



NOAA Fisheries West Coast Region Fiscal Year 2023 Priorities



NOAA
FISHERIES

A Message from Scott Rumsey, Acting Regional Administrator

Dear Colleagues,

This is a critical time for us and the work we do. There has never been as much support for our work, from our agency leadership to the public, reflecting increasing recognition of the onrushing impacts of climate change. Thanks to the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and other funding streams, we have a rare opportunity to make a lasting difference.

Every one of you across the West Coast Region makes our crucial work possible. We see the rewards of our past hard work in many places: new flexibilities for the groundfish fleet, endangered white abalone outplanted in the wild, and well-managed hatcheries that support tribal fishing while respecting wild stocks, to name a few.

Our priorities for the coming year build on those successes, at a time when our work has never been as important, or as challenging. Climate change increasingly influences everything we do, requiring science and strategy to promote sustainable fisheries and the habitat they need. We are strengthening our partnerships and building new ones to expand our reach and find creative solutions. We are diversifying our own ranks, incorporating new views and thinking. Our work is only as resilient as we are. Now, more than ever, our greatest strength lies in our support for each other.

Despite the pandemic, drought, wildfire, and climate change, we have delivered standout successes for the communities we serve and the species we manage and protect:

- Endangered Sacramento River winter-run Chinook salmon swam once again in their historic habitat in the headwaters of the McCloud River for the first time in more than 80 years, an important first step in giving them a new foothold against climate change.
- We were the first region to deliver new funding from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, through the Pacific Coastal Salmon Recovery Fund, to the projects that will make a difference for species and their habitat that urgently need it.
- Nearshore habitat in Puget Sound that is vital to threatened salmon and steelhead and endangered Southern Resident killer whales is better protected thanks to the Salish Sea Nearshore Programmatic. This programmatic is an innovative, new approach to avoiding net losses of habitat that was [recognized in The Seattle Times](#).
- We welcomed our largest cohort of interns this year, benefiting from their fresh ideas and insight. We continue to press forward in recruiting, retaining and empowering a diverse workforce that fully reflects our region.
- Soon we will propose a new deep-set buoy gear fishery for swordfish with less bycatch, while Pacific bluefin tuna will hit the final rebuilding goal needed to increase the U.S. quota for the species.

One of the highlights for me of the last few months has been seeing many of our West Coast Region staff in person again. As I resume travel and have the opportunity to see many of you in person again, I am reminded how energizing it is and how deeply I value -- both professionally and personally -- the serendipitous conversations we have in the office. We all know how much the pandemic years have changed the realities of our workplace. What has not changed is the strength, caliber and ambition of the work we do together.

Sincerely,



FY23 Priorities

Cross-Cutting Themes

Four cross-cutting themes: Species in the Spotlight, Tribal Trust, Climate Change, and Equity & Environmental Justice appear across our strategic goals and actions. These themes are indicated in the text below.

SS - Species in the Spotlight

NOAA Fisheries' "Species in the Spotlight" program brings greater attention to nine endangered marine species most at risk of extinction in the near future.

TT - Tribal Trust

Priorities supporting our commitment to uphold our tribal trust responsibilities.

CC - Climate Change

Priorities addressing the impact of climate change on our fisheries and protected resources.

EEJ - Equity & Environmental Justice

Priorities that advance equity and accessibility of services and benefits to underserved communities.

Goal 1 - Adaptively manage fisheries for sustainability and economic competitiveness to grow the Blue Economy.

Build Resilience in U.S. Seafood and Fishing Sectors

- Implement harvest specifications and management measure rules for salmon, groundfish, Pacific whiting, Pacific halibut, Pacific sardine, Pacific mackerel, and the central subpopulation of northern anchovy. **TT**
- Develop new proposals that create fishing area flexibilities for the groundfish non-trawl sector, in partnership with the Pacific Fishery Management Council.
- Complete a Final Environmental Impact Statement and Final Rule for authorizing Deep-set Buoy Gear under the Highly Migratory Species Fisheries Management Plan.
- Support hatchery production, fish passage, monitoring, evaluation, and hatchery reform projects for salmon and steelhead in the Columbia River Basin by allocating annual funding under the Mitchell Act. **TT**

Advance Aquaculture Opportunities on the West Coast

- Propose a new structure and plan for a Washington Shellfish Interagency Permitting team in coordination with Washington state partners.
- Develop a Draft Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement to identify a Southern California Offshore Aquaculture Opportunity Area.

Conserve & Restore Habitat Supporting Fisheries

- Facilitate implementation of the funding initiative associated with the 2019 Pacific Salmon Treaty agreement.
- Support the four Northwest states of Washington, Oregon, Idaho, and Montana in their development of the Integration and Strategies Group of regional sovereigns and stakeholders to implement the Columbia Basin Partnership Phase II report. **TT**
- Collaborate with the Southern California *Caulerpa* Action Team on eradication and management response.
- Support tribal efforts to assess the feasibility of salmon reintroduction into blocked areas of the upper Columbia Basin consistent with our tribal trust responsibilities. **TT CC**
- Provide coordination and technical assistance to support development of responsible offshore wind development and minimize impacts on critical habitats, protected resources, and fishing opportunities, with available funding. **CC**

PHOTOS: Cover from top left - Salmon troller, NOAA; Center - Gopher rockfish, NOAA Corps; Right - Biologist recording data on the American River, NOAA; Bottom - American River, NOAA. Page 1 - Winter-run chinook juveniles, California Department of Fish and Wildlife. Page 2 - Tuna fishing, Jeff Muir, International Seafood Sustainability Foundation.

Goal 2 - Safeguard protected species and propel their recovery.

Advance Reintroduction Efforts for At-Risk Species

- Continue experimental outplanting efforts to advance endangered white abalone recovery. **Ss**
- Reduce regulatory hurdles to reintroducing salmon and steelhead to habitats upstream of Englebright Dam in California's Central Valley. **Cc**
- Advance the Battle Creek Restoration Project and Winter-run Chinook Salmon Reintroduction Program in California's Central Valley. **Ss**

Complete and Advance Priority Endangered Species Act (ESA) Consultations

- Provide technical assistance to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission and other partners to promote fish passage and salmon recovery in key watersheds and projects, including the Potter Valley Project, Klamath Dam Removal, and the Anderson Dam seismic retrofit project. **Tt Cc**
- Continue reducing the backlog of Hatchery and Genetic Management Plans requiring review under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and/or the ESA. **Tt**
- Evaluate a new long-term harvest management agreement for Puget Sound Chinook salmon submitted by co-managers. **Tt**
- Provide technical assistance to U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and Sonoma Water towards re-initiation of a Russian River biological opinion for river flow, flood control, and reservoir management.
- Provide technical assistance to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to design and assess the effects of the Walla Walla Corps' Dreissenid Mussel Rapid Response Action Plan. **Cc**
- Provide a draft programmatic biological opinion for the reinitiation of Washington Federal Highway Administration-funded road projects that incorporates new stormwater science.

Engage Partners to Enhance Conservation & Recovery

- Provide technical assistance to our partners on Central California Coast Coho salmon recovery and enhancement efforts and develop estuary restoration priorities through the Salmon Habitat Restoration Priorities (SHaRP). **Ss**
- Complete 5-year ESA status reviews for listed species under WCR's jurisdiction. **Ss**
- Assist California, Oregon, and Washington in their draft Conservation Plans and Incidental Take Authorization applications for entangled ESA-listed whales and sea turtles. **Ss EEJ**

- Develop a proposed rule to update federal commercial and recreational vessel regulations to protect Southern Resident killer whales. **Ss**
- Coordinate and implement proactive strategies to minimize California drought impacts on listed species, including developing and implementing Voluntary Drought Agreements, Safe Harbor Agreements, and Water Operation Management Policies, as well as conducting outreach and education, instream flow monitoring and management, and fish rescues. **Ss Cc**
- Continue developing our understanding of indigenous knowledge and traditional natural resource management techniques, in support of reintroducing salmon and steelhead to historical habitats. **Tt EEJ**
- Advance the use of the Puget Sound Nearshore Habitat Conservation Calculator, including implementation and independent peer review by the Center of Independent Experts.
- Implement the Pacific Coastal Salmon Recovery Fund to advance salmon and steelhead recovery and improve the status of vulnerable populations in the face of climate change and other threats. **Cc**
- Support salmon conservation and recovery through grants and providing technical assistance for projects funded by the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law.

Conserve and Restore Anadromous Fish Habitat

- Support Habitat Conservation Plans (HCPs), including the Deschutes River Basin HCP and Western Oregon State Forest HCP, and engage in scoping of the HCP associated with the Oregon Private Forest Accord. **Cc**
- Advance habitat enhancement, fish passage, and fish screening projects in California's Central Valley by providing technical assistance and planning support for consultations on restoration in the San Joaquin River basin, and support development of a biological assessment addressing known deficiencies in the existing consultation for Daguerre Point Dam. **Cc**
- Convene Federal and tribal leaders to prioritize and confirm joint habitat priorities and implement federal nearshore and estuary conservation actions identified in the Puget Sound Federal Task Force Action Plan. **Tt**
- Represent NOAA on the U.S. negotiating team by providing technical, science, and policy support to modernize the Columbia River Treaty regime. **Tt Cc**
- Support the development of a long-term solution for salmon and steelhead restoration in the Columbia River Basin. **Tt Cc**

Goal 3 - (A) Diversify our workforce and (B) support our mission accomplishment through organizational excellence.

Advance Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility

- Advance diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility efforts to recruit, retain, and empower a workforce that reflects our diverse region by improving training, coaching, recruitment, and hiring practices.
- Apply an equity and environmental justice lens to our work. **EEJ**

Enhance Total Worker Wellness

- Continue to support total worker wellness by addressing workload, employee burnout, and a safe and flexible WCR office reintegration.

Invest in Learning and Development

- Advance opportunities for internships and fellowship programs. **EEJ**
- Develop and adopt a West Coast Region training framework which allows the region to coordinate and invest strategically in the growth and development of staff to meet current and future regional needs.

Enhance Strategic Communications and Outreach

- Host Recreational Fisheries Roundtables as part of a series of national public discussions with saltwater recreational fishermen to solicit input on revising the National Saltwater Recreational Fisheries Policy. **EEJ**