

NOAA Fisheries West Coast Region Fiscal Year 2020 Accomplishments



NOAA
FISHERIES

NOAA Fisheries West Coast Region Fiscal Year 2020 Accomplishments

The West Coast Region (WCR) prioritized the following focus areas in fiscal year 2020 (not in rank order):

- Sustain and Increase Fishing Opportunities
- Protect and Restore Habitat
- Support Federal Tribal Treaty and Trust Obligations
- Engage Partners to Enhance Conservation and Recovery Actions
- Advance Reintroduction Efforts for At-Risk Species
- Complete and Advance Priority ESA Consultations
- Advance Diversity and Inclusion
- Promote Workplace Satisfaction
- Improve Regulatory Efficiency and Effectiveness
- Enhance Communications and Information Management

This report highlights updates on the actions that supported each of the above WCR priorities, as well as updates on other notable accomplishments over the last year.

PHOTOS: Cover - Port Gamble beach seining, S'Klallam Tribe; Page 1 - Scott Creek Lagoon and Marsh, Santa Cruz County, Joel Casagrande, NOAA.



Goal 1 - Sustainable Fisheries

Amplify the Economic Value of Commercial and Recreational Fisheries While Ensuring Their Sustainability

SUSTAIN & INCREASE FISHING OPPORTUNITIES

Response to Public Health Measures

We worked with tribes, states, and industry, as well as the Northwest and Southwest Fisheries Science Centers (NWFSC, SWFSC) and NOAA Law Enforcement to support commercial and recreational fishing during the Covid-19 public health crisis. We worked with observer providers to develop safety protocols consistent with state and the Center for Disease Control's guidelines to protect fisheries observers and crews, including self-isolation and screening. We also granted waivers in partial coverage fleets when qualified observers/catch monitors were not available. We published an emergency rule for the at-sea whiting sectors, made inseason adjustments, and extended the primary sablefish season to provide maximum flexibility and increase opportunities. We supported tribes and states in seeking funding provided through the CARES Act. Finally, we worked with the Pacific Fishery Management Council to transition to entirely virtual meetings of the Council and its committees, taking extra steps to highlight continued opportunities for public involvement.

Groundfish Fishing Opportunities

We completed a final rule amending the Pacific Coast Groundfish Fishery Management Plan. It increased access to historically important fishing grounds starting January 1, 2020. It also changed bottom trawl fishing closures and closed deep waters off California to protect deep-sea corals from bottom-contacting gears.



Large Whale and Dungeness Crab Fishery Interactions

We provided feedback to the states of California, Oregon, and Washington on their draft conservation plans to reduce the risk of whale entanglement in state-managed fisheries and measures to assess such risk. The states are currently on schedule to submit complete drafts in winter 2021. We also co-sponsored the entanglement science virtual workshop bringing together science from the NWFSC, SWFSC, academia, states, and other researchers.

Electronic Monitoring

To give industry more time to prepare, we prioritized a new, and third, rule for electronic monitoring (EM) of groundfish trawl vessels that will delay implementation of the EM program to 2022 instead of 2021. This next year, we will continue working on a proposed and final rule that will expand the EM program to bottom trawl and non-whiting midwater trawl vessels to give industry increased flexibility in complying with fishery observer requirements.

PROTECT & RESTORE HABITAT



Southern Resident Killer Whale Critical Habitat

We made progress towards completing a final rule that will revise critical habitat designated under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) for Southern Resident killer whales (SRKW). Last year we proposed expanding SRKW critical habitat beyond the inland waters of Washington to include coastal marine waters from the U.S. international border with Canada south to Point Sur, California. Species in the Spotlight (SS)

Salmon Habitat Restoration Priorities

We collaborated with NMFS' Restoration Center and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife and developed a new approach to restoration planning called the Salmon Habitat Restoration Priorities (SHaRP) process. We successfully piloted the process for the South Fork Eel River in northern California for the benefit of Southern Oregon / Northern California Coast (SONCC) coho. We led the completion of a plan that documents the collaborative, stakeholder, and data driven process. The plan identifies specific reach-scale habitat restoration recommendations for seven focus sub-watersheds of the South Fork Eel River. We are working with our partners to implement SHaRP in other watersheds in California.

PHOTOS: Top - Newport, Oregon fishing boats, Shutterstock; Bottom - South Fork Eel River restoration, California Department of Fish and Wildlife.

Goal 1 - Sustainable Fisheries

Amplify the Economic Value of Commercial and Recreational Fisheries While Ensuring Their Sustainability



SUPPORT FEDERAL TRIBAL TREATY & TRUST OBLIGATIONS

Columbia River Treaty


We represented NOAA on the U.S. team negotiating updates to modernize the Columbia River Treaty regime with Canada. We organized a full day ecosystem session, planned and supported multiple formal government-to-government meetings with 15 tribal leaders, and prepared and presented an ecosystem proposal to the Canadian delegation.

Tribal Relations Training

We transitioned our tribal relations training to a pilot virtual format. The pilot was successfully delivered to Boise staff and surrounding offices. A second round is being held in October 2020. The training provides a deeper understanding of federal Indian law, tribal treaty rights, federal trust responsibilities, consultation and coordination with tribes, cross-cultural communications, and appreciation of tribal culture to aid in building successful tribal relations.

PROTECT & RESTORE HABITAT

Central California Coast Coho Habitat

To improve habitat for endangered Central California Coast (CCC) coho, we collaborated with local stakeholders and federal and state agencies on the Scott Creek Lagoon and Marsh Restoration Project. The project includes two major components: restoration of Scott Creek Lagoon and Marsh and replacement of the defunct Highway 1 bridge that spans the lagoon/marsh ecosystem. Once implemented, the restored ecosystem will optimize habitat quality and extent for CCC coho and provide the necessary space for habitat evolution and climate resiliency. We have conducted technical review on the project designs submitted thus far. 



Makah Tribe Waiver Request

We worked with NOAA General Counsel Northwest and the SWFSC to present a convincing case to an Administrative Law Judge that the Makah Tribe of Washington should be granted a waiver of the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) to hunt a limited number of gray whales. The case was years in the making, hinging on detailed research into gray whale populations, painstaking development of proposed hunt regulations, and detailed consideration of tribal culture.

Columbia Basin Partnership Task Force

We completed the work of the Task Force and prepared the final Phase II report for consideration by NMFS' Marine Fisheries Advisory Committee. The final report includes qualitative and quantitative goals for all salmon stocks in the basin as well as scenarios, and social, cultural, economic and ecological considerations for how to achieve the goals.



PHOTOS: From top - Central California Coast coho, Ben White, Army Corps of Engineers; Tribal fishing on the Columbia River, Shutterstock; Makah tribal members in a traditional whaling canoe, Makah Indian Tribe; Columbia Basin Partnership Task Force committee meeting, Tony Grover.

Goal 2 - Protected Resources

Conserve and Recover Protected Species While Supporting Responsible Fishing and Resource Development

ENGAGE PARTNERS TO ENHANCE CONSERVATION & RECOVERY ACTIONS

Puget Sound Steelhead Final ESA Recovery Plan

We completed the Puget Sound Steelhead Final Recovery Plan, a continuing collaborative partnership with the multi-agency Recovery Team, Puget Sound Partnership, and Tribes. The recovery plan prioritizes removing culverts that block fish passage and improving early marine survival to restore native steelhead back to prominence in Puget Sound.



Pinniped Predation on Salmonids

We issued an MMPA section 120(f) permit that provides expanded authority to state and tribal programs to remove sea lions in the lower Columbia River and its tributaries to reduce pinniped predation impacts on at-risk salmonids. This is one element of a comprehensive strategy that also addresses impacts to at-risk salmonids at dams, hatcheries, and through harvest.



Oregon Tide Gate Partnership

We supported the Oregon Tide Gate Partnership in developing a collaboration-based program for tide gate repair and replacement that is cost effective, efficient to implement, and is supported by the public, regulatory agencies, and organizations. The Partnership provides enhanced conservation for Oregon Coast coho and SONCC coho while facilitating working agricultural lands. We provided engineering technical assistance, support in finalizing the 6-Step Regulatory Process Map and Tide Gate at End of Design Life Binning Map, and input on a funding program for tide gate replacement.

PHOTOS: From top - Juvenile winter-run Chinook salmon are released into North Fork Battle Creek, U.S. Department of Fish and Wildlife; California sea lion salmon predation, Pacific Fishery Management Council; Juvenile white abalone are numbered for outplanting, Michael Ready; Oregon tide gate, Larry Swenson, NOAA.



Sacramento Winter-run Chinook Salmon Reintroduction

As part of the Battle Creek Jumpstart Project, we released approximately 168,650 juvenile winter-run into the North Fork Battle Creek at Wildcat Road bridge. This is the third year juveniles were released for the Jumpstart Project. 2020 also marks the second year of adult returns to Battle Creek (from juveniles released as part of the project during 2018 and 2019), allowing for the collection of adult broodstock that will contribute to future Jumpstart Project releases until implementation of the full Battle Creek Winter-Run Chinook Salmon Reintroduction Plan occurs. **SS**



White Abalone

We conducted the first-ever outplanting of endangered white abalone. With many skilled partners, we released captive-bred abalone into southern California waters — a major step towards bringing white abalone back from the brink of extinction. Successful captive propagation efforts at the Bodega Marine Laboratory allowed us to expand our rearing program with transfers of fertilized eggs to rearing facilities in Moss Landing, Santa Barbara, Los Angeles, and San Diego. Our team efforts over two decades have refined captive breeding methods so we now have thousands of young abalone to outplant to the wild, making the recovery strategy so far a huge success. We will release thousands more over the next few years so they will hopefully re-establish self-sustaining wild populations. **SS**

Southern California Steelhead

We provided extensive engineering and other technical assistance to United Water Conservation District on their designs of alternative fish passage structures on the Santa Clara River in California to conserve endangered Southern California steelhead. The fish passage design ultimately selected by United Water will become part of their larger Habitat Conservation Plan, which is still under development.

Goal 2 - Protected Resources

Conserve and Recover Protected Species While Supporting Responsible Fishing and Resource Development



Columbia River System

We completed a new Columbia River System biological opinion assessing the operation of federal dams on the lower Snake and Columbia rivers, synthesizing years of research and monitoring of fish survival through the dams. The biological opinion outlined conservation measures and recommendations to protect ESA-listed salmon and steelhead and to continue regional dialogue on their recovery. It represented the final WCR component called for in the “Presidential Memorandum on Promoting the Reliable Supply and Delivery of Water in the West.”

Jordan Cove

We completed a biological opinion for the Jordan Cove Liquid Natural Gas facility (FAST-41) on the southern Oregon coast. This consultation evaluated the effects of construction and operation of the terminal and the associated 229-mile pipeline on 17 ESA-listed species and their critical habitat while meeting pressing timelines under FAST-41 and the One Federal Decision Executive Order.

Hatchery and Genetic Management Plans

We continue to work with states, tribes, and other federal agencies to reduce the backlog of hatchery and genetic management plans (HGMPs). We completed final ESA and National Environmental Policy Act determinations on 17 HGMPs in FY20 and expect to complete 22 more in early FY21.

Pacific Coast Salmon Fisheries and Southern Resident Killer Whales

We completed an ESA section 7 consultation on the ocean salmon fisheries for 2020-2021, working closely with the Pacific Fishery Management Council’s ad-hoc technical workgroup. We also reviewed domestic fisheries in Southeast Alaska and Puget Sound inland waters to ensure they are consistent with SRKW recovery and survival. \$20 million in newly appropriated funds to support implementation of the Pacific Salmon Treaty supported habitat protection and restoration efforts as well as enhanced production of hatchery Chinook salmon for SRKW prey. **Ss**

Goal 3 - Organizational Excellence

Improve Organizational Excellence and Regulatory Efficiency

Our People

Everyone in the WCR took teamwork to new heights this year as we faced a global pandemic, social unrest, and catastrophic wildfires. To help us strengthen our resilience, our Employee Communications and Worklife Committee (ECWC) and the Diversity and Inclusion team helped support everyone with a variety of information and tools. We smoothly transitioned to maximum telework, maintained operations, and completed critical work. Our Operations, Management, and Information Division ensured everyone was equipped and remained secure, and they are planning for our eventual safe reintegration.

PHOTOS: Top - Southern Resident killer whale and Chinook salmon, NOAA. This section, top left - Scott Rumsey’s open water swim; top right - Dana Hunter and her Roller Derby team; bottom left - members of the California Central Valley Office enjoying yoga practice; bottom right - Trevor Conder and his wife cross country skiing at White Pass.



Goal 3 - Organizational Excellence

Improve Organizational Excellence and Regulatory Efficiency

ADVANCE DIVERSITY & INCLUSION



New Employee Workshop

We held a new employee orientation in La Jolla, California. This year, we expanded the workshop to our NMFS West Coast partners, including the NWFSC, SWFSC, Office of Law Enforcement, the Restoration Center, and NOAA General Counsel. This biannual workshop provides an overview of NOAA, NMFS, and the West Coast offices' core work and is an essential element of establishing an inclusive, collaborative, and respectful work environment across our offices.



Diversity and Inclusion

Advanced diversity and inclusion by completing and implementing goals in the "Hiring through a Diversity and Inclusion Lens Guidance Strategy." FY20 achievements included: 1) creation of the Pathways Recent Graduate Program, including identification of positions to be advertised and filled in FY21; 2) continued focus on intern opportunities including Hollings, Hollings Prep, Coast, and Sea Grant (13 interns brought on this year, including many minority students); 3) use of the Schedule A process; 4) further development of several other avenues for increasing diversity, including the use of the Conservation Service Corps Act and Direct Hire Authority as a way to bring on minority high school and college interns.



ENHANCE COMMUNICATIONS & INFORMATION MANAGEMENT

Freedom of Information Act

We achieved a 93 percent on-time Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) response rate, substantially exceeding our goal of 80 percent for FY20.

Intranet

We increased functionality of our intranet by transitioning to Google Sites, updating the design for improved usability, and used it to communicate important health, safety, and well-being updates for employees this year.



PROMOTE WORKPLACE SATISFACTION

Emerging Leaders Development Program

We launched the our pilot Emerging Leaders Development Program (ELDP) with ten participants to advance growth and learning and leadership development. We co-produced the ELDP with Portland State University and senior WCR leaders. This pilot program is an essential component of our effort to empower staff in their career growth and development and cultivate NOAA's future leaders.

Mentoring

We fostered mentoring and career development for regional staff. We updated materials in our Mentoring Toolkit to help staff develop meaningful mentoring relationships, identify developmental goals, and practice virtual mentoring. We completed the New Colleague Buddy System Framework to welcome new staff to our offices. The ELDP also included a mentoring component, where participants were each matched with a regional leader for concentrated support and professional development.

IMPROVE REGULATORY EFFICIENCY & EFFECTIVENESS

ESA Five-Year Salmonid Status Review

We initiated a new five-year review of listed salmonids. The 2020-2021 review will include updated information and a compilation of the best available status information on the species that will streamline our regulatory analyses.

Programmatic Consultations

To expedite ESA consultations and maximize benefits to at-risk species, we advanced the development of over ten programmatic biological opinions. For example, we completed a programmatic biological opinion regarding impacts to ESA-listed species in much of coastal California resulting from bank stabilization actions permitted by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The actions under this program apply to the Corps' projects designed to protect critical infrastructure and property as well as their civil works projects that have the purpose of bank stability. We issued the biological opinion in June and it has already created efficiencies and reduced workload. We also continued to implement existing programmatic opinions throughout the Region.

PHOTOS: Left - New Employee Orientation at Southwest Fisheries Science Center, La Jolla, California; Right - members of the Emerging Leaders Development Program, from left - Shawn Martin, Darren Howe, Annie Birnie, Chuck Wheeler, Johnna Sandow, Charlene Hurst, Emi Melton, Naseem Alston, Dan Lawson, Scott Burkart.