

REPORT OF THE HABITAT STEERING GROUP

The Habitat Steering Group (HSG) received a brief update on the status of the Ad-Hoc Marine Reserve Committee's (MRC) marine reserve analysis. The analysis will be ready for the April Council meeting for discussion and possible recommendations to the Council. The HSG will review the analysis and the MRC's recommendations and provide comments to the Council at the June meeting.

The HSG also received an update from Ms. Cyreis Schmitt, NMFS Northwest Regional Science Center, on efforts related to fishing gear impacts. NMFS has submitted a Sea Grant proposal to work with the Washington and Oregon departments of fish and wildlife to develop a Geographic Information System (GIS) database for marine habitat. Included in this initiative is an outreach component to share data with--and solicit information from--industry, members of the public, and scientists. In addition, staff and funding for other research projects has been identified. Ms. Schmitt plans to present a draft process for classifying habitat areas of particular concern (HAPCs) at the April HSG meeting.

The Work Group on Gear Impacts, which is made up of HSG and Groundfish Advisory Subpanel members, is scheduled to meet at the April Council meeting. The HSG discussed potential agenda items for the joint meeting, including classification of habitat types (e.g., cobble, sand, rock), clarification on trawl logbook information, and a discussion relative to which gear types are used in different areas. Given the HSG's rather lengthy agenda for its April 3rd meeting, the HSG would like to request the Work Group meet the morning of April 4th.

The HSG received a presentation from Mr. Jim White, California Department of Fish and Game, regarding the CALFED Bay Delta Program and its ecosystem restoration program. The ecosystem restoration program focuses on restoring and preserving habitat and reducing stressors in the environment through the use of screened diversions, improved fish passage, and water quality. A final environmental impact statement (EIS)/environmental impact review is expected to be completed this summer. The HSG plans to draft a letter to the CALFED Policy Group which stresses the value of habitat restoration for anadromous and endemic species. This letter will be brought to the Council for approval in April.

The HSG also received updates on the Lake Mendocino Project, Potter Valley Project, the San Francisco airport dredging proposal, and the Upper Klamath EIS. It was decided the HSG would draft letters on the San Francisco airport dredging proposal and the Upper Klamath EIS and present them to the Council for approval in April.

The HSG has requested an update on the status of Salmon Plan Amendment 14 (essential fish habitat [EFH]) and the interim final rule for EFH from NMFS at its April meeting as background for potential future action.

On a final note, the HSG would like to express its appreciation to the Council relative to the resolution on Snake River dam removal. That resolution raised the awareness of the importance of habitat restoration and, as a result, Governor Kitzhaber is supporting removal of the Snake River dams.

Action Items: None.

PFMC
03/07/00