

## HABITAT COMMITTEE REPORT ON CURRENT HABITAT ISSUES

### **Northwest Power and Conservation Council letter**

The letter the Habitat Committee (HC) drafted for Council consideration regarding the Northwest Power and Conservation Council Fish and Wildlife Program amendment process is in the briefing book (Agenda Item G.1.a, Supplemental Attachment 1) and has had input from all HC members and their respective states.

### **Integrated Ecosystem Assessment Habitat Component**

At the Habitat Committee (HC) meeting on Thursday, HC member Correigh Greene (Northwest Fisheries Science Center) provided a brief presentation on incorporation of a habitat ecosystem component into the California Current Integrated Ecosystem Assessment (IEA). He is heading up this effort for National Marine Fisheries Service. Given the multiple habitat management needs and the broad extent of essential fish habitat (EFH) for various stocks, the habitat component will include freshwater and estuarine/nearshore habitats as well as pelagic and seafloor habitats. The first stages of this effort will be an identification of habitat indicators and a spatial framework to analyze these across the Pacific Coast. This information will be available to the HC and other relevant advisory bodies in the fall via the IEA report and the State of California Current ecosystem report.

### **Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) Offshore Renewable Energy Workshops**

The HC spent some time discussing potential offshore wind energy projects. Technology for harnessing wind energy is evolving quickly. On the Pacific Coast, stronger winds occur farther offshore and in areas with deeper water than on the Atlantic coast. For example, Oregon has 43,000km<sup>2</sup> of “windy water,” 70 percent of which is in depths greater than 60 meters. The Obama Administration deems offshore energy development a “global race” and has set a goal for the U.S. to produce 55,000 gigawatts of ocean energy by 2015. A west coast demonstration project is planned 15 nm off Coos Bay, Oregon where waters are 365 meters (1200’) deep. This project will have five turbines on a floating foundation and will generate 6 megawatts of electricity.

In May, Habitat Committee members attended a workshop on offshore renewable energy technology sponsored by the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) in Portland. The goal of the workshop was to educate BOEM-Oregon Taskforce members and others on the technical aspects

of offshore wind and other renewable energy technologies. BOEM is forming an Oregon Intergovernmental State Task Force whose role is to provide coordination and input to BOEM, to help reduce multiple-use conflicts, and to identify information gaps and needs. The task force consists of state, Federal and tribal entities only, but during a follow-up conversation, the Task Force Coordinator, Jean Thurston, suggested that the Council might be eligible as a Task Force member. Given the various intersections of offshore energy development with Council-managed species, EFH, and fisheries, and the magnitude of this new ocean use, it would be in the

Council's best interest to participate proactively in this process (Ms. Thurston's email address is [jean.thurston@boem.gov](mailto:jean.thurston@boem.gov)).

In addition, BOEM held workshops in Washington, Oregon, and California to launch the "Ocean Uses Atlas Project," a joint National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration-BOEM project which maps ocean use patterns using expert community knowledge. Habitat Committee members attended these meetings in different states.

At the HC meeting, two members of the Southern Oregon Ocean Resource Coalition spoke on this issue – Susan Chambers, West Coast Seafood Processors Association; and Steve Bodnar, Coos Bay Trawlers Association. They expressed concerns about the way the Coos Bay demonstration project is moving forward and are looking to the Council as the primary voice for fishermen's interests as marine wind energy development proceeds. This strengthens the significance of the Council requesting membership on the Oregon Intergovernmental Task Force.

### **Bureau of Ocean Energy Request for Information**

The Department of Energy (DOE) has released a Request for Information (RFI) (Agenda Item G.1, Attachment 3), which seeks input on research priorities for assessing the environmental effects of offshore wind energy at the nation's first wind energy projects. DOE is considering funding research at one or more projects over the next three years. In the RFI, DOE develops a research strategy for measuring the projects' impacts associated with construction and operations. Research questions raised as a result of this RFI will likely influence research topics funded and conducted in the future, and mayational nvironmental olicy ct

The sample research questions proposed in the RFI are more suited for east coast projects, where six of the seven BOEM-sponsored Wind Energy Demonstration Projects are located. However, ocean conditions on the west coast require different device configurations (e.g., extensive mooring and cabling, massive vertical structures, etc.), and thus, will have different environmental impacts that require different research questions than east coast projects. Oregon state agencies (Department of Fish and Wildlife and Department of Land, Conservation and Development and Department of Energy) submitted a joint Oregon response to draw attention to the research needs and impact concerns unique to west coast projects (Agenda Item G.1.a, Supplemental Attachment 5).

Although the comment period closed May 30 and DOE did not grant the Council's request for an extension, the agency did offer to accept the Council's input any time during the process. It is unclear, however, if specific recommendations made at this time would be incorporated into BOEM's final research strategy. However, in anticipation of a response to the RFI, the Habitat

Committee drafted some points that could be included in a draft letter for the September briefing book.

1. Support for DOE's outreach effort requesting input on their research strategy.
2. Note that because of the many differences between the Pacific and Atlantic oceans' environments and related project configurations the first (and only) west coast wind project should be included in the research design template.
3. The Council is interested in working proactively with DOE and BOEM as they develop research priorities for west coast wind energy projects, and will request membership in BOEM's Oregon Wind Energy Taskforce.
4. Note the Federal agency's obligation to consult under Magnuson-Stevens Act for impacts to Fishery Management Plan species and EFH, as well as the Council's requirement to comment on projects that affect EFH for FMP species.

### **Columbia River Treaty**

The HC discussed the Columbia River Treaty between the U.S. and Canada, which governs international hydro and flood operations on the Columbia River, affecting U.S. power, flood control, fisheries, and other non-power river uses and operations. The current 60-year treaty expires in 2024. Either nation can terminate most of the provisions of the Treaty as early as September 2024, with a minimum 10 years written notice.

The U.S. Entity (comprised of the Bonneville Power Administration and the Army Corps of Engineers) is committed to delivering a recommendation to the Department of State by September 2013 as to whether or not it is in the best interest of the U.S. to continue the Treaty, terminate the Treaty, or seek to negotiate with Canada on modification or amendment to the Treaty. A long-term treaty governing water storage and releases from Canada is of critical importance, affecting important habitat components for Council-managed stocks. The HC has requested a briefing on the status of the development of the U.S. position at our next meeting in Boise, with a focus on opportunities for Council comment.

### **Managing Our Nation's Fisheries Findings**

Members of the HC who attended the Managing Our Nation's Fisheries Conference in May provided a summary to the rest of the committee. Overall, the attendees found the conference to be very interesting and beneficial. Discussion on this agenda item focused on the habitat-related findings from the conference. The HC intends to review these findings more closely and provide comments to the Council in preparation for their communications with the Council Coordination Committee.

### **Summary of Actions and Questions for Council**

- Consider Northwest Power and Conservation Council letter (Supplemental Attachment 1)
- Consider whether HC should draft letter to BOEM for the September briefing book