

REPORT OF THE HABITAT STEERING GROUP

Habitat Steering Group (HSG) does not have any action items at this time; however, we would like to receive Council guidance on the following item.

NMFS Northwest Fisheries Science Center (NWFSC) updates from Dr. Elizabeth Clarke

In April of 2000 Ms. Cyreis Schmitt presented a draft document to the HSG for consideration titled, Designating Habitat Areas of Particular Concern (HAPC) for West Coast Groundfish: Beginning the Process, by Ian Butler and Cyreis Schmitt. To date no progress has been made on this project. Dr. Clarke updated the HSG on the status of this effort and requested assistance from the HSG. The draft HAPC process document will be distributed to the NMFS northwest region, southwest region, southwest science center, and headquarters office for review. Comments will be due to the NWFSC in January and forwarded to the HSG for discussion at its March meeting. In the interest of moving this issue forward for the purpose of inclusion in the groundfish environmental impact statement (EIS), the HSG requests Council direction on whether this should be a workload priority for the HSG.

The HSG also received updates on current NMFS habitat research efforts and will receive a presentation at our March meeting on the status of the habitat components of their five-year strategic plan for research.

We also received updates on the following four items from Mr. Mark Helvey, NMFS:

Sacramento Winter Run Chinook Mortality at Clifton Pumps:

A scientific review panel of the CalFED Environmental Water Account (EWA) met October 22-24 for the First Annual Review to evaluate the first year of EWA operation. Panelists consisted of 12 experts from all over the country in fisheries, ecology, population modeling and water management. They concluded the EWA had met its goals, stayed within budget, and built trust between the different agencies. They characterized the unprecedented high take of winter-run chinook salmon at the Delta Fish Facilities as outside the realm of normal predictable events. The panelists went on to make specific recommendations concerning strengthening the scientific basis for decisions, filling in fundamental data gaps for listed species, establishing a new research program, establishing new studies on growth and mortality rates for the Delta (including Clifton Court Forebay), and conducting statistical analysis of monitoring and sampling programs.

NMFS met with the new California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG) Winter-run Technical Team on October 11 to discuss changes to the methods used to calculate the juvenile production estimate for this coming year. NMFS and CDFG have agreed to use the upper Sacramento River carcass surveys instead of the traditional Red Bluff Diversion Dam counts in the calculation. NMFS is developing a new Space State Model to estimate abundance based on several different sources of data. This model will enable estimates of winter-run adults and juveniles within some degree of probability, which has never been done before.

While some loss occurs at the Delta pumps each year, the significance of the loss this year is still unclear. Initial review by the CalFED Science Advisors indicated the loss would have a modest or less than significant effect on the winter-run population. However, NMFS is still in the process of conducting its own review of the loss at the pumps.

Sacramento Winter Run Chinook Recovery Plan: Planning for the Central Valley Technical Recovery Team (TRT) continues. NMFS has completed its solicitation letter seeking nominations to the TRT. The letter was to go out in late September, but has been delayed due to assisting in efforts to initiate meetings for the Trans-Boundary and the Central Valley TRT's that were held during the week of October 21. NMFS is still refining its mailing list for the Central Valley TRT and has requested CalFed's mailing list which will assure that NMFS is inclusive in its efforts to solicit nominations.

San Francisco Airport Expansion: Due to the events of September 11, airport volume and resulting cash flow has been affected and airport officials acknowledge runway reconfiguration plans may move at a

slower pace. No definitive decisions have been made at this time. The extent that planning activities and impact analyses may be protracted out into the next several months is undetermined.

A scientific panel convened by the National Ocean Service and San Francisco Airport (SFO) (NOAA Science Panel II) did hold a workshop in late summer and prepared a series of recommendations regarding SFO's project team evaluating environmental impacts. A series of recommendations pertaining to habitat related issues were provided including explicitly quantifying the spatial extent of potential physical and biological impacts being considered and conducting an additional field experiment to determine how well the fish collections methods used to date have quantified species abundance.

Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) Consultations: The number of consultations in the southwest region (California) for fiscal year 2001 was 350. This consisted both of independent EFH consultations as well as many that were added to informal and formal Endangered Species Act section 7 consultations.

The HSG discussed the STT report on Queets coho stock assessment (Council agenda item D.6), and developed comments for Council consideration. The HSG received brief updates on the progress of the groundfish rebuilding plans, groundfish EIS, and the draft highly migratory species fishery management plan (HMS FMP). The HSG also attended the SSC discussion on the Status of Marine Reserve Proposals for the Channel Islands. It is the group's intent to comment further on these items at the March meeting.

March HSG Agenda Topics

Council Agenda

- Rebuilding Plans
- Groundfish EIS
- Marine Reserves
- HMS FMP

EFH Letters

- Federal Emergency Regulatory Commission Relicensing Programmatic letter
- CalFed Environmental Water Account letter

Presentations and Updates

- NMFS 5 year research plan habitat components
- HAPC conference call report
- Pacific Marine Conservation Council fishing gear matrix