

PACIFIC FISHERY-SPECIFIC HABITAT CONSERVATION OBJECTIVES
A PILOT EFFORT TO REBUILD AND MAINTAIN SUSTAINABLE FISHERIES
THROUGH TARGETED HABITAT CONSERVATION

NMFS is looking to strategically target its habitat conservation resources towards achieving measurable outcomes for managed fisheries. NMFS is seeking Council support to begin a pilot effort to identify habitat conservation objectives for managed species on the West Coast.

NMFS and the Regional Fishery Management Councils (FMCs) have turned the corner on ending overfishing and are working to maximize the productivity and sustainability of fisheries and fishing communities. NMFS, RFMCs, and partners have made significant strides to establish annual catch limits, accountability measures, and rebuilding plans to achieve long-term productivity and sustainability of our nation's fisheries. Despite progress, certain stocks appear to respond poorly and/or belatedly to rebuilding measures. The health of some of these stocks may be linked to their dependence on particular habitats during critical lifestages. NMFS is increasing its efforts to strategically align and integrate habitat conservation efforts to rebuild these stocks and to support the needs of other federally-managed fish stocks.

Protecting and restoring habitat will help NMFS, FMCs, states, and partners achieve their sustainable fisheries goals. However, we must be more explicit in the identification of those habitats where we can achieve measurable benefits that will support priority, habitat-dependent fish stocks. To this end, NMFS's Office of Habitat Conservation has up to \$100K to support one or two pilot projects to establish these fishery-specific habitat objectives.

NMFS is developing a proposal for a West Coast pilot project. While still in development, the project is likely to:

1. Identify 2-5 focal species of habitat-dependent fishes. It is expected that these species will include both groundfishes and salmon.
2. Develop fishery-specific habitat conservation objectives for each species, and
3. Develop a plan for NMFS to target existing habitat conservation efforts to meet these objectives, including necessary management, monitoring, and evaluation needs.

Outcomes of this work can inform future Council EFH reviews and initiatives under its Fishery Management and Ecosystem Plans, and inform future research and data needs documents. Demonstrated success and/or lessons learned could be applied to other projects, regions, and councils. Council support for this effort is an essential ingredient for a successful pilot project. We hope we can count on that support, and will provide an update on specifics of the project proposal and its status at a future Council meeting.