

Pacific Council News

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REPORTING ON WEST COAST FISHERIES MANAGEMENT

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LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Welcome to the Pacific Council's first newsletter of 2023. A lot has happened since we last assembled a newsletter in 2021. In this most recent one we'll catch you up on the latest happenings and a summary of what's to come on the Council's agenda in 2023. You'll find pieces in here that cover activities concerning each of the Council's fishery management plans, pressing topics like wind energy, and things that have changed at the Council over the last year. If you have questions about anything in here, we are available and ready to answer them. ●

FLOATING WIND AREAS SOLD AT AUCTION

Five companies were awarded offshore wind leases off California in early December in the first West Coast offshore wind lease auction. The lease areas cover 373,268 acres off central and northern California (although the eventual projects will be much smaller) and the cost for the leases totaled \$757.1 million.

RWE Offshore Holdings LLC and California North Floating LLC were awarded leases in the Humboldt offshore wind area. Equinor Wind LLC, Central California Offshore Wind LLC, and Invenergy California Offshore LLC won leases in the Morro Bay area. (Continued on page 12)

STAFF CHANGES AT THE COUNCIL

Over the course of the last year the Council has welcomed four new staff members, including a new Executive Director (Merrick Burden, November 2021), a new Staff Officer (Jessi Doerpinghaus, December 2021), a new Deputy Director (Kelly Ames, September 2022), and another new Staff Officer (Marlene Bellman, November 2022). All four staff are thrilled to be part of the Pacific Council and grateful to inherit such a well functioning institution. Of course, the reason the Pacific Council has functioned so well is because of the tradition of employing good staff, and when new hires are made this often means that some of these high functioning staff have departed. Recent departures include Chuck Tracy (former Executive Director), Mike Burner (former Deputy Director), Jennifer Gilden (former Staff Officer for Habitat and Communications), and John Devore (former Staff Officer for Groundfish and the Scientific and Statistical Committee). Each of these individuals served the Council well for many years, and they are missed. ●



MREP Holds Three Successful Fisheries Science and Management Trainings

The Marine Resources Education Program (MREP) has held three successful West Coast fisheries management workshops in the past year. The first workshop, held in La Jolla, California in April 2022, trained participants in both fisheries science and management over a period of five days. The second, held in Newport, Oregon in October 2022, focused on fisheries science; and the third, held in Vancouver, Washington this January, focused on the process of fisheries management. A wide range of commercial, recreational, and tribal fishermen attended, and Council members and staff were deeply involved in planning and presenting.

Attendees at the recent management meeting said, "Networking was one of my favorite parts of the workshop This is so so worth it. Everyone is supportive and helpful and it's great to connect with people from all different parts of fisheries..." "I feel more prepared to engage, in understanding the 'what' and 'why' behind the actions in the council process..." "I feel so encouraged and will try to be more involved!"

MREP meetings are always free for participants to attend. For more information, see this link: <https://mrep.gmri.org/apply>. ●

Klamath Dam Removal on Track

The removal of the four lower Klamath dams is on track to begin early this year.

The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) approved the removal on November 17, 2022. California, Oregon and the Klamath River Renewal Corpora-



Happy MREP management workshop attendees in Vancouver, Washington

tion, as co-licensees, will carry out removal of the dams and implement the Amended Klamath Hydroelectric Settlement Agreement signed in 2016.

At a celebration on December 8, Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland announced that four tribal water projects in Oregon and California's Klamath River Basin will receive \$5.8 million to restore aquatic ecosystems, improve the resilience of habitats, and mitigate the effects of the ongoing drought crisis.

The small Copco 2 dam (which does not require reservoir drawdown to remove) could be demolished in mid-2023, with full drawdown of the reservoirs at the major dams in December 2023. This would be followed by about eighteen months of demolition and removal of the other three dams,

with several years of river restoration thereafter.

Drawdowns and demolitions are scheduled during the winter months to maximize flushing of sediments through the river system in order to minimize impacts to fish. For details, [see the Klamath River Renewal Corporation website](#).

Since at least 2006 when the current 50-year FERC license for these dams expired, the Council has encouraged FERC to decommission the aging facilities in order to restore natural flows to the Klamath River and provide access to crucial salmon spawning and rearing habitat that is now blocked. Restoring these salmon runs is vitally important to West Coast ocean salmon fisheries.

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Klamath dam removal cont'd—

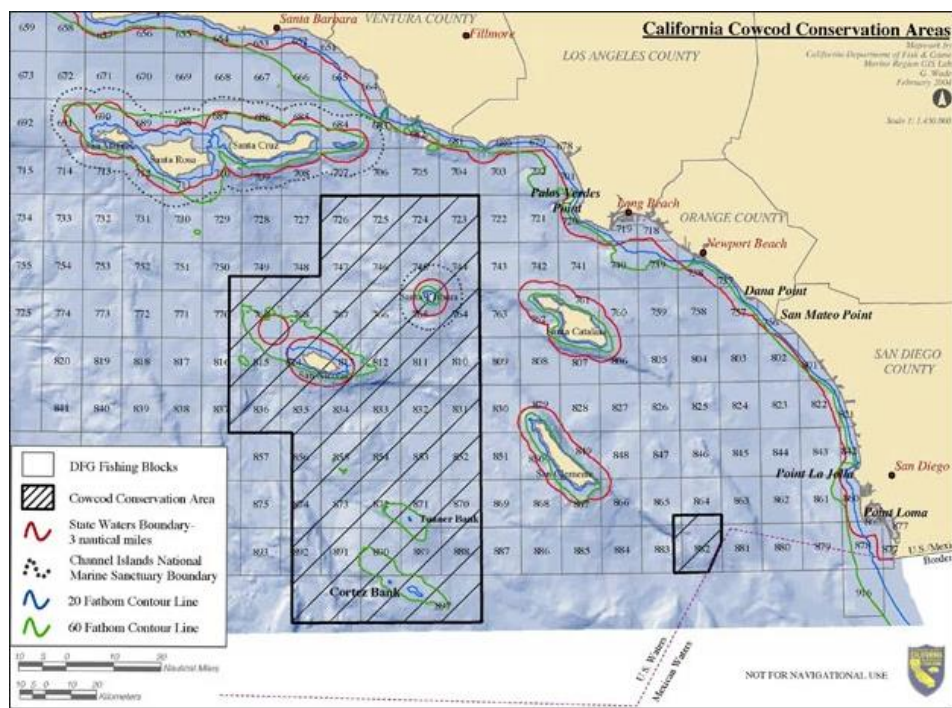
The environmental impact statement found that removal of the lower Klamath Project dams would increase salmon habitat availability, restore a more natural flow regime, restore more natural water temperature variation, protect water quality, and reduce the likelihood of fish disease, all of which would have significant long-term benefits for Spring and Fall-run Chinook salmon, and Southern Oregon/Northern California Coast coho salmon, which are Federally listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act.

The dam removal will solve many, but not all, problems for salmon in the Klamath Basin. Additional issues include long-standing water conflicts that have been exacerbated by years of severe drought.

Projects are underway to improve salmon passage above the dams in order to speed the recolonization of salmon after dam removal. In addition, restoration efforts will be needed to reverse habitat damage done in the basin over the past century. To address these needs, the Klamath Basin Integrated Fisheries Restoration and Monitoring Plan and Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission are planning to create a basin-wide, long-term fisheries habitat restoration platform (see kbifrm.psmfc.org). ●

Considers Changes to Non-Trawl Area Management

The Council is considering major changes to the Non-Trawl Rockfish Conservation Area and the Cowcod Conservation Area. Both areas were created in the early 2000s when the Council began to close areas to the non-trawl sector in order to reduce



California Cowcod Conservation Area map

catch of overfished groundfish species. The Non-Trawl Rockfish Conservation Area is a coastwide band, bounded by approximate depth contours, that stretches along the continental shelf from the California/Mexico border to the US/Canada border and applies to all commercial groundfish non-trawl fisheries. The Cowcod Conservation Area, in southern California, applies to both commercial non-trawl and recreational fisheries.

As groundfish species have been rebuilt, the Council has altered the boundaries of both conservation areas. On multiple occasions, the Groundfish Advisory Subpanel and stakeholders have asked the Council to consider modifying the closures to allow access to healthy shelf species. The Council began focusing on this issue in 2019 and adopted a set of preliminary preferred alternatives in September 2022.

Alternative 1 expands the opportunity for limited entry fixed

gear and individual fishing quota (IFQ) gear switching vessels to utilize non-bottom contact gears (approved in the 2023-24 harvest specifications) and allows for potential gear modifications for stationary vertical jig gear.

Alternative 2 moves the seaward boundary of the Non-Trawl Rockfish Conservation Area to 75 fathoms between the Oregon/Washington border and 34° 27' N. latitude for commercial groundfish and for the non-tribal directed halibut fishery. This alternative has several sub-options, including changes to protect newly opened areas of Nehalem Bank and the Bandon High Spot, Garibaldi Reefs, and Arago Reef (all off Oregon); developing a yelloweye rockfish conservation area near Heceta Bank (also off Oregon); and developing other yelloweye rockfish conservation areas.

Alternative 3 repeals the

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Nontrawl area management

cont'd—Cowcod Conservation Areas for both commercial and recreational groundfish fisheries, with proposed closures to protect groundfish in certain areas.

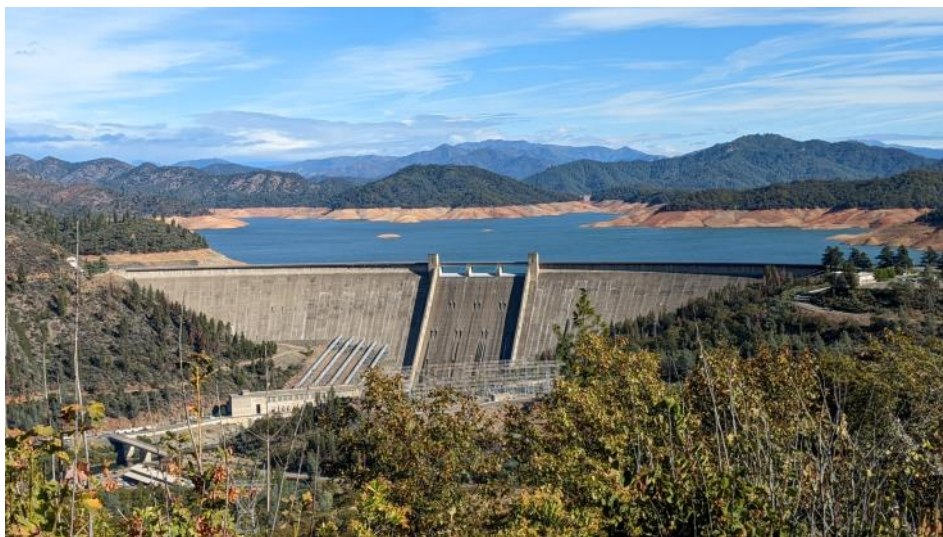
Alternative 4 develops block area closures for commercial non-trawl fisheries. Block area closures are areas defined by latitude and depth contours that the Council can close to certain gears or sectors before or during the fishing season for a certain duration in order to protect groundfish or protected species. Currently, however, block area closures can be used only for trawl fisheries.

The alternatives are laid out in more detail in the [September decision document](#). The Council is expected to take final action in March 2023. ●

Scientists Study Habitat Changes in Trawl Rockfish Conservation Areas

Scientists are conducting a multi-year study of changing habitats and biological communities in the newly-opened bottom trawl Rockfish Conservation Area (RCA). The bottom trawl RCA was closed in 2002, after several rockfish species were designated as overfished, and were reopened in 2020 after the species were rebuilt.

The study, which is being conducted by Waldo Wakefield from Oregon State University and Clare Reimers from Oregon Dept. of Fish and Wildlife, has benefited from regular input by the fishing industry, and focuses on a swath of the seafloor west and north of Heceta Bank. The first phase of the project is to characterize the habitats, organisms, and properties of seafloor sediment where no bottom trawling has occurred for eighteen years. Future phases will



Shasta Dam in October, 2022. Photo: Jennifer Gilden

revisit these baseline areas to assess changes as bottom trawling resumes.

The study is taking place as the Council considers making changes to the Nontrawl Rockfish Conservation Area.

In a complementary project funded by NOAA, researchers from the Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission and Oregon State University are focusing on trawl gear designs (termed “semi-pelagic trawling”) that reduce seafloor contact of trawl doors, sweeps, and potentially footropes. ●

BOEM Focuses on Oil Platform Decommissioning

In October 2022, the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) released a [draft programmatic environmental impact statement](#) (PEIS) focused on decommissioning the 23 oil and gas platforms off the Southern California coast.

Depending on the platform, impacts on the marine environment from decommissioning activities will vary. The PEIS analyzes four alternatives for decommissioning the platforms. Eight of

the platforms are already in the beginning phases of decommissioning.

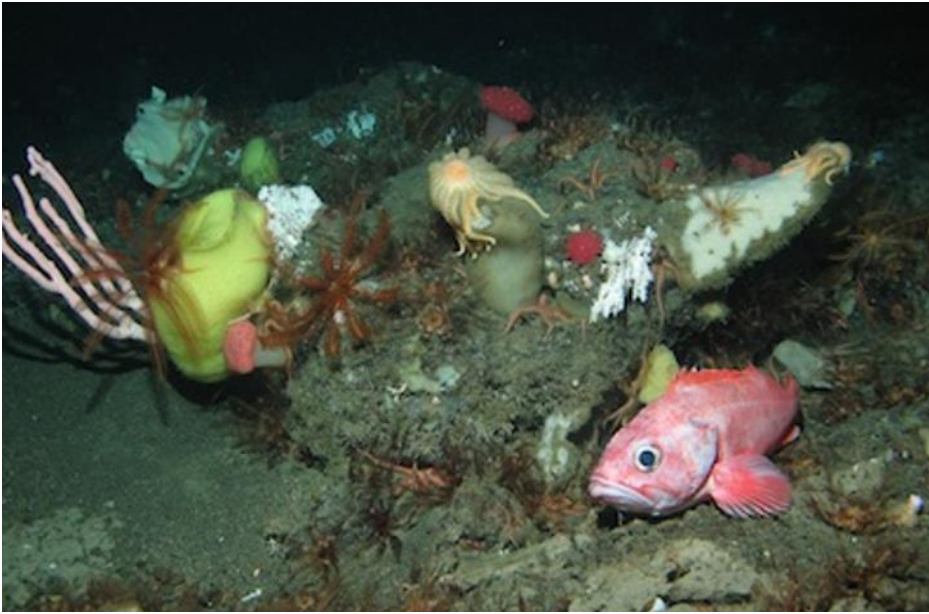
The PEIS alternatives include completely removing the platforms, partially removing the platforms, and retaining the platforms.

The Council submitted a [letter](#) to BOEM on this subject on December 22, commenting on impacts to essential fish habitat and other sensitive habitats, marine fish, contamination, oil and hazardous material spills, spread of invasive aquatic species, and cumulative impacts. ●

California Water Wins and Woes

Despite recent storms, California remains in a third year of drought, with a fourth potentially on tap; only two large storm systems occurred in the 2021/2022 water year. As of January 2023, Shasta Reservoir is at about 55 percent capacity, up from about 30 percent in the fall. The January 2023 series of storms delivered much-needed water into reservoirs but also brought death and

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Deep sea corals near Mendocino Ridge. Photo: NOAA West Coast Deep Sea Coral Initiative

California water cont'd—

devastation to many California communities.

The drought brings additional stress to salmon runs in the San Francisco Bay Delta, worsening existing stress caused by irrigation diversions and leading to a very high mortality rate. Roughly 75 percent of all incoming Endangered Species Act (ESA) listed winter-run Chinook spawners were lost before they could spawn, and there has also been a large die-off of ESA-listed Central Valley spring-run Chinook. The survival rates of out-migrating juvenile winter-run Chinook were depressed into the single digits.

Stephen Maurano of the NMFS California Central Valley Office addressed the Council's Habitat Committee on the status of Central Valley Chinook salmon in April. All four Chinook salmon runs are highly susceptible to climate change and drought conditions. Despite decent returns in 2021, juvenile productivity is poor, preventing the stock from capitalizing on good ocean condi-

tions. Loss of access to high-elevation streams has reduced both spatial and temporal diversity, meaning that salmon populations that used to return at different times and to different areas have been pared down, making them more vulnerable to loss. Historically winter run Chinook had access to 190 miles of stream for rearing habitat. Now, they are constrained to roughly five miles. This makes stocks particularly vulnerable to drought conditions and other events such as fire. ●

Aquaculture Opportunity Areas Move Forward

NOAA is preparing a programmatic environmental impact statement on southern California Aquaculture Opportunity Areas, with a draft expected early next year. The proposed action is a planning initiative only and does not propose any aquaculture facilities or permits. In a [July 2022 letter](#), the Council expressed its appreciation for the programmatic planning that NOAA is conducting and

provided a series of elements that planners should consider in assessing areas for offshore aquaculture. Scoping meetings were held in June and July of 2022. For more information, see NOAA's related [Atlas of Aquaculture Opportunity Areas for the Southern California Bight](#). ●

Climate-Informed Fisheries Management is Next Ecosystem Focus

The Council and its advisory bodies began reviewing the initiatives associated with the Fishery Ecosystem Plan in 2022. Initiatives provide the Council with an ecosystem focus that applies to two or more fishery management plans.

In September the Council adopted a [revised set of candidate initiatives](#) and identified a new initiative that will be the Council's next focus: Ecosystem and Climate Information for Species, Fisheries, and Fishery Management Plans.

This initiative builds on the Climate and Communities Initiative, which concluded in 2021. It focuses on incorporating climate and ecosystem information into fisheries management and developing ways for such information to be used in setting scientific uncertainty, harvest policy, and management actions.

The Ecosystem Workgroup and Council staff will begin their work on this initiative by mapping out the harvest-setting processes for the four fishery management plans. They will seek advice from Council advisory bodies on which of the plans and target stocks might benefit the most from reporting of ecosystem and climate information in support of management.

Other initiatives on the list for

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Riparian habitat in an Oregon stream. Photo: Oregon Dept. of Fish and Wildlife

Ecosystem cont'd—potential future action include (2.2) science policy and planning for understanding the effects of oceanographic conditions and recruitment on Council-managed finfish species; (2.3) cross-fishery management plan (FMP) dynamic bycatch monitoring and minimization; (2.4) cross-FMP essential fish habitat; (2.5) cross-FMP safety; (2.6) supporting fishery and fishing community resilience; (2.7) developing indicators to assess progress towards Fishery Ecosystem Plan goals and objectives; (2.8) assessing flexibility in the fisheries management process; (2.9) optimum yield factors; and (2.10) climate-informed fisheries management.●

Research and Data Needs

The Council is revising the way it reports its research and data needs related to fisheries, fisheries interactions, habitats, and other areas. By law, every fishery management Council must report research and data needs for every five-year period. However, with changing technology, several councils are using online data-

bases for this purpose.

[This video](#) provides a tour of the Council's database. In the future, research priorities will be set every 2-3 years rather than every 5 years.●

Chumash Sanctuary

The [Chumash Heritage National Marine Sanctuary](#) nomination continues to move forward. Draft designation documents are expected to be released in early 2023.

The National Marine Sanctuary Act describes the process for developing fishing regulations within Sanctuaries. For new Sanctuaries, the Secretary of the Interior must provide Regional Fishery Management Councils an opportunity to prepare draft fishing regulations.

In November the Council discussed whether new fishing regulations were necessary for the Sanctuary and concluded that no new fishing regulations were necessary. The Council conveyed that in a December 1, 2022 [letter](#) to the National Marine Sanctuary Program.●

Dam Removal Likely on California's Eel River

The licenses of two dams on the Eel River—which used to be California's third largest salmon producing system—expired in 2022. The river is home to ESA-listed Chinook, coho, and steelhead. Since no agencies have expressed interest in relicensing the dams (collectively known as the Potter Valley project), the license will likely be surrendered and the dams removed. Meanwhile, the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) has extended an annual license to the dams' owner, PG&E. In December 2022, FERC announced that it is considering reopening the license, possibly adding requirements for wildlife protection and habitat monitoring measures that were proposed by the National Marine Fisheries Service in March.

PG&E has pledged to submit its decommissioning documents by January of 2025. By that time, the project may technically be under new ownership. The Project is now enmeshed in the massive Pacific Gas and Electric bankruptcy proceeding, and its fate is uncertain.●

Oregon's new "Private Forest Accord"

The riparian (streamside) protections included in Oregon's Forest Practices Act have been greatly strengthened through a new multi-stakeholder agreement. The agreement improves the management of 10 million acres of private forest to better protect at-risk fish, wildlife, and water quality. The agreement comes after Oregon Governor Kate Brown convened a coalition of timber

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Riparian protections cont'd— companies, environmental groups, and fishing groups.

The new provisions were enacted into law (SB 1501, SB 1502, and HB 4055), and work will now begin to draft a new [Habitat Conservation Plan](#) for private Oregon timberlands. The Accord includes adaptive management, climate change adaptation, and new guidance on beaver management. ●

Deep Sea Coral Research Program Wraps Up

NOAA's West Coast Deep-Sea Coral Initiative (part of NOAA's Deep Sea Coral and Technology Program) was completed in November 2022. The program surveyed many areas off the West Coast, identifying important new areas of coral habitat and discovering massive coral gardens, as well as a potential glass sponge reef that was previously not known to occur south of British Columbia. The study found an extensive and diverse deep-sea "coral garden" in the Mendocino Ridge Essential Fish Habitat Conservation Area at about 400 meters deep.

It is possible that additional funding may become available for targeted projects off the Pacific coast over the next few years before the next West Coast initiative begins in 2028. Initiative staff are working with the Council to provide input on research priorities. ●

Scientists Study Changes in Nehalem Bank Habitat

In 2007, the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife began a long-term study of seafloor habitats associated with the shrimp

trawl fishery near Nehalem Bank. Using a remotely operated vehicle, video transects were conducted inside and outside the boundary of the Nehalem Bank Essential Fish Habitat Conservation Area.

Further sampling was conducted in 2013, providing a comparison of invertebrate abundance between the Conservation Area and the areas open to shrimp trawling. Another sampling was conducted this spring to examine how the seafloor habitats have been affected by 16 years without trawling. Results should help scientists and managers understand the impacts of trawl gear on benthic habitat and invertebrates. ●

BOEM Changes Methods for Analyzing Offshore Wind Sites

In April 2022 the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) issued a request for data about Oregon wind energy Call Areas, which are located off Brookings and Coos Bay.

BOEM has revised its processes for identifying offshore wind energy sites. The new process will apply to planning efforts off the Oregon coast, as well as the Gulf of Mexico, Central Atlantic, and Gulf of Maine. Under its new process, BOEM will collaborate with NOAA's National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science to use a spatial model to identify the best areas for wind energy sites. BOEM and NOAA recently collaborated to use this tool to identify draft wind



Offshore wind turbines in the United Kingdom. Photo by [Nicholas Doherty](#) on [Unsplash](#)

energy areas in the Gulf of Mexico.

In addition, as previously done in the Gulf of Mexico, BOEM will release draft wind energy areas for public review and comment before designating them off Oregon. BOEM [has stated](#) that it is working to improve visibility into how it evaluates the uses and resources of the U.S. Outer Continental Shelf by sharing more information about its analyses on its website. ●

Humboldt Area Aquaculture Projects Slowly Evolve

The Council and its advisory bodies have been tracking two aquaculture projects in or near Humboldt Bay—the Nordic Aquafarms project and the Humboldt Bay Mariculture Project.

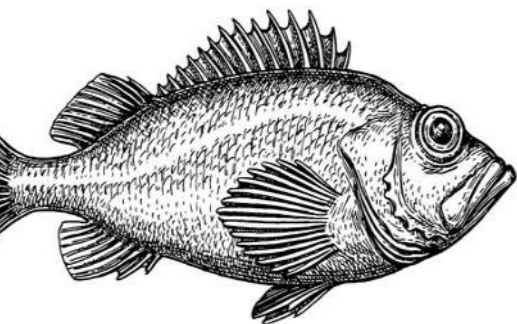
Nordic Aquafarms is proposing a fully enclosed, land-based salmon aquaculture facility in Humboldt County, California. Staff from Nordic Aquafarms have met with the Council's Habitat Committee to discuss concerns about nutrient impacts, water use, salmon escapement, and other issues. The Council [commented on the project](#) in February 2022. The Humboldt County Planning Commission has since issued a

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Humboldt aquaculture cont'd—permit for the development, and denied an appeal by the Humboldt Fishermen's Marketing Association and other groups.

The **Humboldt Bay Mariculture Project** is a shellfish culture operation.

The Council submitted comments on a previous iteration of the project in 2015, expressing concerns on the footprint size and on impacts to eelgrass and Pacific herring. The currently proposed project has changed substantially since then. The size has been reduced from 500 acres to 46 acres of shellfish culture, and sites adjacent to dense eelgrass and important herring spawning grounds are no longer part of the planned operation. ●



The last six months in west coast groundfish management have been dominated by the annual specifications process, along with management of quillback and copper rockfish and changes to the former Rockfish Conservation Areas off California.

Routine Groundfish Management

The Council adopted final harvest specifications and management measures for 2023-2024 fisheries in June 2022.

The Council recommended NMFS implement several new management measures. These in-

Council Explores Meeting and Process Efficiencies

Council staff have developed a [white paper](#) exploring how to make the Council process more effective and efficient. The project incorporates many lessons learned during the Covid epidemic and addresses several goals: reducing advisory body member burnout, improving the timing and flow of information, clearly communicating Council policy and analysis, and improving representation and participation of stakeholders in ways that capture the true diversity of West Coast fisheries interests.

Council staff are continuing to explore the tradeoffs associated with meeting formats (in person, hybrid, and remote). The Council is scheduled to revisit this topic next April and June. ●

National Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act

The National Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, signed in late 2021, provides roughly \$3 billion for NOAA over five years. This includes significant funding to address habitat restoration, conservation, and coastal resilience, and is an unprecedented opportunity to make a difference for coastal fisheries, threatened and endangered species, and coastal communities. In addition to increases in existing Pacific Salmon Recovery and Coastal Zone Management investments, the funding includes nearly \$900 million allocated to competitive grants. The grants programs attracted hundreds of proposals nationwide. NOAA will likely support numerous projects on the Pacific Coast and will announce funded proposals in February. ●

GROUNDFISH NEWS

clude extending the limited entry fixed-gear primary-tier sablefish fishery from October 31 to December 31; recreational bag limit changes to copper, quillback, and vermilion rockfish off of California; and allowing access to the non-trawl Rockfish Conservation Area with certain non-bottom contact, non-trawl gears. (These changes are significant because non-trawl groundfish vessels have not been able to fish in this area for nearly 20 years).

Additionally, the groundfish fishery management plan was amended to establish a 2,000 metric ton (mt) shortbelly rockfish catch threshold. If this amount is exceeded, or projected to be exceeded, it would require the Council to review relevant fishery infor-

mation and take action if appropriate. For more details, please refer to the [Council analytical document](#).

The Council recommended five exempted fishing permits for the 2023-2024 period. They focus on [yellowtail rockfish jig fishing off California](#), [targeting chilipepper rockfish](#) in the Monterey Bay region, [year-round coastwide mid-water trawling for rockfish](#), [recreational cowcod sampling in California](#), and [enhanced biological sampling of recreational yelloweye rockfish](#) in Washington. ●

Quillback and Copper Rockfish Cause Concern

New assessments of copper

Groundfish continued on next page

Groundfish cont'd—rockfish and quillback rockfish conducted in 2021 indicated that portions of these populations were severely depleted in parts of their ranges off California. At the time, NMFS was unable to determine the status of the species because their geographic ranges were not fully defined in the fishery management plan. This led to a process to define these ranges. Until then, management measures are in place to ensure that neither species becomes overfished and to minimize the risk of local depletion. If landing limits are exceeded, the Council will consider relevant inseason adjustments. The Council will be discussing the process of defining area delineations for stocks in March of 2023.●

Electronic Monitoring Discussions Continue

The effort to develop a cost-effective electronic monitoring program continues. The Council is considering changing the deadlines for video review providers to submit feedback to fishing vessels, as well as other review data. In addition, the instructional manual for the electronic monitoring program may

be revised to increase efficiencies and reduce costs for video review. In November the Council discussed these issues and selected a [range of alternatives](#) for further consideration in March 2023.●

Logbooks Will Be Required for Non-Trawl Fleet

In March 2022 the Council clarified that logbooks will apply to the non-trawl groundfish fleet (as opposed to just the fixed gear fleet). This will ensure that data collection is conducted consistently across the entire non-trawl groundfish fleet.

If the Council had not adopted this change, the only boats that would need to complete a logbook would have been those using fixed gear (longline, trap or pot, set net, and stationary hook-and-line), and the rest of the fleet would have been excluded.

Now, logbooks will be required from participants in the groundfish directed open access fishery, limited entry fixed gear sablefish fishery, vessels fishing under limited entry fixed gear trip limits, and gear-switching vessels (those using non-trawl gear in the trawl individual fishing quota program). [See this link](#)

[for more information.](#)●

Council Considers Limitations on Gear Switching

The Council is considering limiting gear switching—the use of non-trawl gear to catch northern sablefish in the trawl individual fishing quota fishery. The topic first came up during the first review of the trawl catch share program. The Council adopted a range of alternatives in September 2021, which it modified at its June and November 2022 meetings. The revised alternatives will be posted as an informational report in the March briefing book. The Council will next review the alternatives at its April 2023 meeting. [A list of the alternatives reviewed in November is provided here.](#) The Council plans to select a final preferred alternative in the spring.●

Groundfish Assessments Planned

In 2023, full assessments will be conducted for black rockfish, petrale sole, canary rockfish, and copper rockfish in California. Data-moderate

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Upcoming Council meetings	City	Dates	Location	First public comment deadline
March 2023	Seattle, WA	Advisory bodies start March 4th Council session begins March 5th	DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel Seattle Airport	February 16, 5pm PST
April 2023	Foster City, CA	Advisory bodies start April 1st Council session begins April 2nd	Crowne Plaza Foster City	March 20, 5pm PST
June 2023	Vancouver, WA	Tentative: Advisory bodies start June 20th Council session begins June 21st	Hilton Vancouver Washington	June 1, 5pm PST
September 2023	Spokane, WA	Tentative: Advisory bodies start September 7th Council session begins September 8th	DoubleTree by Hilton Spokane City Center	August 17, 5pm PST

Salmon: Preseason Schedule Released

The [2023 preseason salmon management schedule](#) was released in November. Hearings are planned for Monday, March 20, 2023 in Westport, Washington and North Bend (Coos Bay), Oregon; and on Tuesday, March 21, 2023 in Santa Rosa, California. The Salmon Technical Team will be meeting in January and February to begin preparations for the pre-season management process for 2023.

As it does annually, in November **the Council reviewed the methodology it uses to count and manage salmon.** Under the salmon fishery management plan (Amendment 21), the Council must consider the impacts of ocean Chinook salmon fisheries on Southern Resident killer whales, which rely heavily on Chinook salmon.

The Council **adopted a change to the Chinook salmon abundance threshold**, changing the threshold from 966,000 to 623,000 Chinook salmon. This means that if the abundance of Chinook is estimated to be less than 623,000 (in the area north of Cape Falcon, Oregon prior to fishing), then actions to limit the fishery will be included as part of the preseason planning process. The change will go into effect this year.

The Council also made **changes to data used in planning fisheries south of Cape Falcon, Oregon.** The change should improve projections for both commercial and recreational fisheries in that area.

In November, NMFS confirmed that **Hood Canal coho salmon are not overfished**, despite an earlier dip in the stock abundance. Five other salmon stocks (Sacramento

River fall Chinook, Snohomish coho, Queets River coho, Klamath River Chinook and Strait of Juan de Fuca coho) were declared overfished in 2018. Sacramento River fall Chinook was declared rebuilt in 2020, and Snohomish coho was designated “not overfished—rebuilding” in 2021. The Snohomish coho stock and the other overfished stocks continue to be managed under their respective rebuilding plans until they are rebuilt.

Amendment 23 to the Salmon Fishery Management Plan has been finalized. The amendment establishes two new harvest control rules that limit the impacts of ocean salmon fisheries on Southern Oregon/Northern California Coast coho.

NMFS’ biological decision for **threatened California Coastal Chinook** is currently being reinitiated, and may lead to constraints on ocean salmon fisheries in 2023. In recent years, salmon ocean fisheries have over-performed in certain areas off the California Coast, and impacts to this stock have exceeded the allowable take limit. In 2022 the take limit was reduced as a buffer against exceeding the limit. In 2023, management tools such as vessel limits and catch limits may be considered in certain areas off the California Coast, especially for the commercial fleet, to help ensure conservation objectives are met.



Photo by [Brandon](#) on [Unsplash](#)

In addition, Central Valley spring Chinook returns in 2023 may be low due to poor survival of the 2020 brood year, according to a report to the Council from National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) in November 2022. NMFS stated in the report that Sacramento winter and fall Chinook are used as proxies to indicate impacts to Central Valley spring Chinook, but those two stocks were given additional assistance (transportation and increased hatchery production) to help improve returns. No additional measures were provided for Central Valley spring Chinook, so the proxies may not hold true this year. On a positive note, CDFW indicated that the number of coded-wire tags recovered in the fishery so far is greater than in past years, which may suggest that the 2020 brood year of Central Valley Spring Chinook may be stronger than NMFS anticipates. Actual forecasts will be available in March, with estimated spawning escapements available once the 2023 salmon season is set at the end of April.

See related articles on Klamath dam removal (page 2) and California water (page 4). ●

HALIBUT NEWS

In November the Council adopted changes to the [Pacific Halibut Catch Sharing plan](#) and annual regulations.

Over the past few years, management of the directed commercial halibut fishery has been gradually transferred from the International Pacific Halibut Commission to the Council and National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS). The transfer will be complete by 2023, the first year in which NMFS will be responsible for all halibut management and permitting. Deadlines for

submitting applications for fisheries will be earlier than in past years. Fishers are encouraged to keep an eye out for notifications from NMFS about the application process. Some application deadlines may be as early as February.

The 2023 directed commercial halibut season recommended by the Council includes a series of three-day openings with additional three-day openings every other week until the directed fishery allocation is obtained, which is similar to past years.●

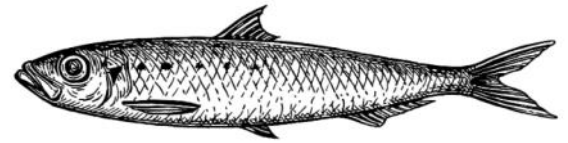
COASTAL PELAGIC SPECIES NEWS

Research: The Southwest Fisheries Science Center hosted a stock structure workshop on Pacific sardine in mid-November to address Pacific sardine stock structure and how survey and landings data are assembled. A Scientific and Statistical Committee Coastal Pelagic Species (CPS) subcommittee workshop will be held in March 2023 to review the results of the workshop.

By 2025, National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) is planning to integrate Northwest and Southwest Fisheries Science Center surveys of hake and coastal pelagic species. Combining the surveys is expected to optimize resources and improve the data collected for stock assessments, management strategy evaluations, and ecosystem research and modeling.

NMFS reported on [several research projects](#) that are currently being conducted on CPS. A new project focuses on the impacts of climate and ecosystem change on the California Current forage complex, and on the fishing communities and predators it sustains. The project is a collaboration between the NMFS Northwest and Southwest Fisheries Science Centers, University of California Santa Cruz, and the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation.

Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) designations for coastal pelagic species are under review. Revisions may include updated descriptions of habitat needs, distribution, and effects from non-fishing and fishing activities, as well as new conservation recommendations. For the EFH purposes, CPS species may be considered in three groups (finfish, squid, and krill) due to their widely differing habitat needs. The Council will next discuss this issue in April and June 2023.●



HIGHLY MIGRATORY SPECIES NEWS

Council Discusses Swordfish Management and Monitoring Plan

At its September meeting, the Council discussed the goals outlined in the draft Swordfish Management and Monitoring Plan as well as existing and new exempted fishing permits, forthcoming Federal regulations for the deepset buoy gear fishery, and potential future fisheries. The Council recommended that the Highly Migratory Species advisory bodies explore the goals for a future swordfish workshop which is intended to guide future Council discussions regarding swordfish management.

Further consideration of the workshop is scheduled for the June 2023 Council meeting.●

Final Action Approaches on Drift Gillnet Hard Caps

In November the Council discussed “hard caps” in the California drift gillnet fishery and narrowed its range of alternative actions on this topic. Final action is scheduled for 2023, however the recently passed Federal omnibus bill calls for a phase out and transition of drift gillnet gear within a five-year period, which may

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Floating wind cont'd— The sale included a 20 percent credit for workforce training programs (resulting in \$117 million in investments), a 5 percent credit for community Benefit Agreements, or CBAs (agreements with communities, stakeholder groups, and tribal entities that are expected to be impacted by offshore wind development), and a 5 percent credit for Lease Area Use CBAs (for entities whose use of the geographic space of the Lease Area, or whose use of resources harvested from that geographic space, is expected to be impacted). Under the lease agreements, lessees are “required to engage with Tribes, ocean users, and local communities that may be affected by their lease activities,” according to BOEM. “These lease stipulations are intended to promote offshore wind energy development in a way that coexists with other ocean uses, addresses potential impacts and benefits, and protects the ocean environment, while also facilitating our nation’s energy future for generations to come.” ([See this article for more details](#)).

The auction occurred on December 6 and was the first-ever U.S. sale to support potential commercial-scale floating offshore wind energy development.

BOEM awards leases through a competitive bid system. Areas that

have commercial offshore wind potential as designated by BOEM as “Call Areas.” If there is enough developer interest in a call area, BOEM may designate it as a “Wind Energy Area” and sell leases in that area.

The Council’s jurisdiction over marine planning activities, such as offshore wind and aquaculture, is limited to sending comment letters to agencies that are proposing projects in Federal or state waters. The Council has sent an unusually large number of letters over the past several months, including at least ten letters to BOEM since October 2021. The letters incorporate input by the Marine Planning Committee, the Habitat Committee, the Ecosystem Advisory Subpanel, and other advisory bodies.

The Council commented on the proposed lease sale [in this August 1 letter](#), stating that it continues to have serious concerns about the speed of the leasing process and the lack of sufficient information for decision-making. The Council recommended that BOEM take a more comprehensive, marine spatial planning approach to best support decision-making and public involvement. The Council is extremely concerned about impacts to commercial and recreational fishing as well as fishing-dependent coastal communities; access to fishing areas, transit, and research activities will all be

impacted by the development.

The Council recommended that BOEM establish (or require Lessees to establish) transit corridors to accommodate fishing and research vessel activities, and outlined concerns over habitat impacts in the lease sale areas. Both the Morro Bay and Humboldt Wind Energy Areas overlap Essential Fish Habitat Conservation Areas.

The Council and NOAA have major concerns about the impacts of offshore wind projects on ongoing scientific research that supports fishery management. NOAA and BOEM developed a draft Federal Survey Mitigation Implementation Strategy that addresses this topic in the northeastern region of the U.S. [The Council encouraged BOEM and NOAA](#) to develop a similar strategy for the Pacific region, emphasizing the importance of scientific surveys in fisheries management.

Now that the offshore wind leases have been issued, the developers will work directly with agencies and stakeholders to conduct surveys, develop siting and design plans, develop CBAs, and conduct numerous other pre-construction activities. BOEM is ultimately responsible for approving the final Construction and Operations Plan, which will require development of an Environmental Impact Statement. ●

HMS cont'd— impact the Council’s consideration of hard caps. The Council will take up this issue next in March of 2023.

Hard caps mean that when a specific number of marine mammals or sea turtles are injured or killed in a fishery, the fishery closes.

The Council first took action on this topic in 2015. However, no regulations were put in place at that time. In 2021, the Council revisited its 2015 proposal, adopting a revised purpose and need statement and range of alternatives. The new range of alternatives includes hard caps that would apply to the vessel observed to have taken one of the protected species. Since the Council last took action on hard caps, the drift gillnet fishery has undergone significant changes. In 2015 there were roughly 20 vessels active in the fishery, but a California buy-back program left 26 permits in the fleet and likely no more than 11 actively participating vessels. ●

California water cont'd—

to the lack of water, managing instream temperatures has been difficult. The current maximum temperature for instream management is 56 degrees. However, NMFS considers 53.5 degrees Fahrenheit as ideal and is advocating for other agencies to adopt this standard. Due to low reservoir levels in 2021, the 56-degree threshold was exceeded on several occasions. The Council has been working on a letter addressing temperature standards in the Sacramento River; **see salmon article for**

more.

Multiple emerging issues may impact Central Valley Chinook. These include the Delta Conveyance Plan (a proposed water bypass project underneath the Sacramento Delta), the proposed Sites Reservoir, and the Reinitiation of Consultation on the Long-term Operation of the Central Valley Project/State Water Project.

On October 1, 2021, the Biden Administration formally withdrew the previous (2019) Central Valley Biological Opinions and has reinitiat-

ed consultation. A new BiOp is expected in mid-2024. In the meantime, Central Valley operations are being conducted under an interim operations plan.

NMFS West Coast Region's California Coastal Office is working with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife and other agencies to develop measures to protect anadromous fish during extended drought. Legislative efforts are also underway to provide more resources to protect California fish from drought. ●

Groundfish cont'd—assessments will be conducted for rex sole and shortspine thornyhead, and catch-only updates will be prepared for widow rockfish and yelloweye rockfish. In 2025, sablefish, roughey and blackspotted rockfishes, Pacific spiny dogfish, China rockfish, aurora rockfish, and quillback rockfish will be considered for full assessments. Yelloweye and yellowtail rockfish will tentatively be assessed with full or updated assessments. Final 2025 stock assessment priorities will be decided by the Council in March and June 2024. ●

Trawl Catch Share Review Begins

In September the Council began reviewing the trawl catch share program and intersector allocations. A review of catch share programs is required at least every seven years, [and the last program review was completed in 2017.](#)

Public hearings will be held in fall 2023 to gather feedback on both trawl catch shares and intersector allocation.

The next action on this issue is scheduled for the June 2023 Council meeting in Vancouver, WA. ●

Council Studies Catch Share Program Costs

The Council has begun a project to study costs related to the trawl catch share program. Darrell Brannan, contractor for the project, is talking with participants about their concerns related to program costs. The study will help the Council evaluate whether changes should be made to the program to reduce costs. An initial report is expected in April 2023. ●

Helpful links:

- [March 2023 Council meeting](#)
- [News and events](#)
- [Subscribe to email list](#)
- [Offshore wind](#)



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