

NOAA Fisheries West Coast Region Fiscal Year 2021 Accomplishments



NOAA
FISHERIES

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The West Coast Region (WCR) identified 12 priority areas shown below (not in rank order) for fiscal year 2021. This report provides a summary of the notable accomplishments for each of these priority areas. These achievements were accomplished as a direct result of the incredible resilience and adaptability of our staff under the challenging circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic and mandatory telework.

- Sustain and Increase Fishing Opportunities
- Conserve Habitat Supporting Fisheries
- Advance Aquaculture Opportunities on the West Coast
- Advance Reintroduction Efforts for At-Risk Species
- Complete and Advance Priority Endangered Species Act (ESA) Consultations
- Engage Partners to Enhance Conservation
- Protect and Conserve Anadromous Fish Habitat
- Advance Diversity and Inclusion
- Support Resiliency and Well-Being
- Invest in Learning and Development
- Enhance Communications and Information Management
- Improve Regulatory Efficiency and Effectiveness



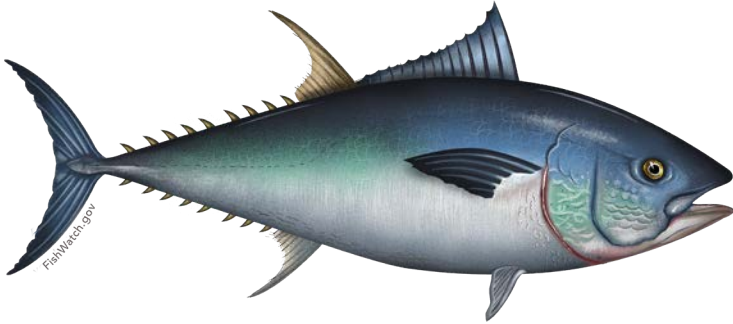
Goal 1 - Sustainable Fisheries

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

SUSTAIN & INCREASE FISHING OPPORTUNITIES

International Management of Pacific Tuna

We worked with the Pacific Fishery Management Council (PFMC) and stakeholders to put forward U.S. proposals to the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC) to build new measures for the management and rebuilding of Pacific bluefin tuna and tropical tuna. Following the consensus and adoption of the resolutions by the IATTC, we completed final rulemakings in a very short time frame.



Ocean Fishery Management

We completed final harvest rules for salmon, Pacific whiting, sardines, groundfish, and mackerel that allowed for productive and sustainable fisheries along the west coast. The 2021 ocean salmon management process was a substantial accomplishment that required developing salmon fisheries that addressed management and conservation objectives for all salmon stocks, with particular attention to overfished coho and Chinook salmon stocks, all salmon stocks listed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), and endangered Southern Resident killer whales.



Deep-Set Buoy Gear in the Swordfish Fishery

We issued a draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to authorize deep-set buoy gear in the swordfish fishery. This EIS is a key step in a multi-year process, and marks the culmination of a decade of work including stakeholder workshops, gear research, and issuance of the first exempted fishing permits to a final preferred alternative adopted by the Pacific Fishery Management Council (PFMC) in 2019 and revised in 2021. We will continue working with PFMC and stakeholders towards a novel approach to provide limited entry for a developing fishery in the coming years.

CONSERVE HABITAT SUPPORTING FISHERIES

Recreational Fishing Workshops

We hosted a virtual workshop focused on shared habitat conservation priorities within a recreationally-important Northern California watershed. The workshop allowed the recreational fishing community to connect with leadership and staff across NOAA Fisheries. Participants shared their conservation and restoration work experiences and provided feedback to enhance future community engagement and identify areas for focus.

ADVANCE AQUACULTURE OPPORTUNITIES ON THE WEST COAST

Aquaculture Opportunity Areas

In response to Executive Order 13921, Promoting American Seafood Competitiveness and Economic Growth, we worked with the Office of Aquaculture to begin the process of developing an Aquaculture Opportunity Area (AOA) in federal waters off of Southern California. We coordinated with the National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science to engage stakeholders in the creation of a marine spatial atlas in support of this effort. We also convened a WCR cross-division AOA Core Team to plan and begin drafting the AOA Programmatic EIS.



PHOTOS: Cover - steelhead, Morgan Bond; Page 1 - Fishing boat, Shutterstock.
This page, clockwise from top - Swordfish, Shutterstock; Recreational fishing, Shutterstock; Bluefin tuna, FishWatch.

Goal 2 - Protected Resources

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

ADVANCE REINTRODUCTION EFFORTS FOR AT-RISK SPECIES

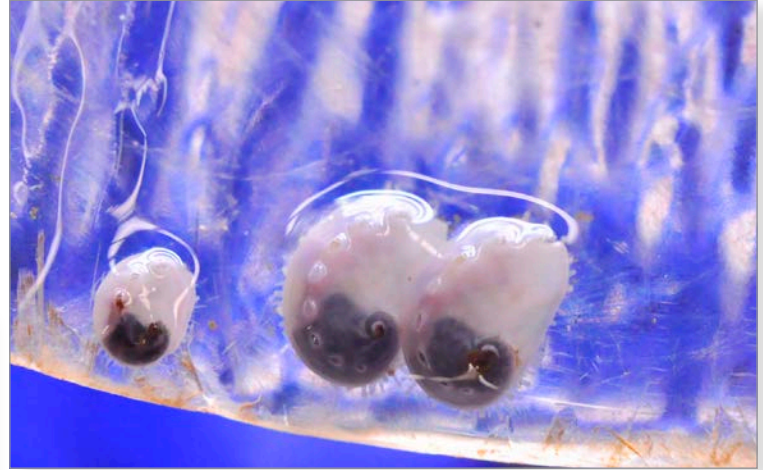
Klamath River Basin

We initiated formal ESA consultation to provide technical assistance to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) and Klamath River Renewal Corporation in support of Klamath Dam removal activities. The ongoing consultation is a critical step in a process leading to the removal of four dams, which will allow for the reintroduction of anadromous salmonids to over 400 miles of historical habitat above Iron Gate Dam. The Biological Opinion is targeted for completion in December 2021.



Central Valley Chinook

We collaborated with the CDFW, California Department of Water Resources, and Pacific Gas & Electric under the Habitat Expansion Agreement to evaluate reintroduction opportunities and advance reintroduction plans for spring-run Chinook salmon in the Feather River.



White Abalone

We collaborated with key partners including the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW), The Bay Foundation, Paua Marine Research Group, and the Aquarium of the Pacific to outplant white abalone in Fall 2020 and Spring 2021. Approximately 3,000 juvenile white abalone were introduced to the wild after being reared in an aquaculture facility. We continue to monitor the sites and have started planning for a Fall 2021 outplanting event.



Willamette Valley Salmonids

We assisted partners in improving upstream and downstream passage for salmonids in the Willamette Valley by actively engaging with the Army Corps of Engineers under the ESA consultation process, in preparation of the Willamette Valley System EIS due for completion in 2024.

Columbia River Basin

We supported the formation and effort of the Upper Columbia Blocked Area Anadromous Fish Working Group, including providing leadership in the 'Actions and Studies' subgroup. We participated in Tribal-led salmon celebrations and workshops, including the 'Bringing the Salmon Home Festival' co-sponsored by Global Affairs Canada, British Columbia and the Indigenous Nations. We also participated in a salmon reintroduction seminar hosted by the Lake Roosevelt Forum.

PHOTOS: Clockwise from top - Juvenile white abalone growing in a lab, Joshua Asel, University of California, Davis; Willamette Falls, Oregon City, Alix Smith, NOAA; Adult salmon resting during migration, Gary Kramer, USDA; Iron Gate Dam on the Klamath River, Bureau of Reclamation.

Goal 2 - Protected Resources

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

COMPLETE & ADVANCE PRIORITY ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT (ESA) CONSULTATIONS



Pacific Coast Salmon Fisheries and Southern Resident Killer Whales

We completed a BiOp on the effects of the Pacific Coast Salmon Fishery Management Plan on endangered Southern Resident killer whales (SRKW). This was the culmination of a 2-year stakeholder engagement through the PFMC to analyze harvest impacts on SRKW. The ESA consultation was an important supporting document for the 2021 ocean salmon fishery management measures and Amendment 21 to the Pacific Coast Salmon Fishery Management Plan. These measures, along with Amendment 21, are intended to limit ocean salmon fishery impacts on Chinook salmon availability as prey for endangered SRKW, especially during years of particularly low Chinook salmon abundance.

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 ESA or National Environmental Policy Act determinations for 20 HGMPs and revised 10. In many cases, previously authorized HGMPs were revised to increase hatchery production to augment the prey base for Southern Resident killer whales.



Anderson Dam Seismic Retrofit

We engaged in several procedural and technical working groups to assist Santa Clara Valley Water District in responding to a FERC order to drain the 90,000 acre-foot reservoir behind Anderson Dam on Coyote Creek. This extraordinary action to address a seismic safety issue created a number of challenging problems for threatened Central California Coast steelhead residing in Coyote Creek, many of which were amplified by the drought.



ENGAGE PARTNERS TO ENHANCE



Whale and Turtle Interactions with the Dungeness Crab Fishery

We provided technical assistance to the states of California, Oregon, and Washington to advance their efforts to draft conservation plans and applications for incidental take authorizations of ESA-listed whales and sea turtles in dungeness crab fisheries. We continued our efforts to build engagement with our state partners in entanglement-related science by hosting a review of the California Current Integrated Ecosystem Assessment (IEA) project's new Whale Entanglement Dashboard. This forum allowed state fishery managers to provide direct feedback on the IEA project, and discuss how the dashboard tool could be used by the States to address entanglements.

PHOTOS: Clockwise from top - SRKW eating Chinook salmon, NWFSC, MMHSRP Permit # 18786-01; Hatchery salmon, Shutterstock; Anderson Lake, County of Santa Clara; Entangled Humpback whale, Crescent City, California, Bryant Anderson, NOAA, MMHSRP Permit # 18786-01.

Goal 2 - Protected Resources

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

ENGAGE PARTNERS TO ENHANCE CONSERVATION

Drought Response

We worked closely with our partners to respond to California's drought conditions. We provided emergency response for endangered species and technical support to develop and approve emergency instream flow regulations for multiple California watersheds. In partnership with the CDFW, we renewed the California Voluntary Drought Initiative, which aims to reduce the adverse effects of dry conditions on ESA-listed sturgeon, salmon, and steelhead, and finalized the California Interagency Anadromous Fish Rescue Strategy. When water temperatures increased, threatening Central California Coast coho salmon at hatchery facilities, we worked with partners to take emergency actions to ensure a safe, expedient and successful transfer to a suitable rearing facility. We also supported temporarily expanding hatchery production of endangered winter-run Chinook salmon, while working to build and conserve the cold water spawning habitat at Shasta Reservoir.

Climate Scenario Planning

We coordinated with NOAA Fisheries headquarters and the Northwest (NWFSC) and Southwest Fisheries Science Centers (SWFSC) to host a broad external expert group in a series of climate change workshops. During the workshops, we explored future climate impacts under alternative scenarios, and identified protection and restoration strategies to foster salmonid resilience in Puget Sound under those future climate conditions. Our team will produce a technical report or summary that describes the methods and findings.

Sacramento River Winter-Run Chinook Salmon

We continue to support cold water management for spawning, improving adult fish passage, and restoring juvenile rearing habitat for endangered Sacramento River winter-run Chinook salmon. We engaged stakeholders throughout the year by holding monthly remote meetings to talk about the Sacramento River winter-run Chinook Salmon Life Cycle Model. We engaged with the Sacramento River Science Partnership (SRSP) Collaboration to advance the implementation of the SRSP Science Plan. We also worked to develop an annual juvenile production estimate used to manage incidental take of winter-run at State and Federal water export facilities in the Delta.



Safe Harbor Agreements

We finalized and implemented the landmark ESA Safe Harbor Agreement (SHA) for Shasta River in Siskiyou County, California. This complex SHA includes a large geographic scope of 30,000 acres, multiple landowners, and conservation strategies focused on key recovery actions including passage, water quality, and water quantity for coho salmon.



PHOTOS: From top - California Central Valley, Shutterstock; Puget Sound and Seattle, Shutterstock.

Goal 2 - Protected Resources

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



Southern Resident Killer Whales Curriculum

We finalized the Saving the Southern Resident Killer Whales curriculum for middle school students in both English and Spanish. Throughout this project-based learning unit, students build an action project that makes a meaningful difference for the Southern Residents, their habitat, and their prey. The curriculum, seeking to inspire young people to become environmental stewards and join efforts to recover imperiled species, has already been adopted by Outschool, Pacific Education Institute, and individual schools.

PROTECT & CONSERVE ANADROMOUS FISH HABITAT

Develop New Habitat Conservation Plans

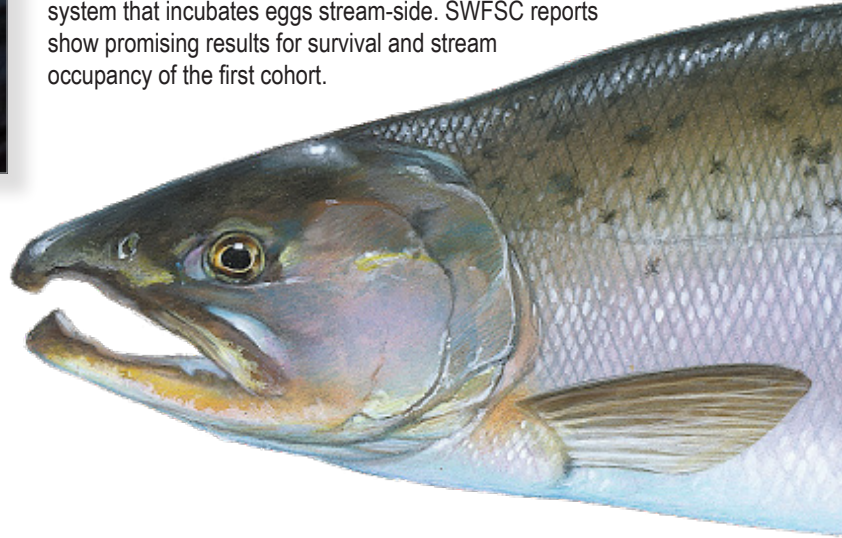
We advanced the development of four new Habitat Conservation Plans (HCP). The Western Oregon HCP proposed action was presented to the Oregon Board of Forestry, which unanimously approved moving forward with the plan. In collaboration with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, we made substantial progress on the Deschutes River Basin HCP and will continue to assess the effects that the management action will have on Deschutes River Basin steelhead and sockeye salmon. We provided technical input and reviewed the City of Santa Cruz's Final HCP Administrative Draft and issued the final Placer County Conservation Plan HCP Biological Opinion.



ENGAGE PARTNERS TO ENHANCE CONSERVATION

Central California Coast Coho Salmon

We released the first and second cohorts of Central California Coast coho salmon from the Don Clausen Fish Hatchery into a tributary of the Russian River using Remote Site Incubators, a confined, flow-through system that incubates eggs stream-side. SWFSC reports show promising results for survival and stream occupancy of the first cohort.



Implement New Habitat Conservation Plan

We coordinated with Stockton East Water District to kick off the Calaveras HCP implementation with an informational stakeholder meeting and the first meeting of the HCP Steering Committee in Spring 2021.

Puget Sound Chinook Salmon

In collaboration with the Pacific Salmon Commission and Northwest states and tribes, we issued grants to protect and restore habitat for threatened Puget Sound Chinook salmon and increase the hatchery production of prey for endangered Southern Resident killer whales.

Salmon Habitat and Passage Restoration

We restored salmon habitat and fish passage through the implementation of the Pacific Coastal Salmon Recovery fund. In 2021, over 170 stream miles were made accessible for fish passage and more than 5,200 acres of salmon habitat was restored.



PHOTOS: Clockwise from top - Saving the Southern Resident Killer Whales curriculum in the classroom; Coho Salmon, Tim Knepp, USFW; Pacific Coastal Salmon Recovery Fund FY20 Report to Congress; Deschutes River, Pete Forsyth.

Goal 3 - Organizational Excellence

Improve Organizational Excellence and Regulatory Efficiency

ADVANCE DIVERSITY & INCLUSION

Advancing Diversity & Inclusion in the Workforce

We implemented the WCR's Diversity and Inclusion Best Hiring Practices and provided training to all supervisors. We increased diversity on hiring panels, added diversity and inclusion topics into candidate evaluations and selections, and created a checklist for each recruit action. We expanded our network for sharing job announcements to include 82 universities, community colleges, Minority Serving Institutions, and tribal colleges, and created a new WCR intern alumni directory. We hired a professional facilitator to conduct racial justice discussions with supervisors, and established supervisory cohorts that will continue to meet with the facilitator through the fall to provide coaching on this important topic.

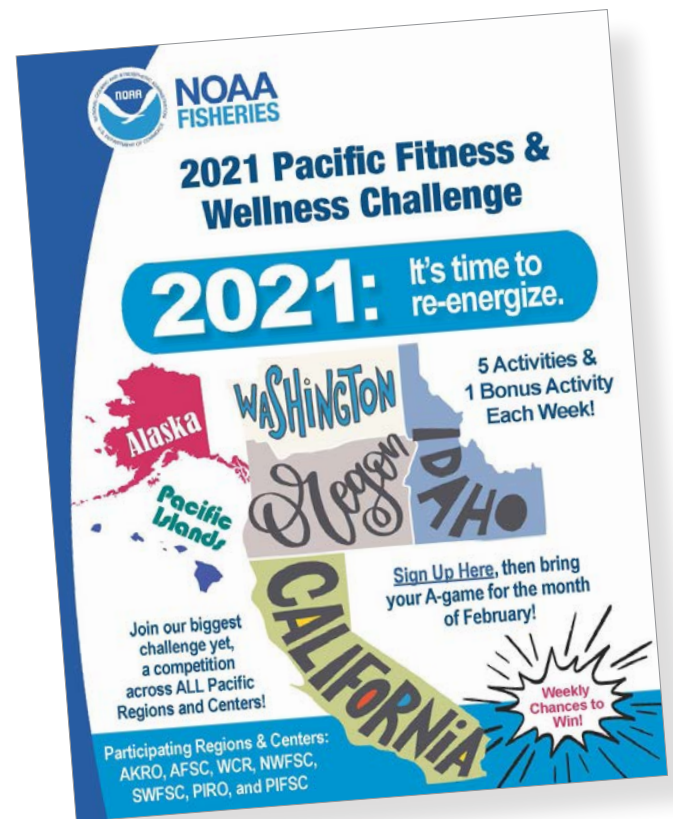
Promoting Internship Opportunities

We supported our largest cohort of interns with 29 total interns. Each intern had one or more mentors supporting their growth and development, while engaging them in different facets of the Region's work. The 2021 cohort came to the Region from eight programs including for the first time, four Roger Arliner Young (RAY) Diversity Fellows. The RAY Conservation Fellowship Program cultivates emerging environmental leaders of color by providing first-time career opportunities for recent college graduates.

SUPPORT RESILIENCY & WELL-BEING

Total Worker Wellness

Acknowledging the challenges of the ongoing pandemic, we continued to provide innovative ways to support employee wellness. We initiated a Pacific Fitness & Wellness Challenge, with participation across 3 regional offices and 4 science centers (including Alaska, Pacific Islands and the West Coast). The wellness challenge encouraged staff to try new activities and incorporate health and wellness in their daily routines. We implemented monthly Focus Days that are designed to create an environment that fosters uninterrupted work time and reduces daily interruptions. We also followed DOC/NOAA and NOAA Fisheries reintegration guidance and engaged staff in reintegration planning through weekly updates and listening sessions.



INVEST IN LEARNING & DEVELOPMENT



Leadership Development

We graduated 10 participants from our pilot year of the WCR's Emerging Leaders Development Program (ELDP) and initiated the second cohort of 11 participants, which is taking place in a completely remote environment. The WCR Growth and Learning Freestyle Program also provided leadership trainings aimed at developing high performing, cohesive, and resilient teams.

Learning, Mentoring, Opportunities, and Support

We fostered career development by creating new tools and resources, and providing learning opportunities, mentoring, and employee support. The 2020 WCR's ELDP cohort launched a new webpage that provides resources for employees to chart their career paths. Supervisors, project officers, mentors, and peers can also use these resources to facilitate discussions about professional growth and development with their team members. We also implemented a new Colleague Buddy System and Shadowing Program to help new employees and affiliates integrate and foster a culture of mentoring through transfer of knowledge among people and divisions.

PHOTOS: From top - 2021 Pacific Fitness & Wellness Challenge; EDLP 2021 Cohort online meeting: Top row - Grace Ferrara, Greg Sieglitz, Hannah Mellman; 2nd row - Jeromy Jording, Sara Azat, Mary Bhuthimethee; 3rd row - Monica Gutierrez, Rachael Wadsworth, Seth Naman; bottom row - Brett Amedick, Janine Iles.

Goal 3 - Organizational Excellence

Improve Organizational Excellence and Regulatory Efficiency



INVEST IN LEARNING & DEVELOPMENT

Habitat Conservation Training

The WCR's cross-divisional FERC and Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) teams completed major milestones this year. Both teams held training sessions for WCR staff to learn how to implement our full range of authority for habitat conservation including the Federal Power Act and the EFH provisions of the Magnuson-Stevens Act.

ENHANCE COMMUNICATIONS & INFORMATION MANAGEMENT

Cultivating a Communications-Savvy Region

We developed resources for WCR staff engagement in becoming a more "Communications-Savvy Region" by updating intranet content and creating a flyer to promote communication resources. 80 WCR staff participated in storytelling training to enhance the use of storytelling techniques to connect with our audiences. In addition, the Regional Leadership Team approved new organizational management procedures to align communication resources with WCR priorities and improve early notice of actions requiring communications support.



IMPROVE REGULATORY EFFICIENCY & EFFECTIVENESS

Pacific Coast Salmon Fishery Management

We approved Amendment 20 of the Pacific Coast Salmon Fishery Management Plan. This amendment modified the preseason schedule for implementing the annual salmon management measures and moved the southern boundary of the California Klamath Management Zone 5 nautical miles north of its previous location to align with the current groundfish management boundary at 40°10' N. latitude. In addition, Amendment 20 updated out-of-date language in the Fishery Management Plan.

Freedom of Information Act

We completed 35 Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests and achieved a 100 percent on-time submission rate. In addition, the WCR FOIA team processed 6 Administrative Records.

PHOTOS: From top - Salmon River shallow water habitat, Oregon, NOAA; Fishing boats, Newport, Oregon, Shutterstock.