

HABITAT COMMITTEE REPORT ON GROUND FISH ESSENTIAL FISH HABITAT AND ROCKFISH CONSERVATION AREA AMENDMENT 28 ALTERNATIVES

The Habitat Committee (HC) heard reports from Council staff Kerry Griffin and Kelly Ames on groundfish essential fish habitat, and spent several hours analyzing and discussing the proposals. The HC greatly appreciates all of the hard work that the team has put into this complex project.

The HC has the following comments:

Alternative 1

The HC's general priorities regarding Alternative 1 are as follows:

1. Accept polygons from the Collaborative Proposal, which have been vetted with stakeholders.
2. Do not reopen existing essential fish habitat conservation areas (EFHCAs) unless there is new information regarding priority habitat delineation. The exception to this recommendation are the reopenings from the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary proposal (this proposal has been fully incorporated into the Collaborative proposal). The reopenings from this proposal were achieved through consensus agreement with the local trawl fleet fishermen and nongovernmental organizations. The new EFHCA and reopenings from this proposal achieve a net increase in areas protected. Consider additional polygons (in the Oceana proposal, and polygons that were initially considered in the Collaborative Proposal but were dropped from the final proposal) that protect priority habitats.

The HC recommended the following specific modifications. Each decision specifies a fishing closure unless noted.

Remove from Collaborative Proposal:

- Grays Canyon Western Modification (reopen)
- Stonewall Bank Western Modification

Add from former Collaborative (referred to as "None" or "Other")

- Shale Pile Northeast Side (reopen)
- Shale Pile East Side
- Garibaldi Reef North
- Garibaldi Reef South
- Daisy Bank Southern Modification
- Haceta Bank Modification (western portion of proposed site where rock substrate occurs)

Add from Oceana Proposal

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Willapa Canyonhead • Astoria Canyonhead • Cascadia Shelf Hotspot • Siletz Hotspot • Hydrate Ridge/ Central OR Footprint Modification • N. Daisy Bank • N. Stonewall Bank • Heceta Bank • Rogue Canyonhead • S. Oregon Footprint Modification • Crescent City Deepwater Hotspot • Samoa Deepwater • Samoa Reef • N. Eel River Canyon • S. Eel River Canyon • Blunt Reef Expansion • Mendocino Ridge Expansion • Spanish Canyon • Delgada Canyon Reopening • South Delgada Canyonheads • Delgada Canyon Deep • Noyo Canyonhead • Navarro Canyon • Pt. Arena Canyonheads • Saunders Reef • Pt. Arena Biogenic Reopening • Pt Arena Biogenic South Expansion • Russian River • Gobbler's Knob 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cordell Bank Expansion • Fanny Shoals Shelf Extension • Rittenberg Bank • Cochrane Bank • Farallon Escarpment to Pioneer Canyon Deep • Pioneer Canyonhead • Pioneer Canyon • Pescadero Reef • Cabrillo Canyon • Ascension Canyonhead • Ano Nuevo Canyonhead • MBNMS SW of Smooth Ridge • MBNMS S of Mars Cable • MBNMS W of Carmel Canyon • MBNMS W of Sobranes Point • MBNMS E of Sur Ridge • MBNMS Point Sur Platform / ONO Sur Platform Rocks • La Cruz Canyon to Piedras Blancas • Pt. Buchon • East Santa Lucia Bank (Northwest Expansion) • Pt. Arguello • East Santa Lucia Bank (Southeast Expansion) • Southern CA Bight
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The HC also recommended that the dimensions of the following two polygons be refined to reflect better information concerning rocky habitat distributions:

- Bandon High Spot Northern Modification (Collaborative)
- Bandon High Spot Southern Modification (Collaborative)

There was disagreement within the HC on three overlapping polygons, and we do not make a recommendation on these:

- Astoria Footprint Modification (Oceana)
- Willapa Deep (Collaborative)
- Astoria Deep (Collaborative)

Alternative 2:

The HC supports the concept of 2B, with the understanding that priority habitat polygons may need to be refined, and identifying coral and sponge habitat may need to be updated to include trawl observations included in the National Marine Fisheries Service Synthesis. Also, the HC supports the concept that a diversity of habitat types be represented across these EFHCAs.

Alternative 3:

In general, Rockfish Conservation Areas (RCAs) were not proposed with the intention of protecting habitat, and therefore do not engender comment by the HC. However, any opening of the RCA will result in an unprecedented opportunity to facilitate applied research that addresses whether habitat protections improve EFH and conditions for groundfish. Hence, the HC recommends that with respect to any adjustments to RCAs, the Council should include in the preliminary preferred alternative a plan to select portions of the RCA for research addressing effects of area closures.

Minority Report

Some HC members expressed concern about making changes to the agreed-upon polygons in the Collaborative Proposal. These EFH and RCA recommendations appear to be the result of negotiations between stakeholders and certain nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). Developing relationships and trust between fishermen and NGOs can have long-term dividends, and it is noteworthy that many studies of marine protected area (MPA) development conclude that directly affected stakeholders must be involved and supportive throughout the process in order for MPAs to succeed. For these reasons, some HC members do not support the blanket closure of the SoCal Bight to bottom trawling at this time.

PFMC
11/18/16