

**OFFICE OF NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARIES,
WEST COAST REGION REPORT**

Essential fish habitat (EFH) for Pacific Coast Groundfish 5-year review

NOAA's Office of National Marine Sanctuaries (ONMS), West Coast Region appreciates the Pacific Fishery Management Council's (Council) efforts at fostering a collaborative relationship with national marine sanctuaries regarding marine habitats. We have appreciated participating on the Essential Fish Habitat Review Committee (EFHRC) and the Habitat Committee (EFH). The west coast region's national marine sanctuaries have been engaged in the 5-year review of EFH for Pacific Coast Groundfish because of the close alignment between the Council's protection of groundfish EFH from adverse impacts from fishing with the ONMS's goals of protecting benthic habitat and associated ecological communities.

On July 31, 2013, in response to a Council-issued request for proposals Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary submitted a proposal, and Gulf of the Farallones and Olympic Coast national marine sanctuaries submitted options to modify EFH for Pacific Coast Groundfish. These submittals are based on information from the Phase 1 Report (September 2012), the EFH Synthesis Report (April 2013) and new information on the geology, (hard and soft substrate), biogenic habitats, groundfish, and existing fishing effort within these national marine sanctuaries. While the submittals are designed to achieve the EFH provisions of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA), they are also consistent with strategies outlined in the sanctuary management plans that address ecosystem-based management, resource protection and fishing activities within the sanctuaries. In addition, each offering reflects on-going discussions and feedback from local stakeholders, particularly the fishing community and Coastal Treaty Tribes to facilitate information to the Council and minimize economic impact to the fishery in a practicable manner.

Submitted by Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary (MBNMS)

MBNMS's proposal is the result of a collaborative process and agreement with Monterey Bay trawl fishermen, the Alliance of Communities for Sustainable Fisheries, Oceana, Natural Resources Defense Council, Ocean Conservancy, Environmental Defense Fund, and the California Risk Pool, including The Nature Conservancy, Fort Bragg Groundfish Association, Half Moon Bay Groundfish Marketing Association, and Central California Seafood Marketing Association. The collaborative proposal requests additional protections to hard and soft substrate on the shelf, upper slope and select canyons with associated biogenic habitat (corals and sponges) where groundfish FMP species have been verified, coupled with modifications to existing EFH Conservation Areas to re-open select areas allowing fishermen access to valuable and historic bottom trawl fishing grounds. The proposal also suggests designating EFH HAPC

‘Areas of Interest’ at Pt. Sur Platform and La Cruz Canyon, for these geologic features represent unique, rare, or important hard bottom habitat with many observed rockfish. The proposal also offers concepts on voluntary management areas and enforcement measures, and develops a collaborative research/monitoring program.

Submitted by Gulf of the Farallones National Marine Sanctuary (GFNMS)

The submittal by GFNMS is designed to principally protect unique geologic features of rocky and mixed substrate on the continental shelf and upper slope with associated biogenic habitat (corals and sponges) where groundfish FMP species have been verified. GFNMS proposes options for up to three new EFH Conservation Areas to minimize the adverse effects of fishing on groundfish EFH, while also minimizing socioeconomic impacts to the fishing community to the extent practicable by designing areas based on feedback from 6 meetings with fishermen during the 90-day RFP timeframe held at 4 ports spanning almost 300 miles of coastline. The options are also based on new information obtained through data collected during 2011 and 2012 that characterized and mapped physical substrate, biogenic habitat, fish and other invertebrates. One of the three areas proposed is a previously unmapped rocky bank near the edge of the continental shelf that was not identified and therefore could not be considered during the original EFH designations. In addition, GFNMS proposes for Council consideration the designation of two new EFH HAPC “Areas of Interest” at Rittenberg Bank and Cochrane Bank because these areas contain unique biological and geological characteristics.

Submitted by Olympic Coast National Marine Sanctuary (OCNMS)

OCNMS and Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) jointly submitted a set of options to modify the Olympic 2 EFH Conservation Area. Based on conversations with various tribal representatives OCNMS and WDFW are proposing an alternative process to address broader ecosystem protection in the Olympic Coast National Marine Sanctuary. While OCNMS and WDFW continue to support the consideration of measures to protect hard substrate and biogenic habitats, such as those identified in the proposed modifications to the Olympic 2 EFH Conservation Area, they acknowledge the importance of being responsive to the concerns expressed by the Coastal Treaty Tribes and see value in taking a broader approach in collaboration with the tribes. Please see WDFW/OCNMS Supplemental Report for more details (Agenda Item D.2.c.).

Phase 3 and assistance from west coast national marine sanctuaries

The national marine sanctuaries on the west coast understand that as the Council has initiated Phase 3 of the EFH review process, the sanctuary submittals will now likely be considered and evaluated on the scale of the entire west coast. We recognize that because of this shift in spatial scope and through the public process changes may be developed and suggested to the sanctuary offerings, which we would encourage. We are committed to continuing discussions with potentially affected fishermen and other interested stakeholders, and offer the Council our assistance in facilitating these discussions and in making technical changes to the proposal/options (i.e. GIS support).