

HABITAT COMMITTEE REPORT ON CURRENT HABITAT ISSUES

The Pacific Fishery Management Council's (Council) Habitat Committee (HC) discussed several habitat-relevant issues and highlights the following for Council consideration.

Hells Canyon Dam Relicensing Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement (SDEIS) - On Friday, May 17th (2024), the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) issued a procedural update to the record indicating the estimated release date for the SDEIS will be July 2024, with a 60-day comment period. Depending on the exact release date, the HC could provide a draft comment letter in the September Briefing Book, or this could require a quick response letter from the Council. Under this timeline, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers intends to issue the final EIS in February of 2025. FERC notes that, "further revisions to the schedule may be made as appropriate."

Mystery Oiling Incident - The Oregon/Washington Mystery Oiling Event was first reported off the southwest coast of Washington on May 19th. The source and volume of the event has not been determined. Tar balls and sheen have impacted the coast sporadically from around the mouth of Grays Harbor, Washington south to Bandon, Oregon. Marine mammal and seabird carcasses from several species have been collected in the incident area and investigation continues to determine if the spill contributed to their mortality. Estuary and rocky intertidal habitats did not appear to be impacted and there are no known reports of impacts to fisheries resources or fishing vessels. Cleanup of the beaches is complete and a final evaluation of the beaches is happening this week.

Ocean Strategies - The White House announced June 3, 2024, three new strategies to advance President Biden's commitment to conserving and protecting our ocean and harnessing its power to strengthen our economy and address the climate and nature crises. These strategies will likely impact Council-managed fisheries: 1) US National Strategy for a Sustainable Ocean Economy - guiding US ocean policies to conserve healthy ecosystems, support resilient communities, and advancing sustainable economic development; 2) Protecting and Restoring Ocean Life - expanding and using biodiversity information to help protect and conserve marine ecosystems and maximize the ocean's benefits to people; and 3) Using Environmental DNA (eDNA) technology to study ocean life - advancing fast, low-cost, and effective eDNA technologies to understand life in the ocean and how it's changing.