



Priorities for Fiscal Year 2023

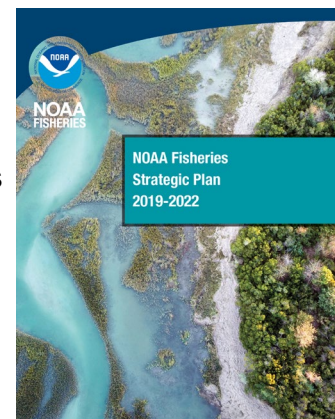
Purpose

This Southwest Fisheries Science Center (SWFSC) Annual Priorities Memo (APM) for Fiscal Year 2023 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 pandemic and hybrid work environment. It speaks to 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](#), [NMFS](#) and the [West Coast Region](#). Additional documents outline work plans and areas of emphasis and emerging needs for the NMFS and SWFSC ([see Appendix A](#)). Collectively, these documents and initiatives represent our core mission and emerging needs for FY23. SWFSC's core values are: Excellence, Commitment, Respect, Community, and Inspiration.



Operating Environment

In FY22 SWFSC employees and affiliates shifted from mandatory telework to a phased return to the office. New guidelines have allowed us to quickly respond to changing pandemic conditions and safely continue operations. With this APM, we lay out a vision equally ambitious to our previous APMs, recognizing there are new opportunity areas, as well as challenges ahead. Our team has proven new models of hybrid, more flexible work arrangements can be successful, while we remain committed to conducting and representing science in our region. Going forward, decisions regarding the full scope of our activities will be made with the best information available.

In addition to the global pandemic, the past three years have seen severe impacts to the fishing and seafood industry, escalating climate change effects on living marine resources, 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.

Fiscal Landscape

As we enter the FY23, the fiscal landscape is complex. The President's FY23 NOAA Budget request includes modest increases in the overall NMFS budget, including advancements for a new Climate, Ecosystems and Fisheries Initiative, funds to mitigate and study the effects of offshore wind energy on our trust resources, and increases for ship surveys. As of this writing, both the House and Senate budget marks have passed and many of these requested increases are included at some level. The budget process is long and takes into consideration the budget mark-ups before a final appropriations bill is signed. At this time, Congress has passed a Continuing Resolution at the start of the year through Dec 16.

Our own Center Management Fund, the portion of our budget used to administer and support all of our science programs (e.g. HR, procurement, IT, facilities, etc.), is requiring additional support following level funding over the past few years. SWFSC's facilities, while some of the newest in NMFS, are aging and those costs are rising along with inflationary costs for other science support.

In late FY22, Congress passed the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), a bill that includes \$3.3B in five-year funding for NOAA. We expect a small portion of these funds will be applied to NMFS fisheries and protected species programs. Although specific information and spend plans are not available at this time, SWFSC will position itself to take advantage of any additional temporary funding made available to meet IRA goals.

Prudent planning includes preparation for both level funding and increased budget scenarios for SWFSC. As has become common, much of the work planned for FY23 will not be accomplished without partnerships and leveraging of funds. These include funding from other federal and state agencies to support salmonid recovery and other Endangered Species Act (ESA) and Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) activities (e.g., abalone, cetaceans, turtles and aquaculture). These types of partnerships have become integral to how we accomplish our mission.

FY23 Priorities

GOAL 1: Adaptively manage fisheries for sustainability and economic competitiveness to grow the Blue Economy. (from *NMFS FY23 Priorities and Guidance*)

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.

The following are **core priorities** for SWFSC base programs under this goal in FY23:

- Stock assessments, high 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 California 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). Specific activities include benchmark stock assessments of copper and black rockfish (with NWFSC), North Pacific albacore, and Pacific mackerel, methods reviews in preparation for a 2024 benchmark assessment for Pacific sardine, and Pacific salmon stock abundance and fishing effort forecasts for 2023, as well as Antarctic krill assessment activities in support of CCAMLR.
- Participation in Take Reduction Teams; bycatch monitoring and identification in CA Current fisheries.

High priorities for SWFSC base programs under this goal in FY23 as funding allows:

- Advancement toward regional implementation of NOAA's Climate and Ecosystems Fisheries Initiative.
- Management Strategy Evaluation for HMS (Pacific bluefin tuna) and others requested by Pacific Fisheries Management Council and WCR.
- Select fisheries surveys and life history studies and activities (outside those outlined under Core Priorities) that support the above core priorities.
- Ecosystem research to continue implementation of the agency's Western Region Implementation Plan under the Ecosystem Based Fisheries Management Roadmap, the Western Regional Action Plan for climate variability and U.S. strategic interests in Antarctica. Special emphasis to be placed on integrating across divisions to achieve synergies and efficiencies with the Center Ecosystem Science Committee and on development of science-to-management application 'on-ramps'.
- Aquaculture related priorities will continue to include: research and out-planting toward recovery of white abalone (a Species in the Spotlight) and research on yellowtail tuna species. Support of the Executive Order on Seafood Competitiveness and new National Seafood Strategy.
- Highest priority research to understand offshore wind energy's impacts on trust resources.

GOAL 2: Safeguard protected species and propel their recovery (from *NMFS FY23 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.

Core priorities for SWFSC base programs under this goal in FY23:

- 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).
- Marine turtle research and assessments, especially for ESA-listed Species in the Spotlight Leatherback turtles. Monitoring of Green turtle habitat use and sea turtle demographic modeling.
- Research, management, and support activities focused on ESA-listed Species in the Spotlight winter run Chinook, California coastal coho, and Upper Klamath Basin coho to support WCRO decision-making (including dam removal, reintroductions and translocations).
- ESA listing petitions requiring science support.
- Participation in Take Reduction Teams; bycatch monitoring and identification in CCLME fisheries.

High priorities for SWFSC base programs under this goal in FY23 as funding allows:

- High priority research in support of ESA Distinct Population Segments.
- CCLME whale entanglement risk assessments.
- High priority activities to address the effects of climate change on protected species.
- High priority research to understand potential impacts of offshore wind energy development on ESA-listed and protected species trust resources.
- Commitments made to outside agencies, such as the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, Bureau of Ocean Energy Management and U.S. Navy that support our core MMPA and ESA mandate priorities.

GOAL 3: Diversify our workforce and support our mission accomplishment through organizational excellence (from *NMFS FY23 Priorities and Guidance*)

Core priorities for SWFSC base programs under this goal in FY23:

- Core management/operations, including mandatory computing upgrades and funded facility maintenance and repair.
- Implementation of innovative technologies that a) increase information content per unit of cost while reducing overall costs (e.g. UxS systems and 'Omics) or b) make hybrid work more efficient.
- Storing, processing, and making publicly accessible large data streams being generated by the Center's data acquisition activities.
- Training and development of staff, as well as increasing diversity, inclusion and accessibility efforts to provide opportunities to our workforce and bolster our ability to withstand attrition.

High priorities for SWFSC base programs under this goal for FY23:

- Implementation of agency-funded facilities projects and the rebuilding of the Antarctic Cape Shirreff field camp facilities.
- Providing infrastructure/capability to store, process, and analyze data streams (i.e. cloud computing) being generated by innovative technologies.

We expect to carry out our planned major surveys; process, disseminate, and archive core fisheries data; and conduct fisheries stock assessments and economic analyses. We also expect to continue to provide relative abundance information on several marine mammal and turtle species. We plan to conduct research on environmental variability that will advance the agency's commitment to ecosystem-based fisheries management and improve our understanding of how the changing ocean environment affects commercial and recreational fisheries over a range of temporal and spatial scales. In addition, a significant number of research projects will be funded through reimbursable agreements with other agencies as well as with temporary funding from NMFS Headquarters Offices.

Conclusion

In FY23, 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.

Appendix A – Strategic Guidance Documents

In addition to the DOC and NMFS strategic plans, multiple plans and strategy documents external to the Center guide our activities each year. These include the [NOAA Fisheries Climate Science Strategy](#) and associated [Western Regional Action Plan \(to be updated in Jan 2023\)](#); [NOAA Fisheries Ecosystem Based Fishery Management Policy](#), [Roadmap](#) and [Western Regional Implementation Plan](#); the new [NMFS Aquaculture Strategic Plan](#); SWFSC Program Review Reports, and planning documents of partner agencies with shared objectives. NMFS has also identified nine species occurring in US waters that require immediate action to prevent extinction, but that have prospects for improvement from conservation actions; six of the nine occur within the West Coast Region. This “[Species in the Spotlight](#)” is a major agency initiative to change the trajectory of these species and place them on the road to recovery and SWFSC is the primary science provider for most of them. In addition, the [Executive Order on Tackling Climate Change at Home and Abroad](#), and the [Executive Order on Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility in the Federal Workforce](#), will guide our work in FY23.