

HABITAT COMMITTEE REPORT

The Habitat Committee (HC) met on Monday, October 28, 2002 to develop comments on agenda items G.7 and G.8. The HC also discussed the following items:

Items Needing Council action

Klamath Flow Issues. At the last meeting, the Council directed the HC to draft a letter regarding Klamath flow issues. This letter was drafted (Exhibit B.1, Supplemental Attachment 2). The letter includes comments on the recent fish kill and related Endangered Species Act (ESA) and Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) consultations. The HC heard a presentation about the current status of Klamath flows by Mr. Michael Rode of the California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG). As a result, the HC redrafted the letter (Exhibit B.1, Supplemental Attachment 4). Additionally, the HC suggests the letter be addressed to both SOC and the Department of Interior.

Marine Reserves. The HC discussed the publication "The Science of Marine Reserves," just published by the Partnership for Interdisciplinary Studies of Coastal Oceans (PISCO), which provides a new synthesis of information. The HC recommends the Council invite Dr. Jane Lubchenco of Oregon State University to give a presentation to the Council on marine reserves at the March 2003 meeting. Dr. Lubchenco is past president American Association for the Advancement of Science. This talk would address both the fisheries benefits of marine reserves and would relate to the development of the Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS).

Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC). The Council received a response from FERC to its letter of May 13, 2002 (Exhibit B.1, Attachment 1). The HC felt that the response was less than satisfactory. The HC recommends the Council re-submit the May 13 letter as formal comment to FERC as part of its new hydropower licensing rulemaking process. The deadline for comments is December 6. In addition, the HC would like to take FERC up on its offer to send a representative to discuss these issues with the HC.

Other Items

EFH and Programmatic Environmental Impact Statements. The Committee heard presentations from Mr. Steve Copps and Mr. Jim Glock about progress on the two EISs. The HC also received a presentation on the progress of EFH mapping by TerraLogic Geographic Information System (GIS). Existing data sources were reviewed and limitations were discussed.

Fishing Gear. The HC heard an update on the EFH EIS work as it relates to describing fishing gear used in the Pacific region. The description is being finalized and will soon be made available to the public for wider review. It describes all gear used on the West Coast in groundfish fishery management plan (FMP) and non-FMP fisheries. In addition, a national review of literature on benthic habitat/fishing interactions has been prepared. The review describes what is known about fishing gear impacts on benthic habitat. These will be used as background for the risk assessment to be included in the EFH EIS.

EFH Tracking and Database. The HC was informed about progress on updating the groundfish EFH appendix for the groundfish FMP appendix 11. The appendix, which consists of life history descriptions of the 82 groundfish species, has been updated. In addition, an EFH database is currently being developed. The database will be an integral part of the EFH EIS, and will allow the public and decision makers to easily access information by topic, including habitat type, location, fish species, prey, and life stage.

Groundfish fleet reduction project. HC members attended a presentation on Ecotrust's work to create a model to analyze impacts of fleet reduction efforts.

National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Applicability. The HC heard about an effort by the Navy to circumvent NEPA to avoid preparing an environmental impact statement on the effects of high-energy sonar testing in the area 12 to 200 miles offshore. Although this effort failed, other attempts to weaken habitat-related legislation are taking place on many fronts. The HC will continue to track and report on these matters.

Marine Aquaculture. The HC heard the National Marine Fisheries Service was requesting comments regarding offshore aquaculture practices, but the timeframe was too short to accommodate the Council process. Marine aquaculture may have important impacts on EFH due to disease and pollution concerns. The HC will continue to track this issue.

Power Plant Effects. At the September meeting, the Council requested the HC to look into power plant effects on Council managed species. The HC is gathering information on this topic and will arrange a presentation for its April meeting.

PFMC
10/29/02