

Deep-sea coral alternatives

NEFMC Habitat Committee

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East Boston, MA

Designation of deep-sea coral protection zones

Broad, depth range options:

3.4.4.1 Shelf slope from 200 m to edge of EEZ

3.4.4.2 Shelf slope from 100 m to 2000 m

Narrower canyon options:

3.4.4.3 All canyon HAPCs and some inter-canyon areas between designated canyons

3.4.4.4 All canyon HAPCs

3.4.4.5 Canyon HAPCs with known corals and some inter-canyon areas between designated canyons

3.4.4.6 Canyon HAPCs with known corals

3.4.4.7 Existing tilefish GRAs

Other coral areas:

3.4.4.8 Gulf of Maine coral zones

Management options for coral protection zones

Status quo
(3.4.2.1.1):

Monkfish DAS restrictions in Lydonia and Oceanographer canyons

Mobile bottom tending gear restrictions in tilefish GRAs

Additional restrictions – narrowest to broadest:

3.4.2.1.2
Prohibit all mobile bottom tending gear

3.4.2.1.3 Prohibit all commercial bottom tending gear

3.4.2.1.4
Prohibit all commercial gear

3.4.2.1.5
Prohibit all fishing gear

These could apply to all coral zones, some coral zones, or portions of coral zones

Access areas (3.4.2.2): Allow specific types of fishing in some or all coral protection zones

Challenges/thoughts

- Coral data issues:
 - Not all areas that may contain corals have been surveyed for corals
 - Some coral records are old, and corals may not still occur at those locations
 - In most cases, data are presence only, and the sampling effort is not consistent throughout the region, so density of samples is not an especially meaningful measure of coral density in an area

Challenges/thoughts, cont.

- Fishery data issues:
 - Fishing effort distribution data are often not spatially precise (we have discussed this at length in the context of SASI)
 - Especially in canyon areas, where topography/depth change rapidly, it is likely to be challenging to overlay coral distributions with fishing distributions

Challenges/thoughts, cont.

- Management strategy:
 - Committee and Council might select a very broad and precautionary strategy, or a more narrowly-focused strategy, or combine the two
 - Example of broad/precautionary – prohibit fishing in large areas not currently fished (e.g. 1000 m to EEZ)
 - Example of narrowly-focused – prohibit use of mobile bottom tending gear in small areas with well-documented coral presence (i.e. within a few specific canyons at depths where corals/fishing are likely to overlap)

Challenges/thoughts, cont.

- Other Councils' coral-related actions:
 - NPFMC – chose a broad/precautionary approach
 - goal was to 'freeze footprint' and prohibit fishing in large areas not currently fished
 - SAFMC – more narrowly-focused – first developed a series of coral zones, put blanket prohibitions on fishing in those zones, and then authorized specific access fisheries within portions of the zones

Research-related alternatives

3.4.3.1: Fully document all corals in NEFSC survey catches

3.4.3.2: Fully document all coral bycatch during observed fishing trips

3.4.3.3: Conduct additional focused coral surveys

3.4.3.4: Create a coral identification guide to support the above efforts



