



Priorities for Fiscal Year 2022

Purpose

This Southwest Fisheries Science Center (SWFSC) Annual Priorities Memo (APM) for Fiscal Year 2022 defines our mission and the activities most critical to achieving them in the coming year. It also acknowledges the unusual operating challenges we continue to face with the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, our fiscal landscape, as well as our strategic approach and funding priorities for meeting our core mission while maintaining focus on emerging needs.

Our Mission

Our mission is to generate and communicate the scientific information necessary for the conservation and management of the Southwest region's living marine resources.

We are guided by our Congressional legislative mandates, goals and priorities. We are also guided by the strategic planning documents of the Department of Commerce, NOAA, and NMFS. A change in Administration means a new NMFS Strategic Plan is forthcoming. The incoming Biden Administration has promulgated multiple Executive Orders that will further guide our work. Additional documents outline these E.O.s, as well as work plans and areas of emphasis for NMFS and SWFSC. Collectively, these documents and initiatives represent our core mission and emerging needs for FY22.

Operating and Fiscal Landscape

FY20 and 21 were among the most challenging years to operate marine science laboratories. With the COVID-19 pandemic continuing to impact the country and mandatory telework remaining in effect for nearly 100% of employees and affiliates, SWFSC starts FY22 in a time of uncertainty, but with our laboratories at the beginning of a phased return to work. These phases, along with a new federal vaccine mandate, will continue to govern our operating status and the degree to which we can resume normal operations. With this APM, we lay out a vision equally ambitious to our previous APMs, recognizing there are new opportunity areas, some tasks may slip in timing, and some may not be executable. Our team has successfully risen to the challenges created by the pandemic, yet we recognize the unpredictability the nation's situation poses and the potential implications for us. Decisions regarding the full scope of our activities, including how we return to work, will be made with the best information available.

In addition to the global pandemic, the past two years have seen severe impacts to the fishing and seafood industry, escalating climate change effects on marine life, conflicts in competing ocean uses, and a multitude of confounding anthropogenic effects on our trust resources.

NOAA is confronting these challenges using a variety of tools and developing approaches where possible. SWFSC will face these issues in our region and will continue to use our resources to provide the best scientific advice possible.

FY22 Priorities

Important note: Priorities for FY22 will be tempered according to COVID-19 restrictions and conditions. Emphasis will be placed on cross-divisional cooperation in achieving goals.

GOAL: Adaptively manage fisheries and aquaculture for sustainability and economic competitiveness

The Center provides the science which serves as the basis for federal fishery management. The scientific advice we provide to the NOAA Fisheries West Coast Region (Region) and the Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) allows the establishment of annual catch limits while preventing overfishing and continuing protection of marine ecosystems and listed species. Our work under this goal also supports efforts to advance aquaculture science for finfish.

Priorities for SWFSC base programs under this goal in FY22:

- Stock assessments, highest priority economic analyses and fisheries surveys for Coastal Pelagic Species (CPS), Highly Migratory Species (HMS), Groundfish, and Pacific salmon. Within this list, priority will be given to stocks that are commercially and/or recreationally fished in CA Current Large Marine Ecosystem (CCLME) waters and have significant economic impacts on the West Coast, as well as those identified through Treaties and international agreements with Regional Fishery Management Organizations (e.g. CCAMLR, ISC). Recognizing the increasing impact of climate change, we will incorporate climate and ecosystem information in assessments, where possible.
- Bycatch monitoring and identification in CCLME fisheries.
- Regional implementation of the NOAA Climate and Fisheries Initiative.
- Management Strategy Evaluation for HMS, CPS, groundfish and salmon stocks, as identified by PFMC or international partner body as a high priority.
- Select life history studies and activities that support the above core priorities, as defined by the Center's prioritization process.
- Development of operational Ecosystem-Based Fisheries Management tools to assist in fisheries management (Ecosystem Based Fisheries Management Roadmap, the Western Regional Action Plan for Climate, and U.S. strategic interests in Antarctica). Special emphasis will be on integrating across divisions to achieve synergies and efficiencies with the Center's Center Ecosystem Science Committee.

- Support of aquaculture research for finfish species (e.g. *Seriola* spp). Support of the Executive Order on Seafood Competitiveness.
- Highest priority research to understand impacts of offshore wind energy's impacts on trust resources.

GOAL: Safeguard protected species and propel their recovery (from NMFS FY22 Priorities and Guidance)

The Center conducts science that contributes to the recovery of species listed under the Endangered Species Act, species covered by the Marine Mammal Protection Act, and the protection of their habitats.

Priorities for SWFSC base programs under this goal in FY22:

- Updated marine mammal assessments (abundance and trends, population structure, health and condition, and placement into an ecosystem context) for CCLME species under the Marine Mammal Protection Act.
- Highest priority Recovery Plan research actions for ESA-listed species, especially Species in the Spotlight (Pacific leatherback turtles, Sacramento River winter run Chinook salmon, Central California Coast coho salmon, white abalone, Southern Resident killer whales).
- Listing petitions requiring science support.
- Bycatch monitoring and identification in CCLME fisheries.
- High priority research in support of ESA-listed species, as defined by Center prioritization process.
- High priority activities to address the effects of climate change on protected species.
- CCLME whale entanglement risk assessments and stranding response activities.
- Commitments made to outside agencies, such as the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, Bureau of Ocean Energy Management and U.S. Navy to support our core MMPA and ESA mandate priorities.
- High priority research to understand potential impacts of offshore wind energy development on ESA-listed and protected species trust resources.

GOAL: Diversify our workforce and support our mission accomplishment through organizational excellence (from NMFS FY22 Priorities and Guidance)

Priorities for SWFSC base programs in FY22:

- Training and development of staff, as well as increasing diversity and inclusion efforts to both provide opportunities to our workforce and bolster our ability to withstand attrition.
- Core management/operations, including mandatory computing upgrades and funded facility maintenance.
- Implementation of innovative technologies that a) increase information content per unit of cost while reducing overall costs for core priorities (e.g. UxS systems, 'Omics, and Artificial Intelligence), or b) make remote work more efficient.
- Implementation of innovative technologies that serve as asset multipliers to improve spatial or temporal coverage for purposes of addressing questions related to wind energy, aquaculture, and climate change.
- Implementation of agency-funded facilities projects and the Antarctic Cape Shirreff rebuild.
- Providing infrastructure to store, process, and analyze data streams (i.e. cloud computing) being generated by innovative technologies.

It will be necessary to broaden our scientific focus in FY22, while simultaneously finding more efficiencies. The base resources available to support research at SWFSC will remain considerable and may increase in areas, yet our budget has remained flat or decreased over the past decade, even as demand for our scientific advice has increased. We will make strategic, and possibly transformative, decisions in FY22 on how we are organized and the activities we choose to conduct.

Conclusion

In FY22, SWFSC will proceed with our plans to continue to deliver high-quality scientific advice to our management partners in the Southwest, nationally, and internationally. We expect the global pandemic to continue to impact our ability to collect and analyze data for which we are planning contingencies to the extent possible. We expect the need to prioritize our work will increase. Our highly trained and professional staff will work together to achieve our highest priorities for the year in support of our mission for fisheries, protected species, and ecosystem-based management.