Determining Where Tarpon Spawn

Description of Issue:

- Atlantic tarpon (Megalops atlanticus), known as *The Silver King*, is economically important throughout its US range and is one of the world's premier gamefish.
- Anglers come from around the world to pursue tarpon in the Gulf of Mexico.
- In Florida, tarpon are part of a saltwater recreational fishery worth more than $10 billion per year providing hundreds of thousands of jobs.
- To protect this economically-important resource and ensure its sustained contribution to Florida's way of life, *$1.7 million is needed in FY 2008* to support an essential tarpon research program.
- Florida tarpon are believed to spawn more than 100 miles offshore along the west Florida shelf, but we don't know where.
- **The most immediate potential threat to tarpon spawning** is new offshore oil drilling activity, slated for about 120 miles off Florida's Gulf of Mexico coastline.
- Oil platforms will provide habitat for the tarpon's predators – sharks that prey on adults, and small fishes that prey on tarpon eggs and larvae – these predators would threaten the region's tarpon population.
- Since spawning tarpon likely come from a wide geographic area, any negative impacts on the spawning site will have wide-ranging implications for the species and the fisheries.
- Construction of large oil rig structures in tarpon's migratory pathways may hinder critical spawning migrations and negatively impact resource sustainability.
- To the extent that human-induced environmental changes have already depleted Gulf of Mexico's tarpon populations, a precautionary approach is warranted.
- Support for this work will help protect an extremely valuable fishing resource that contributes to Florida's and the wider Gulf of Mexico region's economy and to Florida's image and way of life.
- At this critical time when fisheries around the globe are crashing, it is especially important to support this work to show Florida remains at the forefront of sustainable fishery resource management.