

HABITAT COMMITTEE REPORT

The Habitat Committee (HC) met on Thursday, March 3, 2005 to develop comments on marine protected area agenda items and to discuss Klamath River issues and essential fish habitat (EFH) issues associated with oyster culture in Humboldt Bay.

The HC heard a report from National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) staff outlining severe water flow issues in the Klamath Basin in 2005. This will create survival problems, especially for juvenile fish, and will likely result in curtailments in fisheries when the 2005 year class returns. Similarly, the severe fishing quota restrictions expected to be enacted this year resulted in part from the very low flows of 2002 and their impacts on that year's juvenile fish. This demonstrates the need for the Council to continue to be involved in the Klamath Basin and to work toward long-term solutions, such as water banks, market rates for power and water, and other water conservation incentives. A letter on Klamath issues was postponed until the April Council meeting.

The HC also heard a report regarding a Humboldt Bay oyster culture permit application and its potential effects on EFH and Endangered Species Act-listed species. The permittee is proposing to modify an existing oyster culture operation, changing from bottom culture to off-bottom culture. Representatives from NOAA Fisheries and the permittee were present and gave the HC their differing perspectives on impacts to eelgrass and other EFH from these proposed, less disruptive modifications. This consultation is being closely followed by other West Coast shellfish growers and may have implications for other types of permits that potentially impact EFH. When NMFS completes its EFH consultation, the Council may wish to provide comments on this issue.

The HC expressed concerns about 2005 Pacific Northwest water flow issues, since snow pack is currently 20% to 40% of normal in many regions. The HC may provide a more detailed statement on this at the April meeting and may suggest recommended actions to the Council.

PFMC
03/07/05