

# NOAA Fisheries West Coast Region Fiscal Year 2022 Accomplishments



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The West Coast Region (WCR) identified 13 priority areas shown below (not in rank order) for fiscal year 2022. This summary report highlights notable accomplishments for each of these priority areas. These achievements are the direct result of the incredible resilience and adaptability of our staff under the challenging circumstances of the continuing COVID-19 pandemic and the transition from mandatory telework to a hybrid work environment.

- Build Resilience in U.S. Seafood and Fishing Sectors
- 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 Consultations
- Engage Partners to Enhance Conservation

- Protect and Conserve Anadromous Fish Habitat
- Support Responsible Offshore Wind Energy Development
- Advance Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
- Enhance Communications
- Promote Operational Efficiency and Effectiveness
- Enhance Total Worker Wellness
- Invest in Learning and Development

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## **Goal 1 - Sustainable Fisheries**

Adaptively manage fisheries and aquaculture for sustainability and economic competitiveness.

## **BUILD RESILIENCE IN U.S. SEAFOOD AND FISHING SECTORS**

#### Sustainable Ocean Fishery Management

Working with the Pacific Fishery Management Council (PFMC), we completed harvest rules for salmon, Pacific whiting, and Pacific sardine to maximize fishing opportunities along the West Coast while ensuring the sustainability of fisheries and fishing communities. We established the ocean salmon fishing season while meeting conservation objectives for all salmon stocks with freshwater state and tribal fisheries in Washington, Oregon, California, and Idaho, as well as obligations required under the Pacific Salmon Treaty. These actions prevent overfishing, rebuild overfished stocks, achieve optimum yield, and ensure management measures are based on the best scientific information available.



We completed a proposed rule that would establish the 2023–24 harvest for over 90 groundfish species caught along the West Coast. This rule would revise management measures intended to keep the total annual catch of each groundfish stock or stock complex within the annual catch limit while increasing fishing opportunities.



#### **Increasing Attainment in the Pacific Whiting Fishery**

We published a proposed rule to increase operational flexibility in the Pacific whiting fishery and advanced the mothership sector's ability to utilize its whiting allocation, while maintaining fair and equitable access to Pacific whiting by all sectors of the program. The action would increase overall attainment in the fishery leading to economic benefits for participants and communities.

#### International Management for Highly Migratory Species

We led the development of United States (U.S.) proposals through the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission for highly migratory species in the eastern Pacific Ocean, including tropical tuna, Pacific bluefin tuna, and silky shark management measures. We increased overall catch limits and the proportion of Pacific bluefin tuna catch allocated to the U.S., expanding U.S. fishing opportunities.

Photos: Cover - Top, left - Oyster shucking line, Taylor Shellfish, NOAA; Center - Winter-run Chinook alevins for McCloud River reintroduction, Matt Johnson, CDFW; Right - Kelp and sardines, NOAA; Bottom -Tuna harvest, Fabien Forget, Institute of Research and Development. Page 1: Puget Sound, Shutterstock. Page 2: Left - Rockfish harvest, NOAA; Right - Pacific whiting harvest, NOAA; Bottom - Bluefin tuna, FishWatch, NOAA Fisheries.

2 U.S. Department of Commerce | National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration | National Marine Fisheries Service | West Coast Region

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### **CONSERVE HABITAT SUPPORTING FISHERIES**



#### Estuarine and Marine Habitat Mitigation and Conservation

We strengthened eelgrass monitoring and mitigation projects in Humboldt Bay, California, by providing technical assistance and financial support to agency and community partners. We provided support for implementation of the Humboldt Bay Eelgrass Comprehensive Management plan, completed review of the Annual Eelgrass Monitoring Program for the Coast Seafoods Shellfish Aquaculture Permit renewal project, and increased our support to monitor and evaluate eelgrass dieoff in Humboldt Bay. Together, these actions advance the quality of compensatory mitigation projects implemented for eelgrass in Humboldt Bay and help ensure that eelgrass resources remain viable despite disease outbreaks, rising sea levels, and a changing climate.

#### Management and Eradication of Invasive Species

Collaborating with many California partners, we've advanced the management response and eradication of the invasive algae *Caulerpa prolifera* by improving and implementing consultation protocols and permit conditions for bottom disturbing activities in shallow, nearshore marine waters from Morro Bay, California to the international border of Mexico. In collaboration with our partners on the Southern California *Caulerpa* Action Team, a total of \$730K was secured for removal and surveillance efforts that have occurred periodically in FY22, including in the known infestation area inside Newport Bay.



#### **Recreational Fisheries Workshops to Restore Habitat**

We engaged the recreational fishing community in discussions and actions of habitat restoration to benefit recreationally- and ecologically-important species. This included a workshop for the recreational fishing community in north Puget Sound, Washington, to discuss habitat restoration priorities for the Stillaguamish, Snohomish, and Skagit basins. We held a habitat restoration and fishing event for the Southern California angling community, which was funded by the National Fish Habitat Partnership.

### ADVANCE AQUACULTURE OPPORTUNITIES ON THE WEST COAST



#### **Aquaculture Opportunity Areas**

We advanced the sustainable development of offshore aquaculture in southern California by publishing a Notice of Intent and engaging stakeholders during two public scoping sessions in preparation for a Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement for Southern California Aquaculture Opportunity Areas. In partnership with NOAA Fisheries Southeast Regional Office, we provided extensive analysis on the potential interactions between protected species and offshore aquaculture and have developed an Endangered Species Act (ESA) Section 7 aquaculture risk assessment tool to assist with future consultations.

Photos: Top, left - Humboldt Bay eelgrass dieoff, Whelan Gilkerson; Right - Habitat restoration and fishing event in Newport Bay, Orange County Coastkeeper; Bottom -Giant kelp harvest in Southern California, Ocean Rainforest.

## **Goal 2 - Protected Resources**

Safeguard protected species and propel their recovery.

### ADVANCE REINTRODUCTION EFFORTS FOR AT-RISK SPECIES



#### **Restoring the Kingfisher Flat Hatchery**

To restore the Kingfisher Flat Hatchery in Santa Cruz County, California, which was damaged in the CZU Lightning Complex fires, we awarded a grant that provided funding to Monterey Bay Salmon and Trout Project to purchase new tanks and shade structures. The Kingfisher Flat Hatchery is the primary facility for the operation of the Southern Coho Salmon Captive Broodstock Program and is essential for the conservation and recovery of the Central California Coast coho salmon.



#### **Reintroduction in the Upper Columbia Basin**

We continue to support tribal efforts to reintroduce salmon and steelhead into the blocked areas of the upper Columbia River Basin by working with Upper Columbia United Tribes, NOAA's Northwest Fisheries Science Center staff, and other federal agencies to determine reintroduction strategies, identify regulatory challenges, and provide potential solutions. The Confederated Colville Tribes and the Coeur d'Alene Tribe were awarded Pacific Coastal Salmon Recovery Fund grants to support salmon behavior and survival studies in the blocked areas.



#### Returning Salmon and Steelhead to California's Central Valley

We continue to make progress towards returning salmon and steelhead to their original habitat in California's Central Valley by building partnerships, engaging on key projects, and creating public support. This year, we worked with the Winnemern Wintu Tribe, California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW), and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to transport 40,000 endangered Sacramento River winter-run Chinook salmon eggs to the McCloud River for the first time since the 1940s. We completed an analysis of reintroduction of Central Valley spring-run Chinook salmon to the San Joaquin River to calculate the number of natural fish, and are providing technical assistance on the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC)'s license amendment and its restoration and reintroduction of winter-run Chinook salmon project on Battle Creek.

#### White Abalone Recovery

We successfully outplanted nearly 1,800 endangered white abalone in Palos Verdes and Point Loma, California, to advance recovery of the species. We continue to monitor outplanted abalone, scout for new sites for future outplanting, and increase spawning success by developing grant and contract support funds for partners to increase rearing and growing capacity.

Photos: Left - Kingfisher Flat Hatchery, Santa Cruz, Bob Coey, NOAA; Right -Winnemem Wintu Chief Sisk and tribal members release winter-run Chinook salmon fry into the McCloud River, Matt Johnson, CDFW; Bottom - White abalone release site, Point Loma, Amanda Bird, Paua Marine Research.

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## COMPLETE AND ADVANCE PRIORITY ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT CONSULTATIONS



#### Klamath Dam Removal

We completed the Klamath Dam Removal biological opinion which analyzes FERC's surrender and decommissioning of the Lower Klamath Hydroelectric Project, the largest dam removal project in history. This critical regulatory step will advance restoration of the Klamath River, opening over 400 miles of previously inaccessible salmonid habitat.



#### Salish Sea Nearshore Programmatic Biological Opinion

Alongside the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, we completed the Salish Sea Nearshore Programmatic (SSNP) biological opinion, which will cover approximately 100 pending Puget Sound construction projects awaiting ESA Section 7 consultation. The SSNP will help ensure that important infrastructure and maintenance projects can move forward efficiently while still protecting listed species, such as threatened Puget Sound Chinook salmon and endangered Southern Resident killer whales, whose decline has impacted the rights of tribes to harvest treaty fish.

Photos: Top, left - Iron Gate reservoir on Klamath River, courtesy EcoFlight; Right - Squaw Creek, SF Eel River, CDFW; Bottom - Deception Pass, Salish Sea, Shutterstock.

#### Hatchery and Genetic Management Plans

We continued to reduce the backlog of hatchery and genetic management plans (HGMPs) needing review under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and/or the ESA. We completed ESA and NEPA reviews on seven new HGMPs. In addition, we completed reinitiated ESA/NEPA reviews on two HGMPs due to proposed changes in the operation of previously approved hatchery programs. Reducing the HGMP backlog ensures that hatchery program operations are consistent with ESA recovery of protected species.



#### **Eel River Water Releases**

We provided technical assistance to regional entities, including Pacific Gas & Electric and FERC to manage the Eel River Reservoir and implement the Potter Valley biological opinion. We successfully secured water releases for fish by completing 2022 Drought Variance due to limited water storage availability negotiations and are working to advance ESA and Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) interim protective measures.

## ENGAGE PARTNERS TO ENHANCE CONSERVATION

#### **Endangered Species Act 5-Year Reviews**

We completed 5-year reviews for Southern Resident killer whales, eulachon, and seven salmon and steelhead species in the Interior Columbia Basin protected by the ESA. Five-year reviews assess the current status and identify the highest priority recovery actions for the next five years to improve the viability and climate resilience of the species. These reviews recommended each species retain their current listing status while identifying that climate change increases the urgency of recommended recovery actions.



#### Puget Sound Chinook Salmon Harvest

We assisted Washington State and Puget Sound Tribes in developing a new, long-term harvest resource management plan for Puget Sound Chinook salmon. The resulting plan will ensure that treaty tribal and state salmon fisheries are managed, implemented, and monitored in compliance with the requirements of the ESA, for a period of ten years, providing stability and consistency for these fisheries, communities, and salmon resources. The plan is currently progressing through ESA and NEPA reviews.



#### **Responding to California Drought**

We engaged with California stakeholders and federal and state agencies to respond to a third year of historic drought by working with partners on outreach and education, enforcement actions, targeted flow augmentation, monitoring, and fish rescues. We worked to negotiate voluntary drought agreements and provided public workshops on the drought's impact to listed species and options through our Voluntary Drought Initiative Program. We continue to provide technical assistance to state and interagency drought response task forces and collectives, like contributing to CDFW's Fish Rescue Policy and Bureau of Reclamation's Drought Toolkit.

#### Rebuilding Interior Columbia Basin Salmon and Steelhead

We worked with the USFWS, and tribal and state fishery co-managers to produce a final report on rebuilding Interior Columbia Basin salmon and steelhead. The report summarizes the latest science and our experience with recovery planning to identify actions with the highest potential to achieve the Columbia Basin Partnership Task Force's mid-range abundance goals by 2050, which would represent considerable progress towards restoring the interior Columbia Basin salmon and steelhead populations to healthy and harvestable levels.

#### Incorporating Climate Considerations in Fish Passage Design

We released a guidance manual on methods to incorporate future climate change into engineering designs of fish passage facilities and stream crossings. The guidance is intended to ensure fish passage infrastructure will be resilient in the face of climate change.



NOAA Fisheries WCR Guidance to Improve the Resilience of Fish Passage Facilities to Climate Change - 2022



#### **Columbia River Treaty**

We continue to provide crucial technical, science, and policy support in negotiations toward modernizing the Columbia River Treaty between the U.S. and Canada. This year, we worked to align with Canada on ecosystem issues and coordinate the operations of several large dams and reservoirs that provide flood control, power generation, and impact fisheries for communities in both countries.

Photos: Top, left - Puget Sound Chinook, NOAA; Right - Guidance to Improve the Resilience of Fish Passage Facilities to Climate Change, 2022; Bottom - Soames Bar, Salmon River, Shutterstock.

## **Goal 2 - Protected Resources**

Safeguard protected species and propel their recovery.

## PROTECT AND CONSERVE ANADROMOUS FISH HABITAT

#### Integrating Stormwater Science into Management

We integrated the best available science on the impacts of stormwater containing toxic chemicals such as polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons and 6PPD into consultations for transportation infrastructure projects in Puget Sound and the Lower Columbia/Washington Coast. We also completed best practices guidance documents for staff conducting ESA Section 7 and EFH consultations to identify compensatory mitigation options to treat, minimize, avoid, or offset the adverse effects associated with projects that generate stormwater after construction.



#### Western Oregon State Forest Habitat Conservation Plan

The Western Oregon State Forests Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) is a collaborative effort to provide long-term protection to aquatic and terrestrial species, while allowing certainty in operations of state-managed forest lands west of the Cascades. This year, we released a Draft Environmental Impact Statement that analyzes the potential impacts on the environment caused by the implementation of the proposed HCP.

Photos: Top, left - Deschutes River, Shutterstock; Top, right - California Conservation Corps, Morro Bay National Estuary Program; Bottom, right - Two Mile Meadow restoration, Idaho, Jennie Franks, NOAA; Bottom, left - Offshore windmills, Shutterstock.

## SUPPORT RESPONSIBLE OFFSHORE WIND ENERGY DEVELOPMENT





#### Salmon Habitat and Passage Restoration

We successfully completed the FY22 Pacific Coast Salmon Recovery Fund grant competition to restore salmon habitat and fish passage. We awarded \$95 million in funding, including \$34 million in Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) funds on 19 new and continuing salmon recovery programs and projects across the West Coast (including Alaska). These funds will be used to invest in salmon recovery on a scope and scale that has never been seen before. Projects recommended for BIL funding were prioritized for tribal capacity, programs that have diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives identified, and projects that deliver large measurable and lasting benefits to the climate resilience of salmon populations and their habitat.



#### **Offshore Wind Energy Coordination**

We selected a West Coast Offshore Wind Energy Coordinator and together with the NOAA Fisheries Science Centers, created a West Coast Offshore Wind Energy Coordination Team. The team advises on impacts from the rapidly emerging offshore wind energy sector on fisheries, protected species, habitats, ecosystems, and our scientific surveys. This year, the team provided advice to the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) with considerations for NOAA Fisheries' trust resources and our scientific enterprise in BOEM's siting and leasing processes underway off Oregon and California.

## **Goal 3 - Organizational Excellence**

Diversify our workforce and support our mission accomplishment through organizational excellence.

## ADVANCE DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION



#### **Regional Internship and Fellowship Programs**

We continue to recruit, train, and mentor interns and fellows with a DEI lens. This year, we hosted 35 interns, the largest cohort we've had, from nine different internship programs working across the region. We also hosted the first cohort of West Coast Region RAY Diversity Fellows, which aims to increase and facilitate conservation career pathways for emerging environmental leaders of color. The four RAY Fellows provided key contributions to protected species assessments, hydropower management, and scientific research including field research with NOAA's Northwest Fisheries Science Center.

#### Implementing the WCR Diversity & Inclusion Framework

Under WCR's Diversity and Inclusion Best Hiring Practices, we were able to improve gender equality. Sixty percent of Full Time Employee (FTE) promotions and 76% of new/lateral FTE hires were female. We provided training to all supervisors and WCR employees on diversity, equity, and inclusion, which focused on providing coaching support and facilitated discussions. Topics included 'Creating a Respectful and Inclusive Workplace' and 'Understanding Generational Differences.'

## **ENHANCE COMMUNICATIONS**

We advanced our efforts to become a more "communications-savvy region" by educating staff on communications resources and services, providing communications training, and increasing our use of storytelling to enhance our effectiveness. We finalized dozens of communications products to connect public audiences to our work.

# PROMOTE OPERATIONAL EFFICIENCY AND EFFECTIVENESS

### Pacific Fishery Management Council Regional Operating Agreement

Working with the PFMC, NOAA Fisheries Science Centers, and the Offices of General Counsel and Enforcement, we completed a revision to the Regional Operating Agreement (ROA). The ROA is a major step forward to improve our collective effectiveness, collaboration, and teamwork in implementing the Magnuson-Stevens Act.

## ENHANCE TOTAL WORKER WELLNESS

#### **Office Reintegration**

We maintained compliance with established agency reintegration guidance, including developing, tracking, and communicating location-specific requirements and plans for all WCR offices. We also ensured offices and supporting equipment were ready for staff as we began returning to offices. We continued to provide support for staff teleworking, promoting an inclusive hybrid workforce.



#### **Total Worker Wellness**

We developed resiliency resources, including best practices to help staff manage time, workload, and the important balance between work and personal lives. We also supported communication, inclusivity, and staff morale by promoting personal and professional development opportunities like the Pacific Fitness & Wellness Challenge, the People's Eco-Challenge, and the new "Fish Bumps" staff recognition program.

## INVEST IN LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT



#### **Emerging Leaders Development Program**

Eleven participants completed and graduated from the second year of the WCR's Emerging Leaders Development Program and we launched the third cohort (pictured above). The students worked with faculty from Portland State University's Center for Public Service and WCR Leadership throughout the 9-month program. To culminate their program, participants developed recommendations for establishing a hybrid work environment.

#### **Growth and Learning Freestyle Program**

We continue to invest in growth and learning opportunities across the WCR by supporting seven proposals from four divisions and one cross-divisional team. Training topics included implementing strengths-based leadership; advanced communication training on active listening, persuasive speaking, and effective behavior change communications; and the use of instream flow models in a framework to form recommendations that protect and enhance anadromous salmonid population viability and habitat.

Photos: Top - RAY Conservation Diversity Fellow, Talia Davis about to embark on a survey of the Northern California Current ecosystem on NOAA's Bell Shimada. Photo courtesy Talia Davis; Top, right - Fish Bumps logo, NOAA; Bottom, right - Third year ELDP participants, from left: Evan Sawyer, Stacie Smith, Shari Witmore, Aurele LaMontagne, Shivonne Nesbit, Lynn Massey, Elif Wilkins, Jim Morrow, Stacey Miller, and Alison Weber-Stover.