

REPORT OF THE HABITAT COMMITTEE

The Habitat Committee (HC) met June 5, 2009, in Portland, Oregon.

Juan de Fuca/Queets Coho Overfishing Concern

The HC initiated planning the overfishing report for Queets and Western Strait of Juan de Fuca coho. The HC intends to use past overfishing report documents to formulate a list of habitat-related topics to include. We plan to focus on freshwater habitat issues and factors that may influence marine survival. We will be seeking input from Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) and the Washington tribes to obtain current information on freshwater habitat conditions. We will also seek information from NMFS Northwest Fisheries Science Center that has ocean sampling data on sub-adult coho and that has correlated various physical parameters in the ocean to marine survival. We will coordinate with the Salmon Technical Team as needed in our efforts. We plan to have at least one subgroup meeting to work on this report, and anticipate completion by the February 2010 deadline.

Invasive Species

Paul Heimowitz (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service [USFWS]) and Steve Phillips (Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission [PSMFC]) gave the HC a presentation on the status of aquatic invasive species in the western states. Prior to 2007, zebra/quagga mussels had not yet been detected in western United States waters. Since then, mussels have been documented in multiple western states, including California, Utah, and Colorado. Since 2007, most states have taken some legislative actions that either raise funds for inspections and coordination or enhance enforcement efforts to prevent importation of zebra/quagga mussels. Inspections have already been successful in intercepting several vessels infested with these mussels before they were launched into Columbia Basin waters. Unlike neighboring states, the Oregon State Constitution does not allow mandatory boat inspections. Also since 2007 there has been more coordination activity, focusing on increased monitoring and rapid response. A “Columbia Basin Rapid Response Plan” has been developed by a multi-agency coordination team, and is being adopted by Federal agencies, tribes, and other partners. Other aquatic invasive species issues are being worked on that affect council-managed species. Recent reports have suggested that the impacts of non-indigenous species on salmon rival the impacts from the four “H” risk factors. Management and control of aquatic invasive species needs to be integrated with all watershed, coastal, and ocean management programs. Ignoring or passively accepting the problem has dire consequences to our other aquatic management goals.

Ecosystem Management Report

The HC was briefed by Council staff member Heather Brandon on the recent University of Washington School of Aquatic and Fisheries Sciences Annual Bevan Symposium, entitled: "On the Ground and in the Water: Ecosystem-Based Fisheries Management in Practice." The two-day symposium featured internationally recognized experts in fisheries science, policy and law, discussing practical ways to overcome challenges in implementing ecosystem-based fisheries management. Dr. Don McIsaac, Council Executive Director, and Lisa Wooninck, NOAA Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary and Council Habitat Committee member, gave invited talks that were summarized for the HC. The HC would like to compliment the Council staff and our colleagues on their participation in this significant and timely symposium.

Corals Plan

The NOAA Coral Reef Conservation Program (CRCP) has been charged with coordinating the implementation of the Deep Sea Research and Technology Program authorized by the Magnuson-Stevens Act. The 2006 re-authorization required that a Deep Sea Coral Research and Technology Program be established, and authorized, among other things, the designation of zones to protect deep-sea corals. FY2009 is the first year that the program has been funded and the CRCP has proposed a funding model characterized by significant investment in research activities on a region-by-region basis. The CRCP has dedicated most FY2009 funds to the South Atlantic region, and proposes to focus on the Pacific region in FY2010. The CRCP is looking at criteria for prioritizing other regions beyond 2010. By almost any standard, the U.S. west coast ranks high for immediate attention on deep sea corals. For example, the Council may soon be considering modifications of groundfish essential fish habitat related to coral presence, the Olympic Coast National Marine Sanctuary is currently undergoing management plan review that considers protections for corals, and new information is being developed about the significance of corals and sponges found in surveys off the coast of Washington. The federal activity will culminate in a plan for field science activities that utilize mapping, habitat characterization, and research to address the requirements of the MSA, the priority management needs of the Council and other managers, and take maximum advantage of opportunities to complement or leverage significant partnership resources. HC will be following development of this proposal and inform the Council when action is appropriate.

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