

## HABITAT COMMITTEE REPORT ON CURRENT HABITAT ISSUES

**Nordic Aquafarms** – Nordic Aquafarms has announced they are switching from culturing Atlantic Salmon (*Salmo salar*) to Yellowtail Kingfish (*Seriola lalandi*) at their proposed land-based facility in Humboldt County. The Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) previously submitted a [comment letter](#) in response to Humboldt County’s Nordic Aquafarms Draft Environmental Impact Report (EIR), which included concerns regarding potential introduction of non-native Atlantic Salmon and impacts to essential fish habitat (EFH) from the ocean outfall wastewater discharge. The Habitat Committee (HC) discussed whether genetic differentiation between the species proposed (*Seriola lalandi*) and yellowtail native to California (*Seriola dorsalis*) poses any issues for native species.

**Habitat degradation related to Rogue River dams and Cole River hatchery** – Rogue River spring run Chinook, a declining fishery management plan (FMP) salmon stock, are currently being impacted by habitat degradation due to a legacy dam owned by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (COE) and lack of mitigation for lost spawning habitat due to decrepit hatchery facilities. Although Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife and COE are making efforts to augment spawning gravel and restore power to the hatchery, removal of the defective Elk Creek Dam stands to provide the greatest benefits to EFH. Concerted collaboration will be required for dam removal and habitat restoration.

### Columbia River

**The Columbia River Basin mediation process** – The Federal government and plaintiffs are involved in a Columbia River Basin mediation process over the Biological Opinion for the Federal Columbia River Power System associated with the operation of 14 Federal dams and their impacts on the region’s fishery resources. The mediation process continues to work to find long-term and durable solutions to restoring salmon populations in the Columbia River Basin while honoring Federal commitments to tribal nations, delivering affordable and reliable clean power, and meeting the many resilience needs of the regional stakeholders. A decision on a settlement may occur within the next three months. The HC is tracking this issue should the Council plan to respond to any opportunities for comment.

**Funding for salmon reintroduction at Chief Joseph Dam** – The Washington State 2023–2025 biennial budget includes \$3 million over the next two years for pass-through funding to the tribes of the Upper Columbia River to support reintroduction of Chinook salmon above Chief Joseph Dam on the Columbia River.

**Hells Canyon Hydro Project** – The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission’s (FERC) supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the relicensing of the hydro project will evaluate Idaho Power’s project proposal and alternatives. The projected timeline for the supplemental EIS previously aimed for a draft to be issued in June 2023. That timeline has been delayed and the current estimate is for draft supplemental EIS issuance in September. Once issued, there will be a 90-day comment period. If there are any concerns with the supplemental EIS, there will be an opportunity for the Council to comment during the September or November meeting.

**Dredge Material Management Plan** – The HC continues to track the Lower Columbia River Dredge Material Management Plan. The review process has been delayed, with an opportunity to comment now scheduled for late September/early October. As requested by the Council, the HC intends to include draft comments for Council review at the November meeting, and will provide an update at the September meeting.

### **Harbor Modifications**

**Humboldt Bay Offshore Wind Heavy Lift Terminal** – The Humboldt Bay Harbor District plans to release the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Notice of Preparation (NOP) for the Humboldt Bay Offshore Wind Heavy Lift Terminal draft EIR on June 27th, with the NOP comment period concluding on July 31st. The Harbor District will serve as the CEQA lead agency and as the applicant for required state and Federal permits. The project is expected to impact habitat (such as eelgrass and mudflat habitat) and fish in Humboldt Bay from construction and maintenance of the terminal, including impacts from dredging, pile driving, increased overwater shading, and staging of wind turbines. Given the short review period, the HC does not recommend the Council prepare comments on the NOP. However, the HC recommends the Council comment on the draft EIR and will keep the Council informed on the draft EIR timeline.

**Oregon Port Bill (HB 3382)** – Oregon [House Bill 3382](#), known as “The Port Bill,” that the Council provided [comments](#) on in May as requested by Oregon House Representative Boomer Wright, passed in the House after several iterations. This bill is also mentioned in [C.3.a, MPC Report 1](#). The bill allows a local government to adopt an exception to Oregon’s land use planning goals related to estuarine resources in the Port of Coos Bay. The bill allows for deepening or widening the existing Federal navigation channel and establishing new access channels and associated structures. The bill specifies that deep draft navigation channel improvements may be deemed an exception to land use planning goals in order to redesignate or rezone natural and conservation estuary management units. The bill as introduced identified five Oregon ports; the scope was narrowed to include only the port of Coos Bay. The bill requires that dredging include mitigation of adverse impacts to ensure no net loss of estuarine resources and affected aquatic and shore areas and habitats. However, as conservation zones are redesignated for channel improvement, there will be less estuarine areas in Coos Bay available for mitigation.

### **Office of National Marine Sanctuaries (ONMS)**

**Coral research and restoration** – Greater Farallones and Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuaries requested through a letter (see [C.8.a, Supplemental ONMS Report 1](#)) that the Council consider a process starting in September 2023 that can meet their sanctuaries’ needs for deep-sea coral research and restoration. This request will be considered in the September Council meeting under Agenda Item H.3, ONMS – Coral Planting (see C.8, Attachment 2: Draft Proposed Council Meeting Agenda, September 2023). Karen Reyna briefed the HC on this during one of our public comment periods.

**Proposed Designation of Chumash Heritage National Marine Sanctuary Update** – The [draft designation documents](#) are expected to be released in time for the Council’s review/consideration at the September Council meeting. Once the documents are released, ONMS plans to host public workshops and comment meetings during the 60-day public comment period.

**Olympic Coast National Marine Sanctuary Management Plan Review Update** – The public scoping period ended April 3, 2023. Staff are now working on incorporating comments received during the scoping period into initial plans for drafting the [new management plan](#). [Olympic Coast National Marine Sanctuary Advisory Council meetings](#) are open to the public, and working groups focused on revising various action plans for the updated management plan will likely start up in the fall.

PFMC  
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