

HABITAT COMMITTEE REPORT ON SALMON ESSENTIAL FISH HABITAT (EFH) REVIEW

The Habitat Committee (HC) received an overview of the draft report, Pacific Coast Salmon Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) Review (Agenda Item C.5.a, Attachment 1), by Mr. Kerry Griffin, Council staff and member of the Oversight Panel. It was noted that the draft report is a work in progress and that revisions may be necessary prior to adoption of the final version at the March Council meeting based on feedback from the Council and other interested parties. In addition, several topics in the report were highlighted as warranting input from the HC and Council. The HC offered the following comments and recommendations on those:

- The HC endorses the list of potential Habitat Areas of Particular Concern (HAPCs) and supports the recommendation in the draft report that the Council consider designating these as HAPCs. The descriptions of these areas are appropriate for consultation purposes and may be aided where applicable by mapping.
- Although the HC understood the basis of the decision to continue designating freshwater salmon EFH using 4th field HUCs instead of 6th field watersheds, the importance of salmon biologists being able to refine these designations during the EFH consultation process was noted. The potential to use 6th field USGS watersheds should continue to be investigated in the next five-year review process.
- The HC became aware of a significant new issue at this meeting regarding the potential designation of stocks currently under the Pacific Coast Salmon Plan as ecosystem component species. This issue is discussed in detail in the Salmon Amendment Committee's draft environmental assessment report for Pacific Coast Salmon Plan Amendment 16 (C2.b, SAC Report). Such reclassification results in the loss of EFH designations for these stocks (e.g., mid-Columbia Chinook stock) and the associated EFH consultation requirement for federal agencies. The HC believes EFH should be maintained for these stocks.
- Potential impacts associated with climate change (e.g., ocean acidification, direct thermal effects, changes in the hydrologic cycle, sea level rise, and the increasing importance of flood plain habitat) need to be further developed.
- The HC supports the two recommendations associated with identifying impassable barriers that mark the upstream extent of EFH. Specifically, the list should be updated to correct/update typographical and naming errors, and to reflect barriers that have been recently removed or retrofitted with fish passage facilities; and certain barriers that mark the upstream extent of EFH should be considered for removal from the list if considered by NMFS to be necessary for the conservation of the species.
- Finally, although the HC is providing preliminary comments at this time, we plan to continue this discussion in November and provide comments to the Oversight Panel at that time.