

ANNOUNCEMENT OF FEDERAL FUNDING OPPORTUNITY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Federal Agency Name(s): National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Department of Commerce

Funding Opportunity Title: Marine Fisheries Initiative (MARFIN)

Announcement Type: Initial

Funding Opportunity Number: NOAA-NMFS-SE-2013-2003417

Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) Number: 11.433, Marine Fisheries Initiative

Dates: Applications must be received by 5:00 p.m., Eastern Time on August 9, 2012 to be considered for funding. Hard copy applications arriving after the closing date given above will be accepted for review only if the applicant can document that the application was provided to a delivery service that guaranteed delivery prior to the specified closing date and time; in any event, hard copy applications received by NMFS later than two business days following the closing date will not be accepted.

Funding Opportunity Description: The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), Southeast Region, is seeking proposals under the Marine Fisheries Initiative Program (MARFIN), for research and development projects that optimize the use of fisheries in the Gulf of Mexico and off the South Atlantic states of North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida involving the U.S. fishing industry (recreational and commercial), including fishery biology, resource assessment, socioeconomic assessment, management and conservation, selected harvesting methods, and fish handling and processing. This program addresses NOAA's mission goal to "Protect, Restore, and Manage the Use of Coastal and Ocean Resources Through an Ecosystem Approach to Management."

FULL ANNOUNCEMENT TEXT

I. Funding Opportunity Description

A. Program Objective

The Marine Fisheries Initiative (MARFIN) is a competitive Federal assistance program that funds projects seeking to optimize research and development benefits from U.S. marine fishery resources through cooperative efforts involving the best research and management talents to accomplish priority activities. Projects funded under MARFIN provide answers for fishery needs covered by the NMFS Strategic Plan, available from National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), particularly those goals relating to: rebuilding over-fished marine fisheries, maintaining currently productive fisheries, and integrating conservation of protected species and fisheries management. Funding priorities for MARFIN are formulated from recommendations received from non-federal scientific and technical experts and from NMFS research and operations officials.

With the long-term planning capabilities available through the Southeast Data Assessment and Review (SEDAR) process, the priorities are selected to coordinate assessment needs with this solicitation. There is no preference between short-term and long-term projects.

B. Program Priorities

Proposals must address one of the priority areas listed below as they pertain to federally managed species. If you select more than one priority, you should list first on your application the priority that most closely reflects the objectives of your proposal. Projects should focus on the greatest probability of recovering, maintaining, improving, or developing fisheries; collecting data directly applicable for improving stock assessment scheduled in the next three years (see <http://www.sefsc.noaa.gov/sedar/>); and/or generating increased values and opportunities for commercial and recreational fisheries. Any research projects pertaining to effects of the Deepwater Horizon oil spill as they relate to the priorities will be considered. The priorities are not listed in any particular order of importance.

1. Bycatch

The bycatch of biological organisms (including interactions with sea turtles and marine mammals) by various fishing gear types can have wide-reaching impacts from a fisheries management and an ecological standpoint. Numerous factors contribute to bycatch and bycatch mortality, including fishing gear, depth, species morphology, environmental variables, and regulations. Determining methods and gear for reducing bycatch and bycatch mortality can reduce fishing mortality and operational costs, increase efficiency, and result in less waste.

a. Collect and analyze shrimp trawl fisheries data in the southeast U.S. to expand and update current bycatch estimates, temporally and spatially emphasizing areas of greatest impact by shrimping. Sampling effort should include estimates of numbers, weight, and random samples of size (age) structure of associated bycatch complex. The statistical design and extent of the shrimp-trawl observation program should ensure bycatch data collected are appropriate and sufficient for stock assessment of the bycatch species, specifically species of commercial and recreational importance such as red snapper.

b. Identify, develop, and evaluate gear development, and evaluation of gear, non-gear, and tactical fishing options to reduce bycatch in the southeast U.S. shrimp trawl fisheries.

c. Obtain estimates of sea turtle interaction and capture rates in Southeast U.S shrimp trawls or other data that addresses problems in estimating sea turtle interaction and capture rates in southeast U.S. shrimp fisheries as identified in the 2011 biological opinion on southeast shrimp fisheries.

d. Identify gear and tactics that can be used to reduce sawfish interactions with shrimp trawl gear in the Gulf of Mexico.

Note: guidance and research requirements for shrimp trawl fisheries are contained in the Cooperative Bycatch Plan for the Southeast, available from NMFS.

e. Characterize and assess the impact of bycatch of regulatory discards in the commercial and recreational reef fish fisheries including depth-related release mortality for species caught with hook and line, bottom longline, and bandit gear. Studies are needed to evaluate the impacts of the Gulf of Mexico individual fishing quota programs on bycatch, including whether discards are due to harvest of undersized fish or lack of sufficient allocation. Studies are also needed to estimate the magnitude of discarded snapper-grouper species associated with quota and seasonal closures in the Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic.

f. Characterize the species composition, age, sex, size, and disposition of all fishes caught and assess the impact of bycatch of undersized reef fish, shark, and mackerels, including release mortality, during recreational and commercial fishing. Research on the catch-and-release mortality of reef fish species, by gear (e.g., capture by commercial bandit rigs that are electrically or hydraulically powered), sector (e.g., headboat, private boat, charter boat, commercial), and depth. Studies are needed to evaluate acute (short-term observations typically at surface by observers) with chronic, long-term release survival rates.

g. Identify gear and tactics that can be used to return regulatory discards to depth in the recreational and commercial reef fish fisheries to minimize or reverse pressure-related fishing trauma.

h. Test and validate the use of on-board recording systems (e.g., electronic logbooks) for capturing information on discarded fishes in the commercial and recreational reef fish fisheries including species, length, depth, location, and disposition (float, swim, etc.).

i. Identify gear and tactics that can be used to reduce sea turtle interactions with reef fish bottom longline gear in the Gulf of Mexico.

j. Research to document predation rates by marine mammals on discarded reef fish and mackerel species.

2. Reef Fish and other Fishery Resources Associated with Reef Environments

Some species within the reef fish complex are overfished and/or experiencing overfishing because of directed efforts and bycatch in other fisheries. Reef fish are vulnerable to overfishing because they tend to concentrate over specific types of habitat, are often long-lived, may aggregate to spawn, and sometimes change sex.

a. Collect basic biological data for species in commercially and recreationally important fisheries. For all reef fish species, representative age, length, and sex composition data are needed for all sectors (commercial, private, for-hire), gear, seasons, and areas. Life history studies are needed that cover the complete geographic range of species scheduled for upcoming stock assessments (see www.sefsc.noaa.gov/sedar/). Species-specific estimates of recruitment, fecundity, steepness, natural mortality, release mortality, and gear selectivity are also needed for stock assessments, as well as estimates of how catchability has changed overtime due to technological and other advances. Fishery-independent data that can be used to assess status and trends of reef fish species are needed. In relation to the oil spill, particular emphasis should be placed on determining the impacts on deepwater species of commercial and recreational importance (e.g. yellowedge grouper, warsaw grouper). Proposed projects may include the following:

(1) Conduct research on age, growth, and reproduction of reef fish.

(a) Describe the age, growth, and fecundity, especially for South Atlantic, Gulf of Mexico, and Caribbean species that are scheduled for upcoming stock assessments in the next several years.

(b) Collect otoliths from groupers, snappers, and other reef fish species according to the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission (GSMFC) otolith manual. Analyze age information (by gear and sector) considering temporal and geographic effects, where applicable. Develop standardized techniques for aging reef fishes. Resolve any discrepancies in fish age estimates by different institutions.

(c) Age sampling from commercial and recreational fishery sectors (e.g., private, charter, headboat) that is representative of the catches for South Atlantic, Gulf of Mexico,

and Caribbean species. Conduct representative sampling of age- and length-composition consistently across area, time, and gear. Examine the age structure of reef fishes taken from longlines (survey and fishery) and other gear, to evaluate availability to gear types and the geographic distribution of fish as they age.

(d) Identify spawning locations for reef fishes in the Gulf of Mexico, South Atlantic, and Caribbean.

(e) Investigate life history (i.e. growth, survival, feeding, habitat preferences, movement) of larval/juvenile (ages 0 and 1) red snapper in the South Atlantic.

(2) Develop fishery-independent methods and oceanographic models for monitoring and predicting recruitment of reef fishes in the Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic.

(3) Conduct fishery-independent surveys in the Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic to reconcile differences between catch per unit effort indices and fishery-dependent age composition used for stock assessments. Indices should cover a broad seasonal/spatial scale, and age structure.

(4) Assess the contribution of live-bottom habitat, marine protected areas, and habitat areas of particular concern (HAPC) in the South Atlantic, Gulf of Mexico, and Caribbean to reef fish recruitment and survival.

(5) Conduct research to estimate changes in catchability by gear over time due to the introduction of GPS and marine chart-plotting equipment

(6) Research the stock structure of reef fish and other fishery resources associated with reef fish environments.

(a) Examine retention and residency of reef fish species. Examine temporal and spatial differences in the size at age, size at maturity, and other life history characteristics.

(b) Conduct genetic research on stock structure of commercially and recreationally important reef fishes in the Gulf and South Atlantic. Continue oceanographic and genetic studies to identify the origin of spiny lobster recruitment to the Southeast United States and Caribbean. Use genetics techniques to estimate the effective population size of reef fish populations in the Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic.

(c) Conduct traditional tagging studies or use genetic tag methods to estimate natural mortality and release mortality rates of red snapper and other reef fishes. Tagging data are also needed to help elucidate movement of black sea bass between Mid-Atlantic and South Atlantic regions and movement of Gulf red snapper between the eastern and western Gulf. A tag and recapture program for red drum in the Gulf of Mexico is needed to help determine the status of the offshore portion of the stock. Tagging programs specifically

designed to examine the mixing of king mackerel between Gulf and South Atlantic regions should be developed. Tagging data are needed for Caribbean spiny lobster to provide estimates of growth and natural mortality.

2. Management of reef fish

(1) Identify ways to design, manage, and implement a U.S. Caribbean fishing permit specific to gear or fishery.

(2) Develop a pilot program for fisheries-dependent and fisheries-independent sampling of reef fish species, such as groupers, tilefishes, and snappers, including quantifying bycatch, catch composition, and size frequency.

(3) Evaluate the utility of electronic logbooks and other data collection systems for commercial and for-hire fisheries in the Gulf of Mexico, South Atlantic, and Caribbean. Projects should focus on validation of data and timeliness of data delivery.

(4) Develop statistical models integrated with stock assessment projections for use by fishery managers in evaluating the effects of management actions (e.g., bag limits, size limits, seasonal closures, etc.) on future harvests rates and catch limits.

(5) Develop pilot studies to test alternative management strategies for the recreational sector, such as tagging programs, days-at-sea, catch share programs, and first-fish caught retention policies.

(6) Characterize the impacts of invasive species (lionfish, etc.) on ecosystems and their influence on stocks managed by fishery management councils, including information on geographic ranges, rates of expansion, predator-prey relationships, and competition with native species for habitat and prey.

(7) Investigate the value of Gulf of Mexico oil rigs as fish habitat for reef fishes as well as their potential as habitats to enhance stock building efforts.

3. Red Snapper Research

Red snapper are overfished and undergoing overfishing in the South Atlantic and are overfished in the Gulf of Mexico. Additional information is needed to improve stock assessments of red snapper.

a. Research (e.g., otolith analysis, tagging, etc.) to better describe stock structure and mixing rates of red snapper and other reef fishes between the eastern and western Gulf of Mexico.

b. Develop and evaluate gear, fishing tactics, and management measures to minimize the bycatch of or increase the survival of discarded red snapper and other reef fish species in

the directed and shrimp trawl fisheries. Identify fishing tactics and gear that can be used to reduce red snapper interactions and discard mortality in the South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico with hook-and-line gear.

c. Characterize and assess the impact of bycatch of undersized red snapper, including release mortality, during recreational and commercial fishing. Conduct research on the catch-and-release mortality of red snapper and other reef fish species by gear, sector, and depth. Studies are needed to evaluate acute (short-term observations typically at surface by observers) with chronic, long-term release survival rates. More information is needed on release mortality and discard rate by depth, fish size, season, and fishery. Studies are also needed to evaluate the impacts of the Gulf of Mexico individual fishing quota program on bycatch.

d. Conduct age and length sampling across area, time, and gear from commercial and recreational fishery sectors that is representative of the catches for South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico red snapper. Examine the age structure of red snapper taken from longlines (survey and fishery) and other gear, to evaluate availability to gear types and the geographic distribution of fish as they age.

e. Obtain better estimates of red snapper natural mortality and release mortality in commercial and recreational fisheries.

f. Investigate life history (i.e., growth, survival, feeding, habitat preferences, movement) of larval/juvenile (ages 0 and 1) red snapper in the South Atlantic.

g. Monitor the expansion or repopulation of reefs by red snapper along the west coast of Florida and South Atlantic and assess the potential impact on reef fish populations in terms of potential competitive interactions and catch based estimates of abundance.

h. Conduct gut content analysis of groundfishes and predator-prey interactions, to assess possible impacts of reductions in shrimp trawl bycatch on post-settlement survival of juvenile red snapper and other reef fishes.

4. Economic and Sociocultural Studies

Social and economic assessments are required components of all fishery management plans and actions. These assessments support the accomplishment of management objectives while minimizing adverse social and economic impacts.

a. Develop models that explain the production of fishing effort, including entry-exit decisions, in response to regulatory actions (e.g., annual catch limits, individual quotas, time/area closures, trip and bag limits, and size limits) and other external forces (e.g., imports, trade restrictions, hurricanes, and other environmental factors) for the commercial, for-hire and recreational sectors. Research should also consider how targeting behavior

changes spatially and temporally (e.g., when to fish, where to fish, how much to fish, what species to target, what gear to use, etc.) due to the above-mentioned forces.

b. Evaluate the socio-economic effects of allocation of harvests (total allowable catch/quotas) among competing user groups. Estimate the economic value of allocation to the commercial, private angler, and for-hire sectors (i.e., sector separation). Analyses should quantify the economic surplus to each sector and identify the allocation that maximizes the economic benefit to the nation, subject to the biological constraints specified by the respective rebuilding plans, where appropriate. Key fisheries include individual species (e.g., red snapper, vermilion snapper, king mackerel, red grouper, and gag), and fishery management plan-designated species groups (South Atlantic snapper-grouper and Gulf of Mexico (Gulf) grouper or reef fish). Analyses should consider behavioral responses in targeting and effort redirection (if applicable). Evaluation of the commercial sector should include analysis by gear type and fishing location (eastern, northern, or western Gulf; Florida Keys), including any fishery management plan-designated location/season/zone, while the evaluation of the recreational sector should distinguish between charter, party boat, and private angler by fishing location.

c. Evaluate the socio-economic performance of past regulatory actions (e.g., area or seasonal closures, trip limits, bag limits, size limits, etc.) in the commercial, for-hire, and recreational sectors. The research should also consider regulatory tools that may help minimize the socio-economic impact of accountability measures.

d. Evaluate the potential use of catch shares for the for-hire (charter and headboat), recreational (private angler), and commercial (including small-scale fisheries) sectors.

e. Estimate demand and supply relationships in the market for for-hire services. Fishing quality (stock size, catch per unit effort, average fish size) as a determinant of demand and supply should be emphasized. Key species are red drum, king mackerel, Spanish mackerel, red grouper, gag, black grouper, dolphin, wahoo, vermilion snapper, yellowtail snapper, red snapper, greater amberjack, and Atlantic black sea bass. The models should be applicable to the evaluation of the economic effects of common management tools including, but not limited to, minimum and maximum size limits, bag limits, and seasonal closures. Important supply and demand factors such as cost, trip duration, time of departure, capacity, services offered, target species, fishing location, etc., should be investigated. Specific attention should also be given to species target behavior, time and space decisions. The project should clearly address the differences between the charter and headboat industries, such as clientele, target species, location of services, and affiliated tourism.

f. Identify and examine economic incentives and other innovative alternatives to minimize by-catch, including by-catch quotas, gear and season/area restrictions. The project

should contrast the relative costs, potential gains, and level of by-catch reduction associated with traditional methods and any innovative alternatives addressed by the project.

g. Examine the costs and benefits of vessel and/or permit buy-back programs in the snapper-grouper (South Atlantic), reef-fish (Gulf of Mexico), and shrimp fisheries (Gulf of Mexico shrimp and South Atlantic rock shrimp). The analysis must include costs of the program and examination of alternative funding mechanisms.

h. Survey crew members/mates who are not owner-operators in commercial and for-hire fisheries in the Southeast. Collect social and economic information, including, but not limited to, basic household demographic information, household income and debt, employment patterns (seasonal, across fisheries, non-fishing), measures of well-being, and attitudinal information concerning fishing, fisheries management, and expectations of future well-being and continued participation in the fishing industry. Appropriate sampling to support analysis by fishery and gear-type will be required.

i. Evaluate the effect of recent trade-related actions (e.g., anti-dumping duties, payments under the Byrd Amendment, import bans, or other restrictions) and government assistance programs (e.g., trade assistance adjustments, hurricane and other disaster assistance) on the economic status and performance of the domestic shrimp fishery, including both the harvesting and processing sectors.

j. Evaluate the social impacts of the Gulf of Mexico red snapper, and grouper-tilefish individual fishing quota (IFQ) programs. This research would examine how social relationships have changed, by conducting a social network analysis of the leasing and selling of shares. This research should examine the central actor's ownership of shares and how this has changed over time; the online communities that have formed since implementation of the program and provide a venue for buying, selling, and leasing shares; and the previous and current fishing strategies (location, species fished, and landings, etc.) of fishermen who have sold their shares and those who were not granted shares and currently lease shares.

k. Evaluate the social capital within fishing communities. Projects should include an examination of: existing fishing-related organizations; existing organizations in a community (e.g., church, civic association, etc.); existing and potential partnerships for community organization; perceptions and interest in organizing of fishermen; perceptions and interest of community members; and barriers to organization. Projects should focus on geographically defined communities and encompass both commercial and recreational fisheries. Case studies of successful fishermen's organizations may be used for context and background, but focus of the project should be on adopting timely and efficient measures of social capital, defining the components of social capital for each respective community, and describing differences among communities.

l. Identify and evaluate the associations between fishermen, communities, and specific habitats. Descriptions of various gear types and their associated habitats within fishing communities should include a measure of sensitivity of habitat and the fishing community's reliance on those habitats. Social impacts for various habitat-related issues and actions, such as essential fish habitat (EFH), habitat of particular concern, restoration, and inland water-related issues should be discussed. The researchers should work with habitat and social science staff to identify regionally focused topics and develop a methodology for evaluating the social impacts of the implementation of management measures to address habitat-related issues.

m. Evaluate the existence and magnitude of subsistence fishing, including consideration of regional, demographic, or other factors that influence the rate of subsistence fishing. The research approach should be either an in-depth study of a particular fishing community or a broader regional approach using survey methodology or mixed methods. The research should examine all aspects of subsistence fishing, whether from the shore, pier, or vessels at sea, and encompass a multi-faceted view of subsistence or food-oriented fishing in the context of the modern household economy - fishing to eat in one's nuclear and extended family settings; use of fish for celebrations; fishing to engage customary trade and to maintain reciprocity and various traditions; use of fish for barter; use of commercial fishing and other sources of income to maintain subsistence activities. For subsistence within the "recreational" sector, the incidence of subsistence fishing by mode, i.e., charter, headboat, or private angler (shore or boat), should be examined. Research should include an examination of the significance that subsistence fishing has for individuals, families, and community(ies) in terms of food security and how the importance of fishing for food security may vary by race, ethnicity, gender, and class.

n. Collect social and demographic information on fish processors and fish dealers to develop an overall profile of this sector in the Southeast. The data collection should include information on employers and employees. The information collected should include, but not be limited to, the number of full-time and part-time employees at each facility, gender, race and ethnicity, country of origin, and wages earned by employees. The collection of information on facility description and future operational plans should also be considered. Various data collection methodologies may be utilized, such as conducting in-person interviews, surveys, or mixed methods.

o. Examine and describe seafood processing, distribution, and marketing channels in the Southeast region. Examine the impact of the international seafood flows on regional and national markets.

5. Integrated Ecosystem Assessment

The goal of Integrated Ecosystem Assessment (IEA) is to provide an ecosystem-based fisheries management approach to managing various ecosystem services. By integrating information from all other MARFIN projects such as fisheries stock assessments, bycatch, and community social economics, the IEA uses Management Strategy Evaluation to make clearer the management tradeoffs between multiple users of the available resources. It is recommended that proposals in this area pertaining to the Gulf of Mexico demonstrate direct support of the existing GOM IEA Program through collaboration with the GOM IEA team. Proposed projects may include the following:

a. Conduct research including diet composition and gut content of Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic fishes currently under represented in the existing trophic database or literature.

b. Develop an ecosystem-based modeling of fish species with emphasis on examining the collateral effects of management actions on one species relative to others. Ecosystem-based modeling should be conducted to allow the assessment of the influence of long-term environmental factors such as sea-level rise, climate change, and coral community health.

c. Conduct studies that lead to the quantification of uncertainty (especially climatic variability and process error) of results of various ecosystem modeling platforms.

d. Conduct studies that describe socioeconomic/ecological trade-offs between the various ecosystem services provided by the Gulf of Mexico Large Marine Ecosystem.

e. Identify and quantify ecosystem drivers and pressures and comparative risk analysis of candidate management strategies analysis.

f. Obtain data resurrection, compilation, or community-based knowledge that leads to pertinent data histories that can readily be used in various ecosystem models.

C. Program Authority

Authority for the Marine Fisheries Initiative Program is provided by the following:

16 U.S.C 753a

II. Award Information

A. Funding Availability

Approximately \$2.0 million may be available in fiscal year (FY) 2013 for projects. This amount includes possible in-house projects. Actual funding availability for this program is

contingent upon Fiscal Year 2013 Congressional appropriations. The NMFS Southeast Regional Office anticipates awarding approximately ten projects that will range from \$25,000 to \$175,000 per year for each project (not to exceed \$175,000 per year). The total federal amount that may be requested shall not exceed \$175,000 for a one-year project, \$350,000 for a two-year project, and \$525,000 for a three-year project. Applications exceeding these amounts will be rejected/returned without further consideration. Publication of this notice does not obligate NMFS to award any specific grant or cooperative agreement or any of the available funds. Project proposals accepted for funding with a project period over one year do not have to compete for the additional years of funding. However, funding for the additional years is contingent upon the availability of funds and satisfactory performance and is at the sole discretion of the agency.

B. Project/Award Period

The period of awards may be from one to three years.

C. Type of Funding Instrument

Proposals selected for funding will be funded through a grant or cooperative agreement depending upon the amount of collaboration, participation, or involvement of NOAA in the management of the project. An example of substantial involvement is an exchange between the recipient and a NMFS laboratory of sample materials for analysis.

III. Eligibility Information

A. Eligible Applicants

Eligible applicants may be institutions of higher education, nonprofits, commercial organizations, individuals, state and local and Indian tribal governments. Federal agencies or institutions are not eligible. Foreign governments, organizations under the jurisdiction of foreign governments, and international organizations are excluded for purposes of this solicitation since the objective of the MARFIN program is to optimize research and development benefits from U.S. marine fishery resources.

B. Cost Sharing or Matching Requirement

Cost-sharing is not required for this program.

C. Other Criteria that Affect Eligibility

Not applicable.

IV. Application and Submission Information

A. Address to Request Application Package

Application packages are available through www.grants.gov. If applicants do not have internet access, applications may be requested from: National Marine Fisheries Service, State/Federal Liaison Branch, 263 13th Avenue South, St. Petersburg, FL 33701.

B. Content and Form of Application

1. Format Requirements:

All pages should be single-spaced and must be composed in at least a 12-point font with one-inch margins on 8 1/2 x 11 paper. The project description may not exceed 25 pages, exclusive of title page, project synopsis, literature cited, budget information, resumes of investigators, and letters of support (if any). Failure to follow the requirements will result in the rejection of the application and subsequent return.

Any PDF or other attachments that are included in an electronic application must meet the above format requirements when printed out.

2. Content Requirements:

The following information must be included. Applications that do not follow the format requirements will be rejected and returned.

a. Signed Title Page: The Application for Federal Assistance (SF-424) must be signed by the authorized representative. Electronic signatures submitted through www.grants.gov satisfy this requirement.

b. Project Synopsis (1-page limit): It is critical that the project synopsis accurately describes the project being proposed and conveys all essential elements of the activities. It is imperative that potential applicants tie their proposals to one of the program priorities described in Section I.B., Funding Opportunity Description. The Project Synopsis must identify the principal investigator(s) and a brief statement of their qualifications.

c. Project Description (25-page limit): The applicant should describe and justify the project being proposed and address each of the evaluation criteria as described below in Section V., Application Review Information. Project descriptions should include clear objectives and specific approaches to achieving those objectives, including methods, timelines, and expected outcomes. The project descriptions should address the Selection Factors, found under Section V., Application Review Information, since those Selection Factors will be considered in the selection process.

d. Literature Cited: If applicable.

e. Budget and Budget Justification: There must be a detailed budget justification accompanying the SF424A Budget Information form. Provide justifications for all budget items in sufficient detail to enable the reviewers to evaluate the appropriateness of the funding requested. For multi-year award applications, indicate and describe separate funding amounts for each funding year in the detailed justification and in the SF424A Budget Information form. You must submit a copy of a current negotiated indirect cost rate agreement with a federal agency, if such agreement exists.

f. Resumes (2 pages maximum for each major participant).

g. Standard Application Forms: Please refer to the appropriate application package available through Grants.gov.

h. NOAA must analyze the potential environmental impacts, as required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Consequently, as part of an applicant's package, applicants are required to answer the following questions:

(1) Has any National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) or other environmental compliance documentation (e.g., Endangered Species Act Biological Opinion; Letter of Concurrence or Biological Assessment/Evaluation; Clean Water Act permit; State Historic Preservation Officer consultation; state environmental compliance documentation (mini-NEPA); etc.) been completed? If yes, list the environmental compliance documentation that has been completed and provide copies of the documentation as appropriate.

(2) Would the proposed activity or environmental impacts of the activity be subject to public controversy? If yes, describe the potential controversy.

(3) Would the proposed activity have potential environmental impacts that are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks? If yes, describe the impacts that are uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.

(4) Is the proposed activity related to other activities (both NOAA and non-NOAA that together may cumulatively adversely impact the environment? For example, the proposed activity is one of a series of projects that together may cause a change in the pattern of pollutant discharge, traffic generation, economic change, flood plain change, or land use. If yes, briefly describe the other activities and discuss how the related projects would have cumulative impacts on the environment.

(5) Would the proposed activity involve a non-native species? If yes, describe how the non-native species is involved.

(6) Would the proposed activity occur within a unique geographic area of notable recreational, ecological, scientific, cultural, historical, scenic or aesthetic importance? If yes, describe the area, including the name or designation if known.

(7) Would the proposed activity affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources? If yes, describe the impact.

(8) Would the proposed activity affect public health or safety? The effects may be adverse or beneficial and temporary, long-term, or permanent. If yes, describe the effects and the circumstances that would cause these impacts.

(9) Would the proposed activity affect directly or indirectly, in an adverse or beneficial manner, any listed endangered, threatened, or otherwise protected species or their critical habitat under federal and state laws including the Endangered Species Act and the Marine Mammal Protection Act? If yes, name the species and/or habitat that will be impacted and describe the circumstances that would impact the species and/or habitat.

Applications must identify the principal participants, and include copies of any agreements describing the specific tasks to be performed by participants. Project applications should give a clear presentation of the proposed work, the methods for carrying out the project, its relevance to managing and enhancing the use of Gulf of Mexico and/or South Atlantic fishery resources, and cost estimates as they relate to specific aspects of the project. Budgets must include a detailed breakdown, by category of expenditures, with appropriate justification for both the federal and non-federal shares.

All applications must include funding for the principal investigator to participate in an annual MARFIN Conference that NMFS may hold in the southeast regional area at the completion of the project. The conference funds must be obligated and held by the recipient in reserve for later use, when the conference may be held. The presenter will be asked to provide an abstract and PowerPoint presentation to NMFS in advance if the conference is held.

Applications should exhibit familiarity with related work that is completed or ongoing. Proposals should state whether the research applies to the Gulf of Mexico, South Atlantic or North Atlantic for highly migratory species or multiple areas. Successful applicants are required to collect and manage data in accordance with standardized procedures and format approved or specified by NMFS and to participate with NMFS in specific cooperative activities that are determined by consultations between NMFS and successful applicants before project grants are awarded. All data collected as part of an awarded grant must be provided to the National Marine Fisheries Service.

C. Submission Dates and Times

Applications must be received by 5:00 p.m. Eastern Time on August 9, 2012 to be considered for funding. For applications submitted through www.grants.gov, a date and time receipt stamp must be included and will be the basis of determining timeliness. Hard copy submissions will be dated and time-stamped when they are received in the NMFS office. Hard copy applications arriving after the closing date given above will be accepted for review only if the applicant can document that the application was provided to a delivery service that guaranteed delivery prior to the specified closing date and time; in any event, hard-copy applications received by NMFS later than two business days following the closing date will not be accepted. Faxed or emailed copies of applications will not be accepted.

D. Intergovernmental Review

Applications submitted by state and local governments are subject to the provisions of Executive Order (E.O.) 12372, Intergovernmental Review of Federal Programs. Any applicant submitting an application for funding is required to complete item 16 on SF-424 regarding clearance by the State Single Point of Contact (SPOC) established as a result of E.O. 12372. To find out about and comply with a State's process under EO 12372, the names, addresses and phone numbers of participating SPOCs are listed in the Office of Management and Budget's home page at: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/grants/spoc.html>.

E. Funding Restrictions

Indirect Costs - The indirect rate is fixed at 25 percent to maximize the funds available for actual research and to allow applicants to recover a reasonable indirect cost. If the applicant does not have a negotiated indirect cost rate agreement with a federal agency, then they may direct cost all charges, or submit a request to establish a rate. The federal share of indirect costs awarded will not exceed 25 percent of the total direct costs identified on Standard Form 424A Budget Information.

Construction is not an allowable activity under this program. Therefore, applications will not be accepted for construction projects.

Funding beyond the first year will be dependent upon satisfactory performance and the continued availability of funds.

F. Other Submission Requirements

Please refer to important information in "Submission Dates and Times" above to help ensure your application is received on time.

Applications must be submitted through www.grants.gov unless an applicant does not have internet access. In that case, hard copies, with original signatures may be sent to:

National Marine Fisheries Service, State/Federal Liaison Branch, 263 13th Avenue South, St. Petersburg, FL 33701.

V. Application Review Information

A. Evaluation Criteria

Applications responsive to this solicitation will be evaluated by three or more appropriate private and/or public sector experts to determine their technical merit. These reviewers will provide individual evaluations of the proposals. No consensus advice will be given. These reviewers provide comments and assign scores to the applications based on the following criteria, with the points shown in parentheses:

1. Importance/relevance and applicability of proposed projects to the program goals (35 points):

This criterion ascertains whether there is intrinsic value in the proposed work and/or relevance to NOAA, Federal, regional, state, or local activities. For this program, this includes: Does the proposal have a clearly stated goal(s) with associated objectives that meet the needs outlined in the project narrative?

2. Technical/scientific merit (40 points):

This criterion assesses whether the approach is technically sound and/or innovative, if the methods are appropriate, and whether there are clear project goals and objectives. For this program, this includes: Does the proposal clearly identify and describe, in the project outline and statement of work, scientific methodologies and analytical procedures that will adequately address project goals and objectives?

3. Overall qualifications of applicants (15 points):

This criterion ascertains whether the applicant possesses the necessary education, experience, training, facilities, and administrative resources to accomplish the project. For this program, this includes: Does the applicant possess the necessary education and identify the appropriate resources to complete the project?

4. Project costs (10 points):

This criterion evaluates the budget to determine if it is realistic and commensurate with the project needs and time frame. For this program, this includes: Does the budget appropriately allocate and justify costs?

B. Review and Selection Process

When we receive applications we will screen them to ensure that they were received by the deadline date (see Submission Dates and Times); include SF 424 authenticated by an authorized representative; were submitted by an eligible applicant; address one of the funding priorities for federally managed species; and include a budget, statement of work, and milestones, and identify the principal investigator. We do not have to screen applications before the submission deadline to identify deficiencies that would cause your application to be rejected so that you would have an opportunity to correct them. However, should we do so and provide you information about deficiencies, or should you independently decide it is desirable to do so, you may correct any deficiencies in your application before the deadline. After the deadline, the application must remain as submitted; no changes can be made to it. If your application does not conform to these requirements and the deadline for submission has passed, the application will be returned without further consideration.

Following the technical review, we will determine the score for each individual review and average the individual review scores to determine the final score for each application. Then we will rank applications in descending order by their average scores. The top twenty applications will be forwarded to a panel for further review. Those applications that are not in the top twenty category will be eliminated from further consideration.

Those applications that meet the top twenty ranking will be presented to a panel of non-NOAA fishery experts known as the MARFIN Panel. Each member of the MARFIN Panel individually considers: if needs of the Agency are addressed in each proposal; if the project assists industry; and if the project addresses issues that are important to regional fisheries management. Needs of the Agency follow the information identified in the Magnuson-Stevens Act, Title III, Sections 301 and 404. The individuals on the panel provide comments and rate each of these proposals as either "Recommended for Funding" or "Not Recommended for Funding." The panel will give no consensus advice. The Program Manager ranks the proposals in the order of preferred funding based on the number of panel members recommending the proposal for funding. In the event that there are two or more projects tied in the panel's percent selected category that are competing for the final available funds, all tied projects will be given equal consideration by the selecting official regardless of their peer review score. The selecting official will resolve any ties by selecting the projects that are most pertinent to the research needs as listed under the program priorities at the time of selection.

C. Selection Factors

The MARFIN Panel ratings will be provided in rank order to the Selecting Official for final funding recommendations. The Selecting Official shall award in the rank order unless the proposal is justified to be selected out of rank order based on the following factors:

1. Availability of funding
2. Balance/distribution of funds:
 - a. geographically
 - b. by type of institutions
 - c. by type of partners
 - d. by research areas
 - e. by project types
3. Duplication of other projects funded or considered for funding by NOAA/federal agencies
4. Program priorities and policy factors
5. Applicant's prior award performance
6. Partnerships with/Participation of targeted groups
7. Adequacy of information necessary for NOAA staff to make a NEPA determination and draft necessary documentation before recommendations for funding are made to the Grants Officer.

The Selecting Official may negotiate the funding level of the proposal. The Selecting Official makes final recommendations for award to the Grants Officer who is authorized to obligate funds.

D. Anticipated Announcement and Award Dates

Subject to the availability of funds, successful applications are usually recommended for funding within 275 days from the date of publication of this notice. The earliest start date of awards (1st of a month) is approximately 395 days after the date of publication of this notice. Applicants should consider this selection and processing time in developing requested start dates for their applications. It is suggested that a September 1, 2013, start date be requested on the application.

The exact amount of funds awarded, the final scope of activities, the project duration, and specific NMFS cooperative involvement with the activities of each project are determined in pre-award negotiations between the applicant, the NOAA Grants Office and

the NMFS Program Office. Recipients must not initiate projects until an approved award is received from the NOAA Grants Office.

VI. Award Administration Information

A. Award Notices

Successful applicants will receive notification that the application has been approved for funding by the NOAA Grants Management Division with the issuance of an award signed by a NOAA grants officer. This is the authorizing document that allows the project to begin. The award will be issued electronically to the authorizing official of the project. Unsuccessful applicants will be notified that their proposals were not selected for recommendation by the program office.

To enable the use of a universal identifier and to enhance the quality of information available to the public as required by the Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act of 2006, to the extent applicable, any proposal awarded in response to this announcement will be required to use the Central Contractor Registration and Dun and Bradstreet Universal Numbering System and be subject to reporting requirements, as identified in OMB guidance published at 2 CFR Parts 25, 170 (2010), http://ecfr.gpoaccess.gov/cgi/t/text/text-idx?c=ecfr&tpl=/ecfrbrowse/Title02/2cfr25_main_02.tpl, http://ecfr.gpoaccess.gov/cgi/t/text/text-idx?c=ecfr&tpl=/ecfrbrowse/Title02/2cfr170_main_02.tpl.

B. Administrative and National Policy Requirements

The Department of Commerce Pre-Award Notification Requirements for Grants and Cooperative Agreements contained in the Federal Register notice of February 11, 2008 (73 FR 7696) are applicable to this solicitation. <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/>.

Limitation of Liability - Funding for potential projects in this notice is contingent upon the availability of funds. In no event will NOAA or the Department of Commerce be responsible for proposal preparation costs. Publication of this announcement does not oblige NOAA to award any specific project or to obligate any available funds.

National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) - NOAA must analyze the potential environmental impacts, as required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), for applicant projects or proposals which are seeking NOAA federal funding opportunities. Detailed information on NOAA compliance with NEPA can be found at the following NOAA NEPA Web site at www.nepa.noaa.gov/, including our NOAA Administrative Order 216-6 for NEPA website at http://www.corporateservices.noaa.gov/~ames/NAOs/Chap_216/naos_216_6.html and the

Council on Environmental Quality implementation regulations website at http://ceq.hss.doe.gov/nepa/regs/ceq/toc_ceq.htm

Consequently, as part of an applicant's package, and under their description of their program activities, applicants are required to provide detailed information on the activities to be conducted, locations, sites, number and species expected to be caught, species and habitat to be affected, possible construction activities, and any environmental concerns that may exist (e.g., the use and disposal of hazardous or toxic chemicals, introduction of non-indigenous species, impacts to endangered and threatened species, aquaculture projects, and impacts to coral reef systems). In addition to providing specific information that will serve as the basis for any required impact analyses, applicants may also be requested to assist NOAA in drafting of an environmental assessment, if NOAA determines an assessment is required.

Applicants will also be required to cooperate with NOAA in identifying feasible measures to reduce or avoid any identified adverse environmental impacts of their proposal. The failure to do so shall be grounds for not selecting an application. In some cases if additional information is required after an application is selected, funds can be withheld by the grants officer under a special award condition requiring the recipient to submit additional environmental compliance information sufficient to enable NOAA to make an assessment of any impacts that a project may have on the environment.

C. Reporting

Unless otherwise specified by terms of the award, performance and financial reports are to be submitted semi-annually. Performance reports should include progress on identified milestones. All reports will be submitted on a semi-annual schedule and must be submitted no later than 30 days following the end of each 6-month period from the start date of the award. In addition to the financial and performance reports, grant recipients will be required to submit a comprehensive final performance report 90 days after the project end date.

The Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act of 2006 includes a requirement for awardees of applicable Federal grants to report information about first-tier subawards and executive compensation under Federal assistance awards issued in FY 2011 or later. All awardees of applicable grants and cooperative agreements are required to report to the Federal Subaward Reporting System (FSRS) available at www.FSRS.gov on all subawards over \$25,000.

Data Sharing Plan

1. Environmental data and information collected or created under NOAA grants or cooperative agreements must be made visible, accessible, and independently understandable

to general users in a timely manner (typically no later than two (2) years after the data are collected or created), free of charge or at minimal cost to the user that is no more than the cost of distribution, except where limited by law, regulation, policy or security requirements.

Unless otherwise noted in the federal funding announcement, a Data Sharing Plan of no more than two pages shall be required as part of the Project Narrative. A typical plan should include descriptions of the types of environmental data created during the course of the project; the tentative date by which data will be shared; the expected temporal and spatial coverage of the data; the standards to be used for data/metadata format and content; policies addressing data stewardship and preservation; and procedures for providing access, sharing, and security. Because NOAA believes it important that data sets developed with its support should be shared with the scientific community, PIs should also indicate how and when they have made their data accessible and usable by the community in the past. The Data Sharing Plan will be reviewed as part of the NOAA Standard Evaluation Criterion "Importance and/or relevance and applicability of proposed project to the mission goals."

2. The Data Sharing Plan (updated as needed) must be made available publicly at time of award and must remain available until the Environmental Data are made available publicly

VII. Agency Contacts

For questions regarding the application process, you may contact: Robert Sadler, (727) 824-5324, or Robert.Sadler@noaa.gov.

VIII. Other Information

Applicants must have a Dun and Bradstreet Data Universal Numbering System (DUNS) number (www.dnb.com) and be registered in the Central Contractor Registry (CCR) (www.ccr.gov). Allow a minimum of thirty days to receive a DUNS number and to be registered in CCR. Applicants are strongly encouraged not to wait until the application deadline date to begin the application process through <http://www.grants.gov>.