

HABITAT COMMITTEE REPORT ON CURRENT HABITAT ISSUES

Groundfish Essential Fish Habitat Planning

John Stadler provided an introduction to the preliminary draft environmental impact statement (EIS) on Amendment 28 to the Groundfish Fishery Management Plan (FMP). On Saturday, March 10, from 7-9 PM in the Vineyard Room there will be an informational meeting to frame the preliminary draft EIS, describe alternatives examined, and demonstrate two web tools that can be used to visualize alternatives. The Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) and Rockfish Conservation Area (RCA) Project Team compared the no-action alternative with four combinations of over 10 alternatives to modifying EFH conservation areas and RCAs. These four combinations spanned a range of effects on fishes, benthic habitat, economics, and protected resources. All summaries will be available in the April briefing book, and the web tools are currently publicly available (2018 EFH viewer – <http://www.soundgis.com/efh/efh2018-metrics/>; NWFSC FRAM Data Warehouse – <https://www.nwfsc.noaa.gov/data/map>) for viewing and analysis ahead of the meeting.

The Habitat Committee (HC) found the presentation useful and encourages others to attend the Saturday evening session.

Oil and Gas Leasing Program

The Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) was directed in Executive Order 13795 (April 28, 2017) and Secretary's Order 3350 (May 1, 2017) to initiate a process to develop a new National Outer Continental Shelf Program for 2019–2024 that, if approved, will supersede the 2017–2022 Program. The first of three proposals for 2019–2024, the Draft Proposed Program, was released on January 4, 2018.

The Governors of Washington, Oregon, and California and multiple state natural resource agencies have sent letters to the U.S. Secretary of the Interior/BOEM opposing the proposed oil and gas leasing off the Pacific coast. The letters state the importance of marine ecosystems and the coastal community jobs that rely on them. The letters urge the removal of this area from the 2019-2024 Draft Proposed National Outer Continental Shelf Oil and Gas Leasing Program because of the increased risk that offshore oil production poses.

The HC was tasked with reviewing and editing a letter that was originally drafted for Council Coordinating Committee consideration, but was not sent. The edited letter is in the briefing book for Council consideration as D.1, Supplemental Attachment 2. The comment deadline is March 9, 2018 (today).

California BOEM Offshore Renewable Energy Taskforce

The California Energy Commission is hosting a webinar on March 12, 2018. The purpose of the webinar is to discuss the potential for offshore renewable energy in California. The webinar will include presentations on data gathering efforts (the California Offshore Renewable Energy Gateway), the status of BOEM -California Intergovernmental Renewable Energy Task Force, and the Department of Defense mission compatibility assessment. Webinar information can be found at the following link: <https://efiling.energy.ca.gov/getdocument.aspx?tn=222736>

Klamath Dam Removal

Progress continues toward the goal of removing four dams from the Klamath River in 2020. Current focus is on completing the regulatory requirements. Removal of the dams will provide access to more than 400 miles of historic anadromous salmonid habitat, ameliorate poor water quality and fish disease conditions in the river, and increase life history diversity, abundance, and spatial distribution of salmonids in the Klamath Basin.

Columbia River

The U.S. and Canada had their first bilateral meeting focusing on Columbia River Treaty negotiations on January 17 in Ottawa. The U.S. State Department is optimistic that formal negotiations will begin in April. Secretary Tillerson expected to approve plans for negotiations and stakeholder engagement (including tribal representation) soon. Last week, the State Department Treaty team met with representatives from the Corps, Bonneville Power Administration, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).

The 2018 -2027 Columbia River Management Agreement prepared by the parties to the U.S. vs. Oregon process has been completed and submitted to the Federal Court which oversees fish harvest and production management on the River. The agreement and the accompanying BiOp are available through NOAA Fisheries.

The Independent Scientific Advisory Board is evaluating the scientific adequacy of a proposed “block” spill/smolt migration study. Members of the HC are concerned with the initiation of a new study that will periodically cut spill, reducing the potential survival benefit at a time when the Columbia River Salmon are in steep decline. The 9th Circuit Court is deciding if the spill proposal will move forward.

Ocean Acidification and Hypoxia

A member of the HC was appointed to Oregon’s Ocean Acidification and Hypoxia Council, which makes recommendations to the State on actions needed to better understand ocean acidification

and hypoxia and how to mitigate its impacts. This Council is similar to groups that have operated in California and Washington.

Offshore Aquaculture

Rose Canyon Fisheries plans to formally withdraw their current permit application for offshore aquaculture and submit a revised permit application for a different location. This is due to Navy concerns about the original proposed site. The Navy collaborated with the National Centers for Coastal and Ocean Science on a marine spatial siting analysis that identified an alternative site that is acceptable to the Navy, and is referred to as the Navy Corridor Site. This site also avoids various other user conflicts. This analysis was conducted in coordination with the Army Corps of Engineers, Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the California Coastal Commission, and National Marine Fisheries Service. Rose Canyon plans to submit a revised permit application in the near future.

Ventura Shellfish Enterprise (VSE) is a proposed 2000-acre mussel farm consisting of 20 100-acre parcels. The project was originally planned to be sited in state waters off of Ventura. The public stakeholder engagement and siting analysis process identified concerns from the commercial California halibut trawlers working in state waters. As a result, VSE added a Federal waters alternative, which will be their preferred alternative once the permitting process formally begins. The first meeting is not yet scheduled, but the intent is to schedule it by early May.

NOAA's Deep-sea Coral Research and Technology West Coast Initiative

NOAA's Deep Sea Coral Research and Technology Program conducts research to inform regional Fishery Management Council and other resource management decisions. The Program recently launched a West Coast Deep-Sea Coral Research Initiative that will conduct focused fieldwork on deep-sea corals and sponges along the West Coast in 2019 and 2020. The Program develops priorities in consultation with Fishery Management Councils. A steering committee for the initiative is currently planning a workshop, to be held April 16 and 17 in Santa Barbara, to develop a plan to address research needs off the West Coast. The HC will learn more about the Initiative at the April Pacific Fishery Management Council meeting, and will be asked for priorities to inform research planning.

PFMC
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