

WASHINGTON DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE AND OLYMPIC COAST
NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARY REPORT ON ESSENTIAL FISH HABITAT

At the November 2013 Pacific Fishery Management Council meeting, in reference to the joint groundfish essential fish habitat (EFH) proposal by the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) and Olympic Coast National Marine Sanctuary (OCNMS), we had indicated a need for further discussions with the Coastal Treaty Tribes in general, and the Makah and Quileute Tribes specifically, about our proposed modifications to the Olympic 2 EFH Conservation Area. While we have had a couple of meetings with the Makah Tribe about the proposal, as the Tribe whose usual and accustomed fishing grounds (U and As) have the greatest amount of overlap with the affected area, it was clear that the other Coastal Treaty Tribes had concerns about the proposal even if their respective U and As would not be directly affected by the proposal.

In addition to the concerns we heard expressed by various Tribal representatives, we also had a brief discussion at an Intergovernmental Policy Council (IPC) meeting in February. The IPC is an advisory body on activities within OCNMS and is comprised of policy level representatives from the Coastal Treaty Tribes, OCNMS, and the State of Washington. At that meeting, the IPC discussed the need for additional research on bottom habitats within OCNMS, improved communication and coordination on issues such as groundfish EFH and coral and sponge protection, and the potential for bringing together a group of tribal, NOAA, and state scientists in a collaborative effort to better understand bottom habitats and address habitat protection needs.

For the purposes of broader ecosystem protection and the application of precautionary management principles, OCNMS and WDFW continue to support the consideration of measures to protect hard substrate and biogenic habitats, such as those identified in our proposed modifications to the Olympic 2 EFH area. We also want to be responsive to the concerns we have heard expressed by the Coastal Treaty Tribes, and foster our co-management relationships with them. To that end, OCNMS and WDFW believe that the best, most effective, approach for habitat protection in this area would be a collaborative effort with the Coastal Treaty Tribes.

OCNMS and WDFW would propose to review the available bottom habitat data within the context of the scientific group described above and have discussions with the IPC (and perhaps with the Tribes separately, as appropriate) to develop and consider any potential areas for specific habitat or broader ecosystem protection. We would propose to begin this collaborative process this spring with the intent of bringing a recommendation back to the Council, which may be the same proposed Olympic 2 modifications or something different, either as part of the next groundfish EFH review or potentially as an Ecosystem Initiative.

If the Coastal Treaty Tribes are agreeable to the approach we have outlined and will commit to working with us on this effort, then we would request that the Council not take further action on our Olympic 2 proposal at this time.