

NMFS Survey Updates

March 2021

The following supplemental information is provided to the Pacific Fishery Management Council during the Open Comment Report, March 4, 2021, Agenda Item B.1.a ([detailed agenda](#)).

1. Northwest Fisheries Science Center (NWFSC)

The Northwest Fisheries Science Center is planning to field our full suite of surveys in 2021. This includes:

- **The full, four boat, 2021 West Coast Groundfish Bottom Trawl Survey:** The annual bottom trawl survey is a cornerstone of the NWFSC's mission to ensure healthy ecosystems with productive and sustainable fisheries, as mandated by the Magnuson-Stevens Act. Our top priority is providing long-term time-series data for the scientific management of west coast groundfishes and their ecosystem. The survey collects fishery-independent data on abundance, distribution and biology of the 90+ species included in the west coast groundfish management plan as well as coast-wide environmental sampling for monitoring change within the California Current Ecosystem. The 2021 groundfish survey will be conducted from Cape Flattery, WA (48°20') to the U.S. – Mexico border (32°36') between May 14 and October 22, 2021. The survey will sample the entire coast using two chartered west coast fishing vessels for Pass 1 of the annual survey from May 14 to July 23 and two vessels for Pass 2 from August 13 to October 22.
- **The Southern California Rockfish Hook and Line Survey:** After a one-year year hiatus due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the NWFSC is planning to conduct its annual shelf rockfish hook and line survey in Fall 2021. This cooperative research effort charts three vessels from the commercial sportfishing fleet to generate abundance, biological, genetic, and ecosystem information that is used in the assessment and management of groundfish species in shelf depths throughout southern California. The hook and line survey complements the NWFSC's bottom trawl survey by sampling hard bottom habitats and areas of structure that are not easily accessed by trawl nets. The 2021 hook and line survey is the 17th year in a time series that dates to 2004. The proposed dates for this year's survey are Sept. 20 through Oct. 8 with mobilization in Oxnard, CA and demobilization in Long Beach, CA.

- **The Joint U.S./Canada Integrated Ecosystem and Pacific Hake Acoustic-Trawl Survey** will be conducted jointly by the NWFSC on the NOAA ship *Bell M. Shimada* and by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada, Pacific Region, on the CCGS *Sir John Franklin*. The survey will begin in Newport, OR on June 27 where, after a calibration of the acoustics system, the *Shimada* will steam south to Point Conception, CA (34.5°N) to begin running acoustic transects. The survey design is primarily 10-nm spaced transects from Point Conception to the northern end of West coast Vancouver Island, BC (50.5°N) and 20-nmi spaced transects from the northern end of Vancouver Island to Dixon, Entrance, Alaska. The *Franklin* will join the survey on August 11 off Newport and will cover a portion of the US survey area until the two vessels meet on the West coast of Vancouver Island to conduct the Inter Vessel Calibration from August 28 to September 3. The *Franklin* will conduct a post-survey calibration and will return to port on September 6 and the *Shimada* will finish surveying northern Canada and will then steam to Seattle, WA to conduct a post-survey calibration and end the survey on September 24.
- **Typical three Northern California ecosystem surveys** - This includes a successful September 2020 survey on the NOAA Ship *Shimada*. Unfortunately a February 2021 survey on *Shimada* was cancelled because of severe weather that impacted both the ship's planned operations as well as the COVID testing. Given the short 1 week planned duration of this survey it was not feasible to delay or reschedule.
- Assorted other smaller survey and field operations in 2021.

Our survey teams continue to diligently research and plan ways to ensure surveys are accomplished this year. This includes strong safety and travel protocols, contingency plans, staffing options, and contract options where necessary for all surveys and maintain steady progress on gear readiness. We are also working closely with our assessment team to identify data collection contingencies. Critically, we believe we have the minimal staffing identified for all surveys. At this point, we are on track to execute the full suite of NWFSC surveys planned for 2021. That said, things can change. It is possible we will encounter situations such as weather, unexpected staff shortages, or other conditions that would force us to re-evaluate one or more surveys.

COVID vaccine status is a common question. In late 2020 NOAA compiled a list of 6100 critical personnel to prioritize for vaccines. This list includes both survey and observer personnel. However, NOAA has no access to vaccines. Vaccine distribution remains a state, rather than a federal, function at this time. States are welcome to contact NOAA for the list of critical personnel and utilize that list as they see fit.

We will continue to keep the Council informed on our survey status throughout the year at regular Council meetings such as this. We stand ready to provide additional updates as requested and welcome discussion on our surveys.

2. Southwest Fisheries Science Center (SWFSC)

For 2021, the SWFSC has an extensive ship survey schedule that includes five surveys and two partner surveys with a total of 204 days at sea.

- **Winter CalCOFI Cruise.** SWFSC completes quarterly ecosystem surveys as part of our California Cooperative Oceanic Fisheries Investigations or “CalCOFI” program, which has run for 72 years (until last year) and is joint with the Scripps Institute of Oceanography and with CDFW. Our first NOAA Fisheries survey of 2021, the Winter CalCOFI aboard NOAA FSV *Reuben Lasker*, ran from January 12th through February 5th. The safety and scientific preparations for this cruise were the result of a tremendous effort by many. While CalCOFI cruises are typically a joint effort between SWFSC and SIO, due to differences in sheltering in place protocols, Scripps researchers were unable to participate and the survey was staffed entirely by NOAA personnel.
- **Spring CPS survey.** The Spring CPS survey aboard the *FSV Reuben Lasker* is scheduled for March 20th through April 13th and will complete an Acoustic Trawl Method (ATM) survey for Central Substock of Northern Anchovy as well as other CPS stocks from Central California to the Mexican Border. It will also be run in conjunction with nearshore sampling conducted by the fishing industry.
- **Spring CalCOFI survey.** The Spring CalCOFI survey is scheduled aboard the *FSV Shimada* from March 25 – April 18, 2021 and will be staffed entirely by SWFSC personnel.
- **Rockfish Recruitment and Ecosystem Assessment Survey (RREAS).** The RREAS or juvenile Rockfish survey is scheduled aboard the *FSV Reuben Lasker* from April 28th through June 22nd. While this was one survey we were able to execute in 2020, effort for the 2020 RREAS was considerably reduced as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic due to limited sampling and spatial distribution that was conducted on a charter vessel rather than a research vessel. For 2021, we plan to resume our normal sampling effort off Northern, Central and Southern California.
- **California Current Ecosystem Survey (CCES) (Summer CPS survey).** The summer CCES is scheduled for 86 DAS on the *FSV Reuben Lasker* and will be conducted from July 2nd through October 15nd, a bit later than normal. This survey is still in the planning stages and permits are being sought. The hope is that the survey will extend from Vancouver Island to half-way down the Baja California coast and be run in conjunction with the Mexican Government. The

intent is to sample for Coastal Pelagic Species along the US west coast as has been done in recent years and then continue into Mexican waters to sample transboundary CPS stocks down to Punta Eugenia with the Mexican research vessel Dr. Simon Fraiser continuing on to Cabo San Lucas and into the Sea of Cortez. Sampling in Mexico is still solely dependent on whether the appropriate permits can be finalized, but it looks promising. This would be the first time we have ever surveyed in Mexican waters for CPS in conjunction with a similar Mexican survey. Sampling along the US west coast will also be run in conjunction with nearshore sampling conducted by the fishing industry. Options to find synergies between this CCES survey and the NWFSC's Pacific Hake survey for this and future years are being explored.

- **Summer CalCOFI survey.** The Summer CalCOFI survey is scheduled for July 16-31, 2021 on the UNOLS vessel *RV Sally Ride*. Since this survey is being conducted on a UNOLS vessel, it is expected that Scripps Institute of Oceanography personnel will participate. The SWFSC normally sends ~2 personnel and expects it will be able to this time as well, as long as safety protocols for both NOAA and SIO can be complied with simultaneously.
- **Fall CalCOFI survey.** The Fall CalCOFI survey will take place from October 31 to November 15, 2021 (16 DAS) on the UNOLS vessel *RV Sally Ride* and the plans are similar to the summer CalCOFI survey.

The ongoing pandemic conditions continue to bring challenges for planning, executing, and staffing surveys. We are putting more effort in than is typical to conduct these surveys, and will continue to explore a variety of options and contingencies to conduct them while complying with NOAA safety protocols. We were able to fully staff the Winter CalCOFI and expect to adequately staff both the Spring and Summer CPS surveys. As has been happening over the past year, conditions are ever-changing and plans may need to be modified. We will keep the Pacific Council updated with survey activities throughout the year.

Similar to NWFSC, all SWFSC sea-going personnel, both federal and affiliate, have been placed on the agency's priority list for receiving a COVID-19 vaccine. We will keep the Council updated throughout 2021 on our survey status as things may change, and as always we welcome discussion on our surveys.