



# FACT SHEET: HABITAT AND EFH

## HABITAT IS THE ENVIRONMENT WHERE AN ANIMAL LIVES, FEEDS, REPRODUCES, AND GROWS.

Many fish move through different habitats during their lives. For example, a fish might spawn in the surf zone, but live as an adult in open water; or might move seasonally into different depths or substrates. Fish move into different habitats for feeding, spawning, to avoid predation, and for other reasons.

The Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA) identifies habitat loss as a key issue of concern, and requires Councils and the National

Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) to identify and protect the habitats of species managed under fishery management plans.

Councils may restrict certain fishing locations or gear to protect EFH,

deepsea corals, or other habitats not specifically designated as EFH.

### ESSENTIAL FISH HABITAT IS:

**THOSE WATERS AND SUBSTRATE NECESSARY TO FISH FOR SPAWNING, BREEDING, FEEDING, OR GROWTH TO MATURITY.**

**THIS MAY INCLUDE AREAS THAT WERE HISTORICALLY USED BY FISH, LIKE A RIVER ABOVE A DAM.**

## ESSENTIAL FISH HABITAT

EFH is “those waters and substrate necessary to fish for spawning, breeding, feeding, or growth to maturity,” including areas that were historically used by fish, like a river above a dam. In their fishery management plans, Councils must identify and describe EFH for all life cycles of each managed species.

These descriptions must address each life stage and managed species, and must include maps and other details related to habitat needs. Councils must periodically review and update EFH provisions as new information becomes available.

EFH descriptions must address fishing impacts that may

adversely affect EFH, and may include fishing-related actions to protect EFH such as time and area closures, gear restrictions, and other actions.

Each fishery management plan must also describe impacts from non-fishing activities that could affect EFH. In cases involving a Federal action, NMFS must provide the “action agency” with conservation recommendations to avoid, minimize, or mitigate for the impacts. Such Federal actions might include permits issued by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for dredging or jetty maintenance, or U.S. Forest Service plans for forest management activities.

### A HABITAT AREAS OF PARTICULAR CONCERN [HAPC] IS:

**A SPECIFIC HABITAT AREA OR TYPE OF HABITAT THAT PLAYS AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN A SPECIES’ LIFE CYCLE, OR THAT IS SENSITIVE, RARE, OR VULNERABLE.**

**COUNCILS MAY RESTRICT FISHING IN HAPCS.**

Fishery management plans may also include “habitat areas of particular concern,” which are a subset of EFH designed to highlight especially important habitat areas or types that should be given greater consideration in developing conservation recommendations for both fishing and non-fishing activities.

## GROUND FISH EFH

The Council’s groundfish fishery management plan includes more than 100 species that range over the entire U.S. West Coast Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). Groundfish include many species of rockfish, sablefish, flatfish, and Pacific whiting that are often (but not exclusively) found on or near the ocean floor or other structures.

Groundfish EFH includes all waters and substrate from the high tide line (including estuaries) to 3,500 meters (1,914 fathoms) in depth. (For a more technical explanation, go to <http://tinyurl.com/24kvnv7> section 7.2). The figure below shows the overall extent of Pacific Coast groundfish EFH.

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The Council identified five HAPC types: estuaries, canopy kelp, seagrass, rocky reefs, and “areas of interest.” Areas of interest can include a variety of submarine features, such as banks, seamounts, and canyons. They can also include other types of spatially-delineated areas such as all Washington State waters and the Cowcod East Conservation Area off

live nearer to the surface than the sea floor, and can move substantial distances throughout their lives. The definition of EFH for CPS is based on the temperature range where they are found, and on the geographic area where they occur at any life stage. This range varies widely according to ocean temperatures.

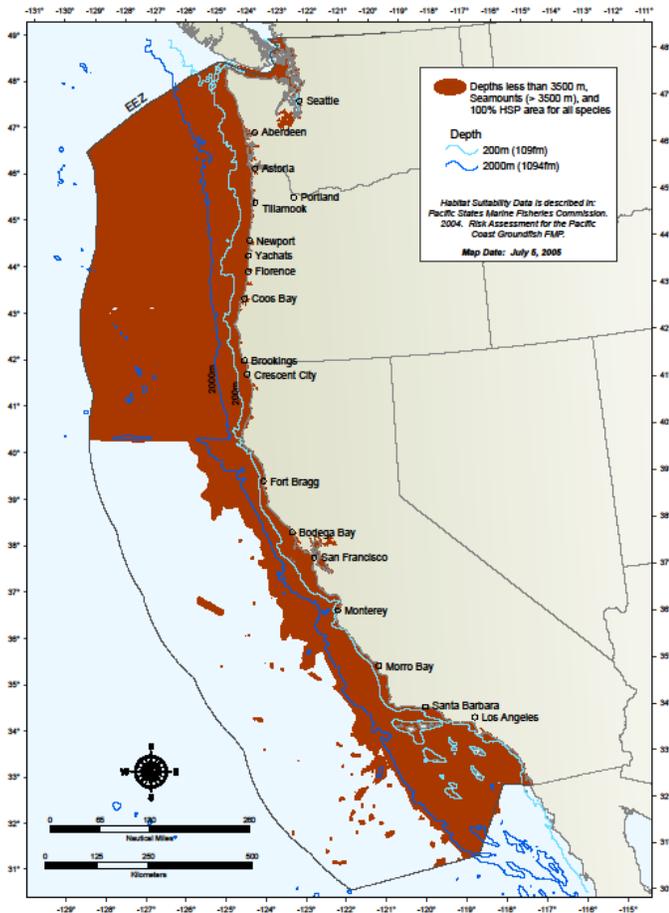
The east-west boundary of CPS EFH includes all marine and estuary waters from the coasts of California, Oregon, and Washington to the limits of the EEZ and above the thermocline where sea surface temperatures range between 10° and 26° centigrade. (A thermocline is an area where water temperatures change rapidly, usually from colder at the bottom to warmer on top). The southern boundary is the U.S./Mexico maritime boundary. The northern boundary is more changeable and is defined as the position of the 10° C isotherm, which varies seasonally and annually. (The 10° C isotherm is a rough estimate of the lowest temperature where finfish are found, and represents their northern boundary).

## SALMON EFH

Salmon range from more than 1,000 miles inland to thousands of miles out at sea, and thus depend on a wide variety of habitats to complete their life cycle. EFH in fresh water includes all of the water bodies on the West Coast that salmon historically occupied, except the habitat above some impassable barriers. Salmon EFH also includes the entire West Coast EEZ north of Point Conception, California, and the marine waters off Alaska that are designated salmon EFH by the North Pacific Fishery Management Council.

The figure on the next page shows the overall extent of EFH for Chinook, coho, and Puget Sound pink salmon. Sockeye salmon, chum salmon, steelhead, and pink stocks originating outside of Puget Sound are not federally managed, and thus do not have EFH established.

The Council is required to minimize the negative impacts of fishing activities on essential salmon habitat, such as the effects of fishing gear (to the extent the gear impacts habitat, or removes salmon prey species), the effect of salmon fishing on reducing nutrients in streams due to fewer salmon carcasses in the spawning grounds, the presence of marine debris and derelict gear, shellfish harvest, and recreational fishing activities. The Council may use gear restrictions, time and area closures, and harvest limits to reduce negative impacts on salmon EFH. However, the Council has not



Southern California.

The Council has also adopted measures to minimize and mitigate the adverse impacts of fishing on groundfish EFH. These include areas closed to bottom trawling and/or all bottom contact fishing (such as longline and pot fishing) to protect sensitive habitats.

## COASTAL PELAGIC SPECIES EFH

The coastal pelagic species (CPS) fishery includes four finfish (Pacific sardine, Pacific (chub) mackerel, northern anchovy, and jack mackerel), and market squid. CPS finfish generally

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imposed such restrictions on the salmon fishery.

## HIGHLY MIGRATORY SPECIES EFH

Defining EFH for highly mobile species such as tuna, swordfish, and sharks is a challenging task, not unlike defining EFH for coastal pelagic species. These species range widely in the ocean, both in terms of area and depth, and often spawn well outside the U.S. EEZ. Their habitat is defined by temperature ranges, salinity, oxygen levels, currents, shelf edges, and seamounts, and varies substantially among species.

The fishery management plan for highly migratory species contains descriptions of their EFH. EFH for the tuna species generally encompasses Federal waters off southern California, but for albacore tuna adults, EFH extends north to the U.S.-Canada border. In addition, some species are nearer to shore than others, or prefer different temperature ranges. EFH for sharks varies, but is associated more with the EEZ off California that off the Pacific Northwest.

## THE HABITAT COMMITTEE

The Council's [Habitat Committee](#) (HC) provides advice to the Council on a wide variety of habitat-related issues. The HC works with other advisory bodies on habitat issues, helps develop ways to resolve habitat problems and avoid future habitat conflicts, and makes recommendations for actions that will help achieve the Council's habitat objectives. Meetings are open to the public.

## EFH CONSULTATION

The National Marine Fisheries Service is responsible for providing conservation recommendations for any Federal agency action that may adversely affect EFH. Actions that occur outside of EFH, but that might affect the habitat, must also be taken into account. Private landowners do not need to consult with NMFS on private land activities (however, such activities may be subject to other regulations). Only if the project is funded, permitted, or authorized by a Federal agency and the project may adversely affect EFH is consultation with NMFS required. In addition, Councils and NMFS may issue conservation recommendations on state agency actions that may adversely affect EFH.

## DEEP WATER HABITAT PROTECTIONS

As part of the review of Pacific Coast Groundfish EFH, concluded in 2018, the Council also approved habitat protections for benthic habitats deeper than 3500 meters. The Magnuson Act includes discretionary provisions that may be used to provide habitat or species protections in areas outside of designated EFH. The new provisions prohibit groundfish bottom contact fishing activities in all U.S. EEZ waters deeper than 3500 meters. Although there is no bottom contact fishing occurring in those areas, the Council would consider exempted fishing permit applications if someone wished to begin fishing there.

For more information, contact Council staff officer Kerry Griffin ([Kerry.griffin@noaa.gov](mailto:Kerry.griffin@noaa.gov)) or call the number on the front page of this fact sheet. For information on the Habitat Committee, contact [Jennifer.Gilden@noaa.gov](mailto:Jennifer.Gilden@noaa.gov).

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