

HABITAT COMMITTEE REPORT ON CURRENT HABITAT ISSUES

HC Strategic Planning Session

The Habitat Committee (HC) conducted a strategic planning session to discuss future HC activities and improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the HC.

The HC notes that the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy and the Pew Oceans Commission Report have urged fishery management councils to move towards ecosystem-based management. This is also a high priority for NOAA. Therefore, the HC discussed how to assist the Council in moving forward with ecosystem-based management. The HC seeks direction on how it and other advisory bodies should be involved in this effort.

The HC would be willing to:

- Develop a workable definition of ecosystem-based management based on existing definitions, including a definition developed by a Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission panel;
- Describe actions the Council has already taken that address an ecosystem-based management approach;
- Work with other advisory bodies to jointly discuss incremental steps the Council could take toward ecosystem-based management.

The HC thought it might be useful to initially focus on salmon because of several upcoming salmon-related activities, but seeks input from the Council and other advisors about whether this would be appropriate. Examples of steps toward ecosystem-based management include:

- Incorporating climate, oceanographic, and other environmental factors into stock assessment and salmon models;
- Developing a conceptual model of the salmon food web (including role of salmon as prey), assembling prioritized list of forage species;
- Investigating how new research tools, such as genetic stock identification and otolith studies, can be used to improve knowledge about the spatial and temporal distribution of salmon stocks.

Channel Islands Draft Management Plan

The HC discussed the revised Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary (CINMS) Draft Management Plan/Draft Environmental Impact Statement. The HC supports the changes within Section 2, which strengthen protection for habitat and reduce the vulnerability of sanctuary resources, including fish habitat, from damage from non-fishing-related activities. The recommended changes in Section 2 do not impact directed fishing activities. Of special note, the HC endorses the changes within Section 2.1.3, which prohibits the exploration, development or production of minerals within the sanctuary; Section 2.1.4, which prohibits discharge or deposit of certain materials within the sanctuary; Section 2.1.5, which prohibits drilling, dredging, or

other alterations to the seabed; Section 2.1.6, which prohibits abandoning materials in the sanctuary; Section 2.1.7, which prohibits certain operations of large vessels (>300 registered gross tons) within 1 nautical mile of an island, and Section 2.1.13, which prohibits releasing introduced species within the sanctuary. Since the comment period for the draft management plan ends July 13, 2006, the HC suggests that the Council forward these comments directly to CINMS.

Mapping of Oregon State Waters

The HC heard an update concerning a consensus statement developed by Oregon scientists regarding mapping Oregon's state waters both for marine resource management and tsunami preparation. (See attachment.) The HC supports this effort, as it would better inform our understanding of fish spatial distribution based on habitat features; help the Council refine essential fish habitat (EFH) (the value of having such detailed information assisted the Council in its designation of groundfish EFH, but detail was lacking in the territorial sea); enhance the Council's ability to manage nearshore fisheries; and provide the Oregon Ocean Policy Advisory Council and State of Oregon with a better understanding of habitat features in their consideration of research reserves.

We urge the Council to endorse efforts to seek funding for this mapping effort.

PFMC
6/13/06