

HABITAT COMMITTEE REPORT

California Conditions Report

The Habitat Committee (HC) heard an update on the severe drought conditions in California, where State and partner agencies continue real-time management of water resources. The California State Water Resource Control Board has approved emergency regulations to ensure agencies and state residents increase water conservation. Californians are expected to restrict outdoor water use (for example, for washing down driveways and sidewalks). Fines may be levied by local water agencies. In January, Governor Brown asked Californians to reduce water use by 20 percent; currently water use has been reduced by 7.5 percent.

In addition, the Bureau of Reclamation released additional water from Trinity Reservoir to supplement flows in the lower Klamath River to help protect the returning run of adult Chinook salmon. At 7 a.m. on Monday, Aug. 25, releases from Lewiston Dam increased to approximately 2,450 cfs to achieve a flow rate of approximately 4,000 cfs in the lower Klamath River. This release from Lewiston Dam was maintained for about 24 hours before returning to approximately 950 cfs, and will be regulated at approximately that level as necessary to maintain lower Klamath River flows at 2,500 cfs until approximately Sunday, Sept. 14. River and fishery conditions are being continuously monitored to determine the duration.

More information on the California drought situation is available at www.ca.gov/drought/.

Fisheries-Specific Habitat Objectives

On May 6 2014, the Council sent a letter to National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) in support of a pilot project on fisheries-specific habitat objectives. The letter helped attract funding for the project that was received in June. In July, NMFS convened a workshop of scientists and Council staff to discuss the project and determine species for which to develop objectives. Species were selected based on scoring for fishery status, estuary/nearshore life stages, relevance for NMFS habitat conservation efforts (including essential fish habitat consultations), and habitat dependence in NW and SW Habitat Assessment Prioritizations. They were further filtered based on use of coastal habitat, data availability, and geographic distribution. The species selected were lingcod, English sole, black rockfish, and bocaccio. In addition, Oregon Coast coho salmon are being considered as a case study highlighting objectives developed by the recovery plan. As a pilot project, this effort will largely be a “proof of concept” to illustrate how habitat objectives can be derived and implemented. NMFS will keep the Council informed as the project progresses.

BOEM Presentation

Ms. Jean Thurston (Renewable Energy Specialist with the Bureau of Ocean and Energy Management [BOEM]) provided the Habitat Committee with an overview of BOEM’s process for leasing ocean energy sites, and focused on the status of the Windfloat Pacific Offshore Leasing Process off Coos Bay, Oregon. Following BOEM’s public review process and finding of a “Determination of No Competitive Interest” in September 2013, Principle Power has begun the

process of developing a construction and operations plan (COP). Both BOEM and Principle Power have been conducting surveys and research work to inform plan development, including Outer Continental Shelf seafloor mapping, marine mammal and seabird data, and effects of the project on the coastal and marine/nearshore environment. The next opportunity for input is a review of the COP prior to the National Environmental Policy Act process, followed by the release next spring of the draft environmental document. At the November meeting BOEM representatives will brief the HC on studies related to potential impacts of electromagnetic fields on fish, and other issues.

NOAA Role in Offshore Renewable Energy

The Habitat Committee heard a presentation by Kim Hatfield from NMFS. NMFS has been actively consulting with the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, BOEM, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and the U.S Department of Energy for offshore renewable energy projects. Consultation for these projects focuses on the Marine Mammal Protection Act, Magnuson-Stevens Act, and Endangered Species Act. Through their consultations, NMFS is involved with adaptive management on all steps of the project, from project design through the life of the project. Currently, the main mechanism for managing these projects is through monitoring the projects and studying their potential effects. While the consultation and adaptive management are in the best interest of the project applicant, the HC is concerned about NMFS' ability to remain actively involved throughout the life of these projects without adequate funding. Failure to implement the adaptive management plan could put the proponents of any given project at risk of voiding their incidental take authorization.

Groundfish Essential Fish Habitat

Dr. Waldo Wakefield provided a status update on the NMFS Northwest Fisheries Science Center's Informational Report responding to Council questions posed in March. The report is still in progress. The final report will be presented to the Council in November. GIS products and pdf maps developed for this report, including maps of EFH proposals overlaid with fishing effort, will soon be available from the Groundfish EFH Data Catalogue at:

<http://efh-catalog.coas.oregonstate.edu/synthesis/>
<http://efh-viewer.coas.oregonstate.edu/efh/>

PFMC
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