

DEEP SEA CORAL RESEARCH & TECHNOLOGY PROGRAM'S UPCOMING WEST COAST RESEARCH INITIATIVE

NOAA's Deep Sea Coral Research & Technology Program (DSCRTP) funded a three-year research initiative to better understand deep-sea coral communities in West Coast waters between 2010-2012. Priorities were solicited from the PFMC, tribes, academic partners, and from NWFSC/SWFSC researchers, and included improving understanding of deep-sea coral distribution, abundance, density, and diversity throughout the region; fish-invertebrate associations; basic deep-sea coral biology; and the state of pre-existing data. Fifteen cruises and projects were conducted as part of the initiative to achieve these objectives, and in the process new species were described and innovative genetic techniques developed. Plans and results were communicated to the Council, and data have been used in the EFH process as well as Sanctuary expansion and damage assessment. In addition, data collected during this initiative supported habitat suitability modeling, and quantification of coral and sponge damage in areas of high fishery bycatch.

The DSCRTP is requesting current priorities from the Council to inform research to be conducted on deep-sea coral and sponge communities between fiscal years 2019-2021. 2018 is a planning year in which approximately \$200,000 will be dedicated to deep-sea coral related planning and activities on the west coast; 2019 and 2020 will be research years in which DSCRTP expects to provide support of up to \$1M per year; and in 2021 data analysis will be supported with up to \$100,000 from DSCRTP. It is important that the Program develop research initiative plans in consultation with the Council; therefore we would like to discuss the initiative in more detail at a future Council meeting to gather feedback and work with the Council and Advisory Bodies. DSCRTP also plans to convene a workshop in early 2018 to obtain and discuss priorities from the community at large.