

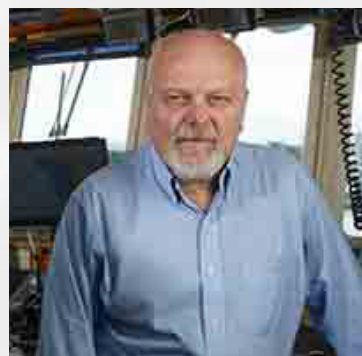
# WEBINAR

Tuesday  
July 28, 2020  
12:00 PM - 1:00 PM ET

## Establishing Baselines for Benthic Habitat and Fish Populations on the West Florida Shelf via the Power of Combined Visual and Acoustic Technologies

As incongruous as it seems, the northern Gulf of Mexico supports intensive natural resource extraction (fisheries, oil and gas), but is one of the most poorly mapped ocean areas of the United States. Only about 5% of the West Florida Shelf (WFS) was mapped prior to 2016. Bathymetric mapping identifies the characteristics of the bottom topography (ruggosity), but cannot, in and of itself, be used to characterize habitat types nor utilization and importance of target areas to a variety of biota. By employing in situ towed video systems, one can pair imagery and sonar mapping products to define habitat types and calculate the relative and absolute densities of biota associated with each. These mapping products have considerable utility in defining essential fish and protected species habitats, for locating and assessing potential marine protected areas, and for identifying areas that should be excluded for consideration from offshore development activities. As a result of a grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation's Gulf Environmental Benefits Fund (GBEF), the project undertook a large-scale bathymetric and habitat classification program on the WFS. This program resulted in an additional 2,700 km<sup>2</sup> of high-valued habitat being mapped. A number of candidate areas for additional protections and ongoing recovery efforts have been identified. This webinar outlines the process by which potential target areas are evaluated, the development of integrated habitat assessment products, and the value of such products supporting resource management and recovery planning.

### Presenters



**Dr. Steven Murawski**  
University of South Florida  
College of Marine Science



**Chad Lembke**  
University of South Florida  
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**Sarah Grasty**  
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**Alex Ilich**  
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