

ESSENTIAL FISH HABITAT ISSUES

Situation: The Habitat Steering Group (HSG) will be reviewing and commenting on Council agenda items C.5, Habitat Elements of the Groundfish Rebuilding Plans; C.10, Groundfish Fishery Management Plan Environmental Impact Statement; D.1, Review of West Coast Marine Reserves Efforts; D.2, Marine Reserve Proposals for Channel Island National Marine Sanctuary; F.1, NMFS Report on Salmon Management including Columbia River flow issues; and F.4, Queets River Coho Status Review. Other issues that will be discussed at the September HSG meeting include the Council Operating Procedures (COP) for the HSG; regional Council approaches to the identification and protection of habitat areas of particular concern; fishing gear impact information; mortality of Sacramento winter chinook at the Clifton Pumps, and the Sacramento winter chinook recovery plan (see Ancillary D for the complete agenda).

Council Action:

1. Consider comments and recommendations developed by the HSG at the September meeting.

Reference Materials:

1. Habitat Steering Group Agenda (Ancillary D).

PFMC
08/28/01

REPORT OF THE HABITAT STEERING GROUP

At its meeting on Monday the Habitat Steering Group (HSG) reviewed the Council Operating Procedures for the HSG and submitted suggested changes to the Executive Director. We also discussed the following items.

Habitat Areas of Particular Concern (HAPCs)

The HSG received a briefing from NMFS staff last year on a process for designating HAPCs, because little progress has been made to date. The HSG plans to revisit this issue at its next meeting. The Group reviewed the document "Regional Council Approaches to the Identification and Protection of Habitat Areas of Particular Concern" and plans to review the processes used in other regions as examples.

The following four updates were provided via email from Mr. Mark Helvey, NMFS, to the HSG:

Sacramento Winter Chinook Mortality at Clifton Pumps

A salmon workshop was held in June devoted entirely to the unprecedented loss of juvenile winter run chinook at the Delta Pumps in March (19,989) of which 94% were taken at the State Water Project (SWP) pumping facility. The incidental take limit set by NMFS was 7,404 for both Central Valley Project (CVP) and SWP facilities. The relative significance of this issue is still unclear. Data on spawning adult winter run used to make the juvenile production estimate is ambiguous, and a low estimate was used. The actual number may have been higher. There are also potential uncertainties in calculation of the number juvenile winter run chinook loss in the Delta. (i.e., direct loss of juvenile salmon through the SWP - Clifton Court Forebay is estimated at 70%, but could be as high as 90%).

NMFS is conducting a complete review of the winter run take as part of the CalFed Environmental Water Account (EWA) Science Review that will be presented in October. The Bureau of Reclamation has reinitiated consultation on the 1995 Winter Run Biological Opinion. Recommendations from this review will be forthcoming, but will most likely involve changes in the use of EWA for export curtailments, changes in the methods used to determine the number of juvenile winter run chinook entering the delta, and increased monitoring.

Sacramento Winter Chinook Recovery Plan Update

NMFS is in the process of mailing out letters soliciting nominations to the Technical Recovery Team (TRT) (note: these TRTs are multispecies) by the end of September. The process was delayed somewhat due to the Science Center's involvement with assembling the Central California Coast TRT, and the Transboundary TRT (northern California/Oregon border). NMFS is in the process of formulating a mailing list for the solicitation letters. Screening of the nominations by the Science Board and the Regional Administrator, and appointments to the TRT is planned to occur over the fall/winter months with the first meeting of the Central Valley TRT anticipated for early next year.

San Francisco Airport Expansion

Airport officials have abandoned one of four alternatives for building a new runway in the bay and have also added a new alternative that will leave a much smaller footprint. Alternative F2 has been dropped from further consideration, and this alternative would have required filling about 1,000 acres of the bay. The new alternative, BX-6, would cover about 600 acres of bay bottom. Airport officials are also offering about \$200 million to restore wetlands encircling the bay in exchange for filling part of it. Plans for the NOAA II panel to peer review the construction impact studies has been pushed back from October, and a new date has not been set.

EFH Consultations (to date)

The number of consultations in SWR is approximately 112 with 3,115 acres of estuarine and coastal EFH potentially affected by the proposed project actions that were reviewed. Potentially affected acreage for proposed riverine project actions is unidentified.

Klamath River Flow Issues

Non-jeopardy flows for the Klamath River were prescribed in a NMFS April 2001 Biological Opinion (BO) on the effects of the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation's operation of the Klamath Project on coho salmon. To date, those flows have been attained. However, the BO is effective only through September 2001 and it is uncertain when a new BO will be issued.

Both upper and lower basin parties have been meeting in a court-ordered mediation to develop short- and long-term solutions to the Klamath water crisis. Increased water storage, reduction in demand, water purchases, and groundwater pumping are some of the actions being considered or implemented to address the problem. In addition, new strategies for basin-wide coordination of restoration are being developed that may lead to reorganization of existing restoration efforts.

Federal Energy Regulatory Commission Relicensing Programmatic Letter

Background for the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) Relicensing Programmatic letter continues to be gathered by the Habitat Steering Group (HSG). Federal and state agencies support the concept of a programmatic letter which would address the Essential Fish Habitat as well as water quality and quantity issues as they pertain to relicensing. Input from staff has been received and relicensing projects that affect anadromous fish have been identified. We expect to review a draft letter at the November meeting.

The HSG has no requests for Council action at this time.

PFMC
09/12/01