

HABITAT COMMITTEE REPORT ON HABITAT MATTERS

Coast Seafoods Update

The Habitat Committee (HC) discussed the Coast Seafoods' Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) and the next steps in the permitting process for the proposed project in Humboldt Bay, California. In March 2016, the Council sent a comment letter to Humboldt Bay Harbor District commenting on the DEIR for the proposed project. A follow-up comment letter and accompanying cover letter were sent in September 2016 for the revised DEIR (Agenda Item C.1, Attachment 1). The U.S. Army Corp of Engineers (USACE) is scheduled to initiate the Federal process for permitting the Coast Seafoods' proposed project by issuing a notice of intent and eventual draft permit.

It would be important for the Council to remain engaged and comment on USACE's Federal permit; however, the permit process and comment periods may or may not align with the Council's meeting schedule. If so, **the HC proposes forming a subcommittee that could meet between Council meetings to develop a draft comment letter (or letters) on the Coast Seafoods project for the Council and/or Council staff to consider and finalize.**

The HC discussed the long-standing problem of aligning Council comments with formal comment periods, such as the proposed Coast Seafoods Aquaculture project. The HC plans to discuss how best to address this issue and prioritize comments on deadlines that do not coincide with Council meetings, and will bring a proposal to the Council in the future.

Oroville Dam Relicensing

NMFS is currently working on a biological opinion and EFH consultation for the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) relicensing of Oroville Dam on the Feather River, a tributary of the Sacramento River. Some fishing groups are concerned that measures to protect Endangered Species Act-listed Sacramento spring-run Chinook salmon may inadvertently harm EFH for fall-run Chinook salmon. Specific measures and EFH recommendations are unknown at this time. The documents are currently under NMFS internal review. The HC plans to review the Biological Opinion and EFH consultation when it comes available and report findings back to the Council.

Columbia/Snake River Biological Opinion

Bonneville Power Administration, U. S. Army Corps of Engineers, and Bureau of Reclamation (the Action Agencies for the Columbia/Snake River Biological Opinion) are set to begin scoping for a comprehensive environmental impact statement (EIS) under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) to address the environmental impact and alternatives for managing and operating federal dams on the Columbia and Snake Rivers. According to the U.S. District Court, scoping must be completed by September 30, 2017. The draft EIS is not due until March 27, 2020.

The Action Agencies are considering a public comment and hearing process that could begin as early as the end of September and extend through December. Although this comment period encompasses the November Council meeting, with elections and holidays it presents a less-than-ideal time frame for public comment.

If the Council would like to either seek a longer time period for public comment and/or produce comments during the EIS scoping process, the HC could draft a letter for Council approval at the November meeting.

BOEM Presentation

The HC heard a presentation from Donna Schroeder of BOEM on the Trident Winds offshore energy wind project. Trident Winds spoke to the HC at the March HC meeting about applying for a lease to develop a wind energy facility offshore of Morro Bay. The requested lease area is located 33 nautical miles offshore of Morro Bay in 400-500 fathoms and will potentially consist of 100 floating units generating 6-8 MW each. Trident proposes to be operational by 2025. As an “unsolicited” lease, BOEM has published a “Request for Interest” to determine if there is any other interest in the lease area and to gather information on the area, such as geological and geophysical conditions, historic and archeological sites, and relevant environmental information. The comment period for this notice closes Sept. 19.

At this stage, Trident Winds has not yet developed the project description, but additional information on the project is available from www.tridentwinds.com and includes a link to the city of Morro Bay’s website, which includes information about outreach efforts. BOEM will begin their review and analysis of the project and solicit public comments once the project description and Construction and Operation Plan is complete. Additionally, a site assessment phase will likely precede the Construction and Operations Plan, offering another opportunity to comment on the project before the start of the NEPA process.

Authority to exclude vessels from a wind project lies with the Coast Guard rather than BOEM and is very likely. The project was designed to avoid primary shipping lanes.

Cal Poly’s “CalWave Power Technologies” is another energy project proposed off California that will serve as a test site for energy developers. This test site will be located offshore of Vandenberg Air Force Base near Point Conception. CalWave and Vandenberg Air Force Base have a memorandum of understanding for potentially connecting the test center to the base’s energy grid for its use.

A Renewable Energy conference is scheduled for Nov. 1-2 at UC Davis to address California-specific energy issues.

PFMC
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