

HABITAT STEERING GROUP REPORT

We have two action items which we shall read at the end of our report.

Ms. Cyreis Schmitt, Mr. Waldo Wakefield, and Ms. Allison Bailey of NMFS spoke to the Habitat Steering Group (HSG) on NMFS's efforts on fish gear and marine habitat research and marine Habitat Areas of Particular Concern. Prior to the HSG meeting, we requested that NMFS present habitat data for lingcod and bocaccio off Oregon and Washington. Ms. Bailey presented triennial survey and trawl logbook data on lingcod and Pacific Ocean perch.

Recommendation: We would like to encourage the Council to include habitat data; such as bottom typing, catch and logbook; ocean condition data into the rebuilding plan for bocaccio, lingcod, and Pacific Ocean perch. We will discuss this further on Friday under agenda item G.9.

We discussed the disposal of dredge spoils at the mouth of the Columbia River. Apparently, there has been progress, with input from crabbers, on a selection of a site which is smaller than the site originally proposed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps). However, we still are concerned that the Corps has not followed essential fish habitat (EFH) procedures and will discuss this with NMFS staff in Portland. If necessary, the Council might have to weigh in on this issue again.

Mr. Larry Week, of California Department of Fish and Game, updated us on the Eel River and the Potter Valley relicensing draft environmental impact statement. We will continue to track this with great interest. Mr. Week also discussed a bypass project on the Russian River.

Action Item 1: We have an **action item** on the Snake River dams. Please refer to attachment F.1.a.(1). This a majority resolution by the HSG. Earlier today you heard from Mr. Ed Bowles of Idaho Department of Fish and Game on the compelling case for removing the four lower Snake River dams to restore salmon and steelhead. We ask you to pass this resolution.

Action Item 2: Statement of the Habitat Steering Group on the Impacts On Fishing Habitat.

HSG has reviewed the scientific literature on the impacts of fishing on habitat and considered presentations on this topic. The HSG has concluded that while there have been few studies of the impacts of fishing on West Coast marine habitats, there is good evidence gathered in other marine ecosystems, that fishing can have substantial adverse impacts on ecosystem structure. These impacts include the reduction of habitat complexity and biodiversity. Because most target groundfish populations depend on habitat complexity at some points in their life cycle, it is reasonable to infer that the reduction of habitat complexity may reduce fish survivorship in these cases.

The HSG recognizes the Council and NMFS are engaged in several initiatives aimed at protecting EFH, rebuilding depleted fish populations, and exploring the use of marine reserves as a potential management tool—all of which are inter-related. The HSG suggests that a coordinated workplan be developed to avoid duplication and maximize efficiency.

Therefore, in order to meet the EFH mandates of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, the HSG recommends the Council take action to protect fish habitat by approving a joint workshop of the HSG, Groundfish Advisory Subpanel, Ad-Hoc Legal Gear Committee, and others as deemed appropriate, to develop a workplan to address the impacts of fishing gear on habitat at the September meeting. Further, the HSG encourages NMFS to begin the process of identifying habitat areas of particular concern, particularly for species designated as overfished.

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06/22/99

SNAKE RIVER DAM RESOLUTION

WHEREAS, fishing cultures, livelihoods, economies, and recreation along the Pacific Coast from Alaska to California, and east to Idaho and Montana, have been dramatically affected by the precipitous decline and subsequent listing under the Endangered Species Act of anadromous fish in the Snake River Basin;

WHEREAS, rigorous scientific review by the Plan for Analyzing and Testing Hypothesis (PATH), has demonstrated much, if not most, of this decline is due to cumulative impacts of the Federal Columbia River Hydroelectric System, and, that retiring Ice Harbor, Lower Monumental, Little Goose, and Lower Granite dams on the lower Snake River and returning this river reach to a normative river condition is most likely to avoid extinction and recover Snake River salmon and steelhead stocks;

WHEREAS, wild Snake River salmon and steelhead are an irreplaceable genetic resource that continue to play a vital ecological role even at their currently depressed levels. If these runs are allowed to vanish, the foundation of the interior northwest's ecosystems will be severely undermined.

WHEREAS, extinction will prove ever more costly, and recovery will restore these fish to their rightful place in the cultures, economies, and hearts of Pacific Northwest peoples;

THEREFORE LET IT BE RESOLVED, that the Pacific Fishery Management Council finds the extinction of wild Snake River salmon unacceptable, and recommends implementation of the measures deemed by scientific analysis to recover wild anadromous fish in the Snake River Basin to sustainable fisheries levels. The Council recommends full consideration and mitigation of negative impacts of the selected recovery option on affected individuals and their communities.

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