

ESSENTIAL FISH HABITAT/ROCKFISH CONSERVATION AREA
PROJECT TEAM PROGRESS REPORT

At its November 2016 meeting, the Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) considered an analytical report from the Essential Fish Habitat (EFH)/Rockfish Conservation Area (RCA) Project Team (Project Team) on potential modifications to existing EFH Conservation Areas (EFHCAs) and the trawl RCA. The Council identified some preliminary preferred alternatives and provided direction to the Project Team regarding alternatives to be considered for further analysis. The Council also asked for a progress update, consistent with the Groundfish Management Team's (GMT) supplemental report on future meeting and workload planning (November Agenda Item C.6.a, Supplemental [GMT Report](#)). This update describes progress made in several areas, and makes recommendations for the project schedule.

Spatial Data

At its November 2016 meeting the Council directed the Project Team to move forward with further analysis of the Collaborative and Oceana proposals, and supported several recommendations regarding new or modified boundaries, including:

1. Six EFHCAs off Oregon, proposed by the Midwater Trawlers Cooperative (November Agenda Item F.4.c, [Public Comment](#) 2, page 32);
2. Modify the Rittenburg Bank EFHCA, proposed by the Greater Farallones National Marine Sanctuary (November Agenda Item F.4.b, Supplemental [NMFS Report](#));
3. Correct the coordinates for the Potato Bank EFHCA;
4. Inclusion for analysis the Garibaldi reef proposed EFHCA (in Appendix F.4.a of November [Project Team Report](#));
5. Align the shoreward boundaries of the Southern California Bight closure in Alternative 1.c (Oceana, et al.) with the waypoints defined in federal regulation that approximate the 100fm boundary. This was suggested by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (November Agenda Item F.4.b, Supplemental [CDFW Report](#)).

Numbers 1-4 above are separate alternatives under Subject Area 1, resulting in some increase in the complexity of the analysis and workload. The fifth bullet is relatively straightforward, and is not anticipated to be a significant workload.

While most of the necessary geographic information systems (GIS) layers for these revised alternatives have been created, some that are related to the alternatives added by the Council in November are still pending. In addition, the Project Team must finalize its approach to using habitat suitability probability (HSP) data in the context of developing priority habitats, in response to comments by the SSC (November 2016 Agenda Item F.4.b, Supplemental SSC Report). Logbook data will require additional processing and quality control, and funding for the GIS Analyst is not yet in place. These are among the tasks that need to be completed prior to proceeding with the data analysis and document production.

Habitat Analysis

The Council considered recommendations from advisory bodies, and provided the following direction to the Project Team regarding analyses in different subject areas and alternatives, relative to physical and biogenic habitat:

- The Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) and Habitat Committee (HC) recommended changes to the analysis of habitat forming invertebrates (HFI) (i.e., corals/sponges);
- The SSC recommended a different approach to using HSP as it pertains to priority habitats;
- The SSC considered a revised DAC methodology and recommended no longer using fishery-dependent data. Rather, the SSC suggested using the HSP data layers to identify areas that have a high probability of overfished species occurrence.

The Project Team has made progress addressing each of these topics. However, for each modification of the analytical approach, a significant amount of time and resources is required. For example, regarding the first bullet above, the Project Team considered ways to incorporate trawl survey and fishery bycatch data into the HFI data layers, and ultimately chose to 1) incorporate the trawl survey data into the existing ‘presence’ data layer, and 2) update the Phase One Report heat maps that display coral and sponge bycatch density, using trawl fishery observer data. To arrive at this decision, the Project Team held conference calls, a webinar, and developed a written description of the analytical approach ultimately adopted.

Socio-Economic Analysis

Data on catch, revenue, and effort was not included in the November 2016 report, but the Project Team continues to develop its analytical approach. On February 9, 2017 the SSC’s Economics Subcommittee held a webinar meeting to consider the potential approaches to the economic analysis, including the question of which years to use as general indicators of future fishing activity, in areas proposed to be re-opened to fishing. On March 1, members of the Project Team presented the same approach to the GMT. The Project Team requested guidance on the choice of years to use for assessing past fishing activity in areas that have been closed to bottom trawling for up to 15 years. The full SSC will consider the Subcommittee report at its March 2017 meeting in Vancouver, Washington.

Investigating data sources/issues and developing a reasonable method to assess effort, catch, and revenue for the socioeconomic analysis required a significant amount of additional work by several Project Team members. EHFCAs have been closed since 2006, and the trawl RCA has been closed since 2002. This limits the amount of complete logbook tow information that is available prior to those periods. For example, the Project Team found that for most bottom trawl tows prior to 2000, only a single point was recorded in logbooks, rather than a start and end point for each tow. Given that the average bottom trawl tow is in the range of 17 kilometers, this adds a great amount of uncertainty to the analysis and where catch may have occurred. The Project Team will finalize the data sources and a method to conduct the socioeconomic analysis after the March 2017 meeting.

Revised Alternatives Table

Based on Council direction from the November 2016 meeting, the Project Team developed a revised alternatives table (appended). It reflects the alternatives added to subject area 1, and the fact that subject area 2 and Alternative 3c are now limited to waters off Washington.

Staffing

The Project Team is made up of staff from the Council, NMFS, and NWFSC, with GIS analysis being conducted by Sound GIS. NMFS was able to procure additional funding to support the GIS analyst position, hopefully through the completion of the project. However, that additional funding is not yet in place, which is causing a delay in the analysis. All other Project Team members have multiple other priorities and tasks, making it a challenge to maintain progress on the EFH/RCA project. Nonetheless, the Project Team meets at least once per week and continues to move forward with the necessary analyses.

Recommendation for Modified Schedule

The Project Team recommends moving final action to September 2017, to accommodate the additional analyses and modified alternatives resulting from the November 2016 Council meeting. This leaves open the possibility of a June check-in to provide preliminary analysis and solicit feedback from advisory bodies and the Council on specific topics.

PFMC
03/08/17

Subject Area	Alternatives						
1. EFHCA changes (re-openings and new closures)	1.a No Action (PPA for WA)	1.b Collaborative	1.c Oceana, et al. (modified per November F4b CDFW report)	1.d MTC (pg 32) *	1e Garibaldi reef South (from “None” in F4a Project Team Report appendix table F4-a)**	1f Rittenburg bank modifications in NMS report**	1g Potato Bank correction**
2. New EFHCAs within current RCAs (WA only)	2.a No Action	2.b Add new EFHCAs within the trawl RCA based on presence of priority habitats (WA only)					
3. Adjustments to Trawl RCA	3.a No Action (PPA for WA)	3.b Remove the trawl RCA (PPA for OR&CA)**	3.c Remove the trawl RCA and implement discrete area closures for overfished species (WA only)**	3.d Remove the trawl RCA and implement block area closures to protect groundfish and protected species, primarily salmon (PPA for OR&CA)**			
4. Use MSA Sec. 303(b) discretionary authorities	4.a No Action	4.b Use MSA Sec. 303(b)(2)(A), 303(b)(2)(B), or 303(b)(12) to close waters deeper than 3,500 m to bottom contact gear, consistent with September 2015 Agenda Item H.8.a, Supplemental NMFS Report . (Preliminary Preferred)					

*Nehalem bank/shale pile, Popcorn, Garibaldi reef, Stonewall bank, Daisy bank/Nelson Island (as modified by GAP), Heceta bank (as modified by GAP). This alternative is mutually exclusive with Alternative 1c.

**These are not mutually exclusive with other EFHCA or RCA changes.