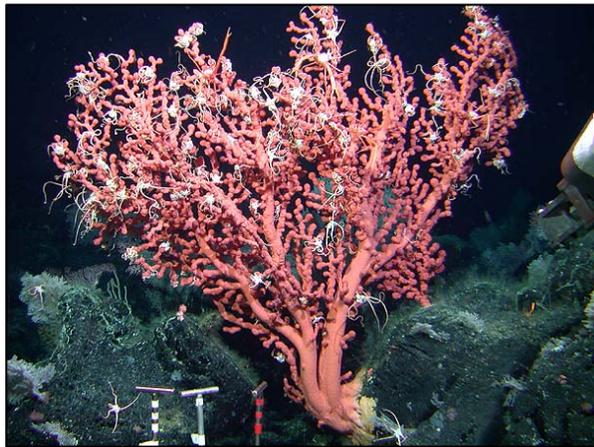


Fishermen's Perspectives on Conservation Options for Cold Water Corals in the United States

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Problem Statement

It has been recognized that cold water corals have life history characteristics that make them particularly vulnerable to disturbance. In addition, there is a growing consensus among scientists that cold water corals are threatened by human actions such as bottom trawling (targeting bottom dwelling fish), oil and gas drilling, and off-shore cable laying. This is of particular concern because of the growing agreement that cold water coral ecosystems are of ecological importance and may serve as nursery grounds for commercially important fish species. A problem arises because there is no clear mandate in the United States regarding how to approach protection of cold water corals, which leads to a debate on how the issue should be addressed. In addition, international concern exists regarding cold water corals found outside national jurisdictions. In order to advance action internationally, the U.S. needs to show action domestically.



Policy Research Objectives

The motivating questions behind this research are: 1) How can fishermen's knowledge of the resource and perceptions of conservation be incorporated into cold water coral policy development?; 2) Can understanding the issue from the perspective of the resource user inform policy decision making?; 3) How can cold water corals be protected within a system that encourages compliance?; and 4) Is a ban on bottom trawling necessary to protect cold water corals?

Proposed Research

The primary focus of this research is to answer the question: "What are the perceptions of commercial fishermen within the North Pacific and Mid-Atlantic regions regarding the issue of coral water coral conservation in the United States EEZ?" This includes sub-questions such as: How do fishermen view cold water corals? Do fishermen think they are damaging corals? Do they think there is a problem? How do fishermen think the situation should be resolved? In addition, this research hopes to provide regional insight by considering whether there are comparisons that can be made between fishermen in the U.S. and Atlantic Canada.



Tools and Techniques

This research will be conducted as a mail survey of federal fisheries permit holders in the Mid-Atlantic (New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, and North Carolina) and North Pacific (Alaska) regions. The survey instrument will be developed through interviews in each of the regions and once complete, mailed to a random sample of permit holders in each region. Results of the surveys will be analyzed using STATA or a similar program, and recommendations for domestic federal policy options will be made.

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