

ACTION PLAN FOR HIGHLY MIGRATORY SPECIES ESSENTIAL FISH HABITAT REVIEW PHASE 2: SCOPE, BACKGROUND, PROCESS, AND SCHEDULE

The Magnuson-Stevens Act requires fishery management plans (FMPs) to describe, identify, and conserve essential fish habitat (EFH) for each species in the FMP's fishery management unit (FMU). Federal regulatory guidance at 50 CFR 600 provides further requirements to identify adverse impacts from fishing and non-fishing activities, to recommend conservation measures, to consider habitat areas of particular concern (HAPC), and to address other elements. These EFH components should be reviewed and updated at least every five years. EFH provisions for highly migratory species (HMS) were incorporated in the HMS FMP in 2003 and have not been subsequently revised. Council Operating Procedure 22 provides guidance on developing the process, scope, and personnel to carry out EFH periodic reviews.

At its September 2020 meeting, the Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) considered HMS EFH review materials including a literature review and summary, Advisory Body reports, and other materials. The Council agreed to move forward with Phase 2 which includes the consideration of potential modifications to EFH provisions in the HMS FMP.

Objectives

The overarching objectives for all EFH reviews are to ensure that the EFH provisions in the Council's FMPs are consistent with the best scientific information available, and to ensure a transparent and efficient science-based process for review of new information and consideration of any potential changes to EFH provisions.

The specific objectives of Phase 2 of the HMS EFH review are to: 1) recommend EFH provisions that should be modified, in light of new and newly available scientific literature and reports identified during Phase 1; and 2) recommend a schedule and timeline for consideration by the Council.

Scope

Utilize information identified in Phase 1, genomic and tagging studies, and other relevant information to recommend potential EFH modifications in the areas of:

- Species distribution per life stage
- Habitat associations, including preferred prey
- Species life history summaries

Complete the following:

- Remove EFH provisions for species no longer in the FMU
- Consider whether new information indicates HAPCs should be identified
- Update bibliography of literature, data, and other information sources
- Develop updated maps depicting the range of species and life stages
- Develop a markup version of the FMP with proposed EFH revisions

Staffing

- Council and National Marine Fisheries Service staff leads will provide overall coordination (Kerry Griffin, Eric Chavez)
- Southwest Fisheries Science Center staff will provide scientific support for the review of information (Brad Erisman, Nicole Nasby-Lucas)
- Highly Migratory Species Management Team will review and provide subject matter expertise, as needed
- Council staff will coordinate FMP amendment language (Kit Dahl, Kerry Griffin)

Schedule

- March 2021 Council meeting: Council adopts Phase 2 Action Plan
- September 2021 (tentative) Council meeting: Council considers Phase 2 report and initiates FMP amendment and schedule, as appropriate

PFMC
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