

## HABITAT COMMITTEE REPORT ON CURRENT HABITAT ISSUES

### *Board of Forestry Rules*

The Oregon riparian protection rule issued by the Board of Forestry has implications for habitat important to salmon. The Council has a document in the September briefing book summarizing this protection rule, which could form the basis of a comment letter to the Board of Forestry. Riparian vegetation buffers perform several important functions that are important to maintaining the quality of salmon habitat. For example, they are a source of large woody debris, leaf litter, and insect fall; they provide shade to maintain cool water temperatures; and they filter stormwater runoff before it enters the stream. As such, Amendment 18 to the Pacific Coast Salmon Fishery Management Plan includes protecting and restoring riparian buffers as important tools for conserving salmon essential fish habitat.

The Habitat Committee (HC) recommends Council staff write a comment letter to Board of Forestry that recommends a 100 foot buffer for riparian habitat on fish-bearing streams. A subcommittee of the Board of Forestry has a meeting scheduled on September 25, 2015 to consider this issue. Therefore, a Council comment letter needs to be received before September 25, 2015 for the Board of Forestry's consideration.

### *HC Composition*

The HC is currently lacking both a northern tribal representative and a Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife representative.

### *Coast Seafoods Presentation*

The HC heard a presentation from representatives for Coast Seafoods (Robert Smith with Plauche & Carr, LLP and Chris Cziesla with Confluence Environmental Co.) on shellfish aquaculture expansion in Humboldt Bay, specifically on their impact analysis and mitigation alternatives, which have been modified based on feedback from state and Federal agencies. Mitigation alternatives include seeding to help regrowth of eelgrass in depleted areas and salt marsh restoration. Mitigation alternatives are dependent on partner or public funding.

Coast Seafoods currently has a Notice of Preparation out for comment with a deadline of September 21, 2015 and is preparing their Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) to submit for the state California Environmental Quality Act in late September. A 45-day comment period will follow the publication of the DEIR with the Final EIR up for certification in late November or early December. The Federal lead will most likely be the Army Corps of Engineers; the timeline for the National Environmental Policy Act process is unclear. The comment period does not coincide with the November Council meeting.

The Council sent a letter to the Humboldt Bay Harbor District and Coast Seafoods in July with concerns about the project and the similar Humboldt Bay Harbor District project. The HC did not have time to thoroughly review the 300+ page technical report submitted into the supplemental

briefing book to determine if all concerns were adequately addressed in the revised project description.

In order for the Council to comment on the draft EIR, the HC suggests the Council re-send the letter sent in July, noting that the proposal has been modified, before the NOP September 21 deadline. The letter could acknowledge Coast Seafoods' efforts and also request an extension of the comment period, possibly by delaying submission of the DEIR by a week or less so that the comment period overlaps with the Council's November schedule. If the comment period were delayed, the HC could provide a more detailed letter for the November briefing book.

### *West Coast Water Update*

The HC heard updates from HC members on water-related issues.

- Several desalination plants have been proposed for the California coast. The HC is monitoring the timeline, processes, and potential habitat impacts of these proposals through updates from HC members.
- In Oregon and Washington, recent rains and cooler temperatures have brought water temperatures back down to normal ranges. The recent rains also increased stream flows, at least temporarily, allowing salmon to move upstream. However, water supplies remain low.
- In June 2015, the Council sent a letter to the Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) requesting additional water releases in the Klamath River to avoid die-offs similar to what occurred in 2002. On August 7, BOR issued a new biological assessment of additional Trinity River flows to supplement lower Klamath flows. As a result of the assessment, supplemental releases of water began on August 21 and are expected to continue through September 20. To prevent a major lethal outbreak, a pulse flow was recommended to flush the pathogens from the system. The pulse flow was initiated on September 8, increasing flows to 5000 cfs for 24 hours, and is now ramping down.

PFMC  
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