

The Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, Marine Minerals Program (<http://www.boem.gov/Non-Energy-Minerals/Marine-Minerals-Program.aspx>) would like you to save the date for an upcoming working group addressing our "**Understanding the Habitat Value and Function of Shoal/Ridge/Trough Complexes to Fish and Fisheries on the Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico Outer Continental Shelf**" on **Friday, January 24, 2014**. The working group will be held in Charleston, SC in conjunction with the Southern Division of the American Fisheries Society Conference (<http://sdafs.org/meeting2014/>). If you'd like to attend in person please register for a one day attendance at the conference (unless you already plan to attend this conference) there is no additional cost for the working group. Alternatively, we plan to host a webinar of this meeting (details to come) so people may opt to attend remotely.

The overall objectives of this working group are to:

- (1) Further identify the habitat value and function of shoal/ridge/trough complexes to priority fish species on the Mid-Atlantic, South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico Outer Continental Shelf;
- (2) Discuss current scientific understanding of the habitat uniqueness, value and function of ridge/swale and shoal complexes for benthic and fish communities, identifying critical gaps in understanding;
- (3) Identify relevant areas, space, and time scales for study, cost-effective research methods, costs, and cost-leveraged study opportunities to develop appropriate duration datasets to address the critical gaps in understanding;
- (4) Foster collaboration among federal and state agencies, industry, and academia in addressing information needs;
- (5) Advance the understanding of how the disturbance of benthic habitat and infaunal/epifaunal communities may lead to cascading effects on keystone demersal and pelagic fishes;
- (6) Identify next steps, if appropriate, for the utilization of compiled knowledge and identify data gaps in future BOEM OCS management.

Presently BOEM and Normandeau are working together to finalize a draft white paper addressing the current knowledge of the habitat value and function of the various sand features, how the physical environment relates to the structure and function of these features, and the biological environment associated with these complexes. This draft white paper will be available for your review prior to the working group and will be critical to our discussion during the meeting. Utilizing the working group discussions and comments we will revise the paper and send out the final to all participants.

Please RSVP to marineminerals@boem.gov and let us know if you plan to attend remotely via webinar or in person.