

REPORT OF THE HABITAT COMMITTEE

The Habitat Committee (HC) met on Monday, June 16 and discussed the following topics. Comments on the Groundfish Bycatch Program Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) will be made during that agenda item.

Salmon Aquaculture

The HC heard a presentation on Atlantic salmon net pen aquaculture by Dr. Ian Fleming of Oregon State University. The HC has concerns about net pen aquaculture and discussed how to address this issue in the future. This is a very important issue with a number of habitat, ecosystem and fishery-related implications, including potential effects on wild salmon, steelhead, and groundfish. For example, there is documentation of Atlantic salmon spawning in coastal streams in British Columbia and Alaska, leading to competition between native salmon and these exotic fish. There are also water quality and disease transmission issues associated with net pen aquaculture, and there is potential for other species besides salmon, such as sablefish and halibut, to be farmed offshore.

The HC proposes drafting a resolution that clarifies the Council's position on salmon net pens (as they relate to habitat) for presentation to the Council in November. At the same time, we realize this issue has implications that go beyond habitat effects. For example, salmon net pens have an important economic impact on Council-managed salmon fisheries.

We recommend the Council invite Dr. Fleming and/or other experts to give a similar presentation to the Council and its advisory bodies, and consider a draft resolution in November.

Klamath/Trinity Flows

The HC received an update on Klamath River issues from Mr. Mike Rode. The U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (USBR) is presently operating the Klamath Project under a "below average" water year type that is resulting in a flow release of 1,168 cubic feet per second (cfs) at Iron Gate Dam during the month of September. This flow is approximately 60% greater than occurred last year at this time, just prior to the onset of the fish kill. Additionally, the USBR has implemented an augmented flow release schedule on the Trinity River to increase flows in the lower Klamath River and minimize the risk of incurring another major fish kill. Trinity River flows at Lewiston Dam were increased from 450 cfs on August 24 to 1,650 cfs on August 26, and are being ramped back down to the base flow of 450 cfs by September 17. Flows at the mouth of the Klamath River at this time are approximately 3,500 cfs, compared to 2,000 cfs last year. The HC is concerned that the use of such a large amount of Trinity River water to solve a mainstem Klamath River flow problem is an artificial short-term solution for a complicated long-term problem and neglects anadromous fish needs in the 140-mile portion of the Klamath above its confluence with the Trinity River.

Conservation Implementation Program (CIP)

The CIP is being proposed by the USBR to recover endangered shortnose and Lost River Suckers and coho salmon while allowing continued operation of existing facilities and future development of water resources for human use in the Klamath Basin. The HC is concerned there is not enough water in the Upper Klamath Basin to provide for all fish, wildlife, and agricultural needs especially during below average water years; the water needed cannot be developed. Therefore, the HC believes it is unrealistic for the CIP to propose that listed species can be recovered while even more water is developed for future agricultural and other human uses. The HC is also concerned the CIP only focuses on three listed species when the health of the entire Klamath River ecosystem is in jeopardy. For instance, the CIP will not address the EFH of chinook salmon, a Council-managed species that suffered a devastating fish kill in September 2002. To be successful, the HC believes that the CIP needs to be a multi-species, ecosystem-based program.

Other Issues

The HC also discussed marine reserve issues, and supports the MPA Demonstration Project as a way to improve collaboration between the Council and other federal agencies. We also heard an update on West Coast habitat mapping that will be used in the EFH EIS and other efforts.

Finally, the HC received public comment from Oceana on deep water corals and sponges as living substrate. We expect a more in-depth presentation on this topic at some point in the future.

PFMC
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