surveys:</b>          |      |        |        |        |
| Spring Plankton Survey            |      |        | X      |        |
| Shrimp/Groundfish Surveys         | X    |        |        | X      |
| Fall Plankton Survey              | X    |        |        |        |
| Bottom Longline Survey            | X    |        | X      | X      |
| Reef Fish Survey                  | X    |        | X      | X      |
| <b>Information Operations:</b>    |      |        |        |        |
| Joint Annual Report               |      | X      |        |        |
| Data Input and Request Processing | X    | X      | X      | X      |
| Specimen Archiving and Loan       | X    | X      | X      | X      |
| Real-time Data Summaries          |      |        |        | X      |
| <b>Program Administration:</b>    | X    | X      | X      | X      |