

## HABITAT COMMITTEE REPORT

The Habitat Committee (HC) met on Monday and Tuesday, November 1 and 2, to develop comments on marine protected area issues and essential fish habitat (EFH) for salmon and groundfish. In addition, the HC discussed the following:

### **California Herring**

The HC heard a presentation from Mr. Eric Larsen of California Department of Fish and Game regarding the management of herring in California, with an emphasis on San Francisco Bay. Herring populations are critically low, and the age structure has been significantly affected by poor ocean conditions and harvest pressure over the past 20+ years. Although harvest alone probably does not threaten the population, the HC is troubled about the progression of California herring management. Clearly, the status of this important prey species can have a dramatic effect on the health of many Council-managed species. The HC urges the Council to recommend that the California Fish and Game Commission take a very precautionary approach to harvest until a minimum threshold population level, coupled with recovery to historic age structure, is identified and achieved.

### **Klamath/Trinity Issues**

The Habitat Committee discussed a Memorandum of Agreement that was recently developed between the states of Oregon, California, and the federal government to collaboratively work together to solve Klamath Basin resource issues. While the agreement focuses on future collaboration, it seems to be a prelude to a Conservation Implementation Program (CIP) being developed by the Bureau of Reclamation. The CIP is intended to recover listed fish species (and hopefully address restoration of Klamath Basin fisheries resources in general), while ensuring certainty of water availability to water users of the Klamath Basin.

While the Klamath has experienced a fairly wet autumn to date, flows at Iron Gate Dam have not increased from September lows, and the Bureau of Reclamation plans to manage river flows throughout the winter based upon the dry water year-type forecast of last June. The extremely low flows planned for the upcoming months, especially during February and March—a critical time for the salmon fry survival—are problematic. The HC may recommend that a fast-track letter to the Bureau of Reclamation be developed next February. The letter would encourage the Bureau to adjust the water year type and resultant river flows based upon the hydrologic conditions of the previous months, rather than the previous spring/summer period.

It is too early to know the total basin-wide size of the 2004 Klamath fall chinook run, but preliminary indications are that the run is smaller than was predicted. As you may recall, the abundance of age-3 Klamath fall chinook was predicted to be one of the lowest on record.

However, there is good news regarding management of the Trinity River. A recent court decision has determined that the Record of Decision (ROD) regarding the restoration of the Trinity River

should be fully implemented, including flows that have been challenged by litigation since the ROD was signed in December of 2001. These flows, associated with the other components of the ROD, should dramatically influence the recovery of Trinity River fish populations.

### **Central Valley Water Project letter**

In June, the Council directed staff to coordinate with NMFS Southwest Region to prepare a letter to the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation and California Department of Water Resources on EFH conservation recommendations relative to in-stream water management within California's Central Valley Project. This letter was delayed while waiting for the EFH recommendations to be finalized. The recommendations were released in late October, and the HC is now in the process of developing a letter on this subject to be sent between the November and March Council meetings.

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