

HABITAT COMMITTEE REPORT ON
ESSENTIAL FISH HABITAT AND ROCKFISH CONSERVATION AREA
AMENDMENT 28 - FINAL ACTION

General Comments on EFH:

The Habitat Committee (HC) considered its past comments and recommendations to the Council made during the essential fish habitat (EFH) review process in support of the EFH mandates. The HC's recommendations are guided by the objectives established in Amendment 19, which are to protect a diversity of habitat types across the region, including sensitive and priority habitats, and to create habitat connectivity.

Specific Recommendations on Alternatives for the Final Preferred Alternative

Alternative 1a: Collaborative Recommendations

The HC recommends accepting the proposed sites in Alternative 1a as a starting point, based on extensive review by stakeholders and the habitat protections provided. Below we note exceptions, and the rationale for these:

- Do not include the following re-opening sites due to presence of priority habitats:
 - Grays Canyon Western Modification
 - Pt. Arena South Modification 1
- Adjust the shape of the following sites to avoid opening areas of priority habitats (e.g. rock and mixed):
 - - Bandon High Spot Northern Modification (Collaborative/opener)
 - Bandon High Spot Southern Modification (Collaborative/opener)

Alternative 1b: Oceana Recommendations

Include the following sites. Where the Oceana and Collaborative closure sites overlap, we recommend those sites be merged to encompass the full spatial extent of both alternatives to offer greatest protection of EFH:

- Olympic Footprint Modification
- Willapa Canyonhead
- Astoria Canyonhead
- Astoria Footprint Modification
- 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
- 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
- La Cruz Canyon to Piedras Blancas
- Delgada Canyon Reopening
- South Delgada Canyonheads
- Noyo Canyonhead
- Navarro Canyon
- Pt. Arena Canyonheads
- Saunders Reef
- Pt. Arena Biogenic Reopening
- Pt Arena Biogenic South Expansion
- Russian River
- Gobbler's Knob
- Pt. Buchon
- East Santa Lucia Bank (Northwest Expansion)
- Pt. Arguello
- East Santa Lucia Bank (Southeast Expansion)
- Southern CA Bight

Alternative 1c: MTC Recommendations

Include the following sites:

- Shale Pile Northeast Side (reopen)
- Shale Pile East Side
- Garibaldi Reef North
- Daisy Bank Southern Modification
- Stonewall Bank Southern Modification (reopen)

Alternative 1d Recommendation:

- Include Garibaldi Reef South

Alternative 1f Recommendation

- Include Potato Bank (new orientation)

Alternative 2

The HC does not have a recommendation on the Rockfish Conservation Areas alternatives; however, we provide comments on habitat-related research needs in areas that have been closed to bottom trawling, as discussed below.

Alternative 3a Recommendation

Use the MSA Discretionary Authorities (303(b)(2)(A), 303(b)(2)(B) and 303(b)(12)) to close deep water habitats (> 3,500 m) to bottom contact gear.

Alternative 5b EFH description

The HC supports these updates, including the addition of methane seeps to Appendix B in the description of EFH for groundfish.

Alternatives 6b, 7b: Fishing and Non-Fishing effects

The HC supports these administrative updates.

Alternative 8.b: Research Needs

The 2006 EFH Record of Decision states that “Three variables are fundamental to assessing the status of habitat: The locations and intensity of fishing impacts, the sensitivity of specific habitat types to specific impacts at differing levels of intensity, and the potential for habitat to recover between impact events.” The benefits of area closures to groundfish stocks and their habitats remains a major source of management uncertainty. Re-openings in EFHCAs or the RCA will result in unprecedented opportunities to facilitate applied research to address these uncertainties. Hence, the HC recommends that the Council authorize development of a research plan. Additionally, focused studies on the effects of EFHCA are needed.

In addition, the HC suggests the following subject areas for research:

1. Baseline studies in new EFHCA on species densities, abundance and habitat condition, and monitoring changes over time to determine the effects of EFH closed areas.
2. Compare species and habitats in bottom trawl vs. no trawl areas to determine the effects of bottom trawling.
3. Examine the role of habitat-forming invertebrates, including deep sea corals and sponges as habitat for managed species.
4. Determine the effects of benthic habitat protection (quantity and quality) to promote groundfish productivity and sustainable fishing.
5. Implement a plan to foster comparative scientific research for different gear types within different habitat types.
6. Examine the role of methane seeps and associated structures as habitat for groundfish.

Alternative 9.b: Groundfish FMP EFH Review and Revision Process

The HC supports updating the groundfish EFH review and revision process and describing it elsewhere (e.g., in the Council Operating Procedures [COP]). This would include creating criteria prior to each review. The HC is available to assist in this process. Among other things, the Council could request feedback from each advisory body regarding this current EFH revision process ahead of changes to the COP.

PFMC
04/07/18