

HABITAT COMMITTEE REPORT ON MARINE PLANNING

The Habitat Committee (HC) discussed The Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM's) recently published notice for draft Wind Energy Areas (WEA) off Oregon, which provides for a 60-day comment period until October 16, 2023. The BOEM is requesting specific and detailed comments on a range of topics regarding activities and concerns within and around the WEAs. Habitat-specific topics include the geological, geophysical, oceanographic and biological conditions, habitats that may require special attention, protected species habitat, Federally designated areas, and areas that are environmentally sensitive or crucial to marine productivity. In addition, BOEM is asking for input on the constraints of cable transmission routes. The HC has not had sufficient time to fully consider the habitat-related implications of the proposed draft WEAs and potential cable routes on habitat resources in the vicinity of the WEAs, but notes that the draft WEAs do not reflect the preferred National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science (NCCOS) habitat suitability submodel scenario as recommended by the National Marine Fisheries Service. The HC has broadly identified a number of key concerns (listed below) to be further developed for the Council's comment letter. Additional habitat issues may arise as the HC dives deeper into the underlying habitat information, some of which was only recently identified on Federal data repositories.

Preliminary Structure and Potential Comments and Recommendations:

- **Consider acquiring additional seafloor mapping where spatially lacking, and additional processing/analysis of existing data to improve identification of sensitive habitats prior to selecting the final WEAs. This would likely require additional time before the WEAs could be finalized.**
- **Consider recommendations about specific aliquots within WEAs containing sensitive habitat features or designations,** (for example, portions of Essential Fish Habitat Conservation Areas [EFHCAs] in the WEAs, rocky reef habitat areas of particular concern [HAPC], coral habitat, methane seeps and carbonate deposits with methane emissions).
- **Consider habitat impacts and potential recommendations for possible cable transmission routes within the WEA and elsewhere, including nearshore and estuaries, and mechanisms for protecting habitat resources:**
 - Heceta Bank and Heceta Bank EFHCA (potential cable routes to avoid Department of Defense and Coast Guard Fairway constraints)
 - HAPCs (rocky reefs, kelp, seagrasses, estuaries)
 - carbonate deposits and methane seeps
 - juvenile salmon rearing habitats in estuaries
 - cable route footprints and installation impacts on habitat from different leases.

The HC recommends working with the Marine Planning Committee to incorporate habitat comments into the draft letter for Council review. The HC encourages providing succinct comments and recommendations with sufficient detail to help ensure the final WEAs and cable considerations are as sound as possible.

PFMC
09/09/23