

## REPORT OF THE HABITAT STEERING GROUP

The Habitat Steering Group (HSG) received a brief update on the status of the Ad-Hoc Marine Reserve Committee's (MRC) marine reserve analysis. The analysis will be ready for the April Council meeting for discussion and possible recommendations to the Council. The HSG will review the analysis and the MRC's recommendations and provide comments to the Council at the June meeting.

The HSG also received an update from Ms. Cyreis Schmitt, NMFS Northwest Regional Science Center, on efforts related to fishing gear impacts. NMFS has submitted a Sea Grant proposal to work with the Washington and Oregon departments of fish and wildlife to develop a Geographic Information System (GIS) database for marine habitat. Included in this initiative is an outreach component to share data with--and solicit information from--industry, members of the public, and scientists. In addition, staff and funding for other research projects has been identified. Ms. Schmitt plans to present a draft process for classifying habitat areas of particular concern (HAPCs) at the April HSG meeting.

The Work Group on Gear Impacts, which is made up of HSG and Groundfish Advisory Subpanel members, is scheduled to meet at the April Council meeting. The HSG discussed potential agenda items for the joint meeting, including classification of habitat types (e.g., cobble, sand, rock), clarification on trawl logbook information, and a discussion relative to which gear types are used in different areas. Given the HSG's rather lengthy agenda for its April 3rd meeting, the HSG would like to request the Work Group meet the morning of April 4<sup>th</sup>.

The HSG received a presentation from Mr. Jim White, California Department of Fish and Game, regarding the CALFED Bay Delta Program and its ecosystem restoration program. The ecosystem restoration program focuses on restoring and preserving habitat and reducing stressors in the environment through the use of screened diversions, improved fish passage, and water quality. A final environmental impact statement (EIS)/environmental impact review is expected to be completed this summer. The HSG plans to draft a letter to the CALFED Policy Group which stresses the value of habitat restoration for anadromous and endemic species. This letter will be brought to the Council for approval in April.

The HSG also received updates on the Lake Mendocino Project, Potter Valley Project, the San Francisco airport dredging proposal, and the Upper Klamath EIS. It was decided the HSG would draft letters on the San Francisco airport dredging proposal and the Upper Klamath EIS and present them to the Council for approval in April.

The HSG has requested an update on the status of Salmon Plan Amendment 14 (essential fish habitat [EFH]) and the interim final rule for EFH from NMFS at its April meeting as background for potential future action.

On a final note, the HSG would like to express its appreciation to the Council relative to the resolution on Snake River dam removal. That resolution raised the awareness of the importance of habitat restoration and, as a result, Governor Kitzhaber is supporting removal of the Snake River dams.

**Action Items:** None.

PFMC  
03/07/00

## Sea Shepherd Conservation Society

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8 March 2000

Sea Shepherd Conservation Society's Comments to Pacific Fishery Management Council meeting to address management of fisheries for salmon, coastal pelagic species, Pacific halibut, highly migratory species, and groundfish:

### **- habitat issues**

My name is Frank Trinkle, I am the Development Director for the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society, a non-profit organization presently headquartered in Washington State dedicated to the international protection of marine wildlife.

We feel that there is potentially no issue on the Council's agenda today more critical than the issue of habitat.

The specific habitat area we wish to bring to the Council's attention is the kelp forest ecosystem of the California central coast. Though vital habitat for juvenile rockfish and the Southern sea otter, the kelp plants in the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary are being harvested at levels very much at odds with the precautionary principle of fishery management. The practice of hand harvesters taking the whole plant down to the sea bed, in violation of DFG regulations, has been widely reported. The MBNMA Kelp Management Plan admits to the inadequacy or complete lack of studies on the impact of kelp harvesting on sea otters, benthic invertebrates, microinvertebrates, or other marine life inhabiting this ecosystem, nor is there any known answer to the question "at what point would intensive repetitious harvesting, especially in a confined space, begin to cause significant ecological degradation?"

We fully concur with Friends of the Sea Otter in their assessment that the regulations are weak; the harvest is poorly monitored; and the kelp harvesting document is based on an insufficient amount of research assessing harvesting impacts on this vital fish nursery.

The Southern sea otter has been in steady decline for the last five years, and now numbers less than 2,000 animals. It is listed as "threatened" under ESA and is a "fully protected animal" under the California Fish and Game Code. The precautionary principle in fishery management must be applied: In light of the lack of knowledge of the impacts of harvesting within the otter's habitat, and the likelihood of disruption and illegal "take" of sea otters by the harvesting of the kelp canopy, aggravating the condition of the canopy during the winter months when it is most sparse and the waters are rough, the practice of kelp harvesting in the Sanctuary should be disallowed, and the federal authority should declare the kelp forests within the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary a "no take" marine protected area.

SALMON ADVISORY SUBPANEL COMMENTS ON  
HABITAT ISSUES

The Salmon Advisory Subpanel (SAS) welcomes this opportunity to support the direction put forward by the Habitat Steering Group (HSG). It is critical the Council continue to track and attempt to influence the various habitat issues that will be brought forward in the near future, such as: Klamath Water Operation Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS), and the Inter-Columbia Basin Ecosystem Management Plan DEIS.

We would also like to clarify the issue of SAS representation on the HSG. We endorse full designated status of a SAS member on the HSG. Mr. Paul Engelmeyer is willing to continue his participation as SAS representative to the HSG.

We appreciate the Council's leadership concerning the Snake River Resolution as well as the other habitat-related issues you have attempted to influence. We will continue to bring issues to you through the HSG process.

PFMC  
03/08/00