Pacific Council News

VOLUME 48 NO. 2, SUMMER 2024
REPORTING ON WEST COAST FISHERIES MANAGEMENT

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COUNCIL STAFF

A NOTE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Welcome to the Council's Summer 2024 newsletter, where we re-cap west coast fisheries decisions and events from the first half of the year.

While every year is important, this year started off with some highly consequential events and decisions by the Council. In particular, this year's salmon seasons included a second year of closures for salmon fishing off California, and restricted fishing off Oregon South of Falcon. Two back-to-back years of restrictions like these puts us in unprecedented territory. I'm grateful that fisheries North of Falcon are holding fairly steady.

On the groundfish front, many folks were highly tuned into final decisions regarding the status of quillback rockfish. That decision was made in the spring, resulting in catch limits that will constrain many of our nearshore groundfish fisheries off of California. This decision was very difficult, but is based on the best available scientific information.

Also on the groundfish front, the Council made a final decision on gear switching in the groundfish catch share program after several years of deliberation.

In the world of highly migratory species, the big news is that bluefin tuna has been rebuilt ahead of schedule and is on pace to continue increasing in abundance in the coming years. Also, the Council assembled a workshop in June to discuss the future of the highly migratory species fishery in light of climate change and bycatch constraints. You can read about these issues and more in detail in this newsletter. As always, if you have any questions regarding the work of the Council feel free to contact any of us at the Council office.

—Merrick Burden, Executive Director, Pacific Fishery Management Council

The Klamath River flowing freely after the breaching of J.C. Boyle Dam on July 30. (Swiftwater Films)

Special feature: A Dispatch from the Reuben Lasker

Council member Corey Ridings volunteered on NOAA's research vessel *Rueben Lasker* in May this year. Corey serves in the California obligatory seat, is a PhD candidate at the University of Washington, and works for the Ocean Conservancy. *(Part I of II)*

Recommended food and beverage pairing: Oreo ice cream bar and bad coffee

Recommended audio pairing: God Games, The Kills

Did you know there are corgis at sea? There are on the *Reuben Lasker*, one of 15 NOAA "white ships" that conduct scientific surveying in U.S. waters. Led and operated by the NOAA Corps, a group of dedicated service people enlisted as part of America's seventh uniformed service (points if you knew America's sixth service, the Public Health Corps), the *Reuben Lasker* is home-ported in San Diego and sports an unofficial corgi theme seen daily on the ship's agenda, or Plan of the Day sheet, and on the bridge (sorry, no actual corgis onboard, safety concerns). The *Reuben Lasker* is led by Commanding Officer Claire Surrey-Marsden and supported by a suite of NOAA Corps officers and civilian crew who keep the ship running so a team of onboard scientists can collect fishery and ecosystem data critical for conserving and managing our nation's fisheries.

The back deck of the Reuben Lasker.

After several not-so-subtle hints by the author to NMFS science staff that I would love to personally experience life on a NOAA ship, I scored an invite to volunteer as part of the scientific crew on the *Reuben Lasker* this spring. My anticipation was high, as was my anxiety; as a former groundfish observer in the North Pacific life aboard wasn't unknown territory, but vomiting for three days straight was also not unknown territory. I boarded on May 12 as part of the second leg of the 2024 cruise, catching a small craft from the Santa Cruz harbor out to the vessel. There's no shorthand to describe how fire the *Reuben Lasker* is. She's amazing. At over 200 feet and shining white, my husband and some local surfers were able to follow the ship from West Cliff in Santa Cruz as she steamed back out to sea. A cutting image against the backdrop of a blue-gray Monterey Bay, NOAA ships are the backbone of our national ocean science enterprise. The top deck is designed for

Bonnie Vierra, NOAA Corps Operations Officer for Environmental Investigation, and Council member Corey Ridings

bird and mammal observing, there is a full acoustics laboratory, and the ship has both dry and wet laboratories for processing samples, and midwater trawl and plankton nets. On a more practical level, there is also internet, TV, a gym, and hot freshwater showers.

After quietly settling into the stateroom I shared with NMFS Associate Research Scientist Becky Miller, who was sleeping at the time as most of the science crew works at night, I took a quick nap and readied myself for a night of work. But first, a snack. The mess is full of tasty eats and coffee brewing 24/7. The coffee was questionable, but with folks working around the clock to ensure smooth sailing and collect data, I came to find that the boat runs on a steady buzz of energy, camaraderie, and caffeine.

My shift started, and the

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COUNCIL WORKS TO SIMPLIFY, STREAMLINE PROCESS

The Council has agreed on several changes to make its process more efficient and effective. These changes were discussed in January by the Council's "Committee of the Whole," which focused on how to prioritize Council agenda topics while reducing expenses and meeting time. The Committee asked the Council's Executive Director, Merrick Burden, to provide his recommendations, which he did in June.

The main changes are:

- Reducing Council meeting length by at least half a day (with corresponding reductions in advisory body meetings).
- Considering more economical meeting locations, remote meetings, and holding a Council meeting in a coastal fishing community.
- Scheduling agenda items more strategically.
- Providing clearer guidance to advisory bodies on relevant discussion topics.
- Standardizing the format of advisory body reports to include summaries and executive summaries.
- Limiting public comment time to five minutes (including for organizations), with flexibility for the Chair or Vice Chair to adjust this time based on the number of participants.
- Reducing workload and agenda planning to twice per year to better align with the Council's budget process.
- Using a new streamlined process for exempted fishing permits and simplifying renewals.
- Discontinuing international staff travel associated with highly migratory species and Pacific halibut management (travel for formal representatives and commissioners representing the Council will continue).

Some of the more simple changes listed above will be discussed at the September Council meeting. The more complex matters will be discussed in November.

On a related note, the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) and Council are discussing how to focus the SSC's roles and responsibilities related to salmon and groundfish management. The SSC has been dealing with an expanding workload.

NOAA SECURES $3.3 BILLION BOOST FOR FISHERIES AND CLIMATE RESILIENCE

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) recently secured a $3.3 billion funding boost through the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), which was signed into law by President Biden in 2022. These funds mark a landmark investment in U.S. marine resources, and are focused on preparing fisheries and fishing communities for the impacts of climate change.

The funding will focus on the following areas:

Climate-Ready Fisheries Initiative: $349 million to enhance NOAA's scientific capabilities and survey systems to support the fishing industry, communities, and tribes affected by climate change.

Modernizing Stock Assessments: A $145 million investment in data acquisition and management, including ecosystem science, to modernize stock assessments.

Climate, Ecosystems, and Fisheries Initiative: $40 million to develop ocean ecosystem predictions and their implications for coastal communities and economies.

Pacific Salmon Conservation: $42 million to advance salmon science, including the development of better analytical tools.

West Coast Tribal Fish Hatcheries: $300 million, including $60 million for deferred maintenance of Columbia Basin Mitchell Act hatcheries.

Habitat Restoration and Fish Passage: $484 million to restore access to healthy habitats for migratory fish and support habitat restoration projects.

Inflation Reduction Act funds for the Council: In addition to the funding above, NOAA Fisheries has slated $20 million in IRA funding for the Regional Fishery Management Councils. The Pacific Council has submitted three proposals for IRA projects that are set to be the focus of climate-related work for the next three years. These proposals build off previous recommendations of the Ad Hoc Ecosystem Workgroup and the Ecosystem Advisory Subpanel.

NMFS plans to fund all three of the Council's proposed projects under its Climate, Ecosystems, and Fisheries Initiative. Funding for should be available in mid-2024.

Funds will also be used to make the permitting process more efficient and to enhance Northwest Fisheries Science Center facilities.

COUNCIL AND STAFF PERSONNEL CHANGES

Council membership: Brad Pettinger will continue to serve as Council Chair, and **Pete Hassemer** as Vice-Chair, for the August 11, 2024-August 10, 2025 term.

Thompson Banez was appointed to the California Dept. of Fish and Wildlife seat on the Groundfish Management Team, and **Lynn Mattes** was appointed to the International Pacific Halibut Commission's Management Strategy Evaluation Board.

Council staff changes: On the Council staff, several new hires have been made to backfill a handful of retirements. In January **Hayden York** joined Council staff as the new Technical Operations Specialist. In April **Angela Forristall** joined the Council as the newest Staff Officer for salmon items. Also in April, **Samantha Holland** joined the Council staff as the newest Meeting and Events Specialist. In June, **Gilly Lyons** was hired as the Council Staff Officer in charge of climate resilience. In July, **Katrina Bernaus** joined the staff as a Staff Officer focused on Coastal Pelagic Species. We are excited to see the contributions that these folks make to the Council process. At the same time, we thank **Dr. Jim Seger** and **Renee Dorval** for their many years of valuable service to the Council. They will be missed.

Advisory body changes: The Council removed the gillnet position and a California sport position (for inland fisheries) from the Salmon Advisory Subpanel. The Washington commercial seat on the Coastal Pelagic Species Advisory Subpanel can now be filled by either a commercial or processor representative. The three sport fisheries at-large positions on the Groundfish Advisory Subpanel will now represent Washington (one seat), Oregon (one seat), and California sport (two seats). The Council is considering making changes to the composition of the Ecosystem Advisory Subpanel, given new Inflation Reduction Act projects. The Council also made nominations for the West Coast Take Reduction Team, which addresses take of humpback and blue whales.





New Council staff (clockwise from upper left): Gilly Lyons (climate), Katrina Bernaus (coastal pelagic species), Samantha Holland (meetings and events), Hayden York (technical operations), Angela Forristall (salmon)

COUNCIL COORDINATION COMMITTEE MEETS

The Council Coordination Committee (CCC) met in May to discuss NOAA's priorities, new Federal regulations regarding the National Environmental Policy Act, the National Seafood Strategy, the America the Beautiful Executive Order (30 x 30); and Sanctuary regulations regarding fishing activity. The CCC includes representatives from all eight regional fishery management councils.

The discussion of the America the Beautiful initiative centered on how conservation areas are defined, and what counts toward the Administration's goal of protecting 30 percent of U.S. lands and waters. Most protections implemented by fishery management councils appear to fall under the definition of "other effective conservation measures." The CCC will ask

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OFFSHORE WIND UPDATE

The Council's Marine Planning Committee met several times this year to discuss offshore wind energy development and other marine planning activities.

The Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) has released notices of intent for two National Environmental Policy Act documents: an environmental assessment for commercial wind leasing off Oregon, and a draft programmatic environmental impact statement for five offshore wind leases in California (two off Humboldt Bay, three off Morro Bay). (See the Council's letters on the Oregon environmental assessment and California environmental impact statement). The Council comments, which were drafted by the committee, focus on ensuring that fishing, habitats, and coastal communities are protected as these projects move forward.

The committee discussed the five planned offshore wind sites off California, as well as California's Strategic Plan for Offshore Wind, which, among other things, seeks to identify suitable sea space for future offshore wind leasing. The committee discussed NMFS' offshore wind energy strategic science plan, Oregon's review of BOEM's offshore wind planning activities, and Oregon's efforts to ensure stakeholder participation in offshore wind development. The committee also heard updates on West Coast Ocean Alliance activities, NOAA listening sessions related to Aquaculture Opportunity Areas, and research that is being done to understand the potential impacts of wind energy on the ocean ecosystem.

BOEM will auction off two leases off the southern Oregon coast in October (see Council comments), and the Ports of Long Beach and Humboldt Bay are planning major projects to accommodate future offshore wind development.

See the Marine Planning Committee's March, April, and June reports; see all Council letters on offshore wind (under "other correspondence"). ⭘

National Marine Sanctuaries

Chumash Sanctuary: NOAA is working on designation materials and responding to public comments on the proposed **Chumash National Marine Sanctuary (NMS)**. A final decision on sanctuary designation should be made by mid-2024.

The sanctuary is proposed for an area off the coast of San Luis Obispo County, California, between the Channel Islands NMS and Monterey Bay NMS. it is intended to recognize indigenous peoples' cultural connections to the area, conserve the area's rich biodiversity, and provide opportunities for tourism and economic development. The draft regulations would prohibit future oil and gas development and other activities, but no regulations are proposed that would change commercial or recreational fishing activities.

Management plan reviews: The **Olympic Coast** NMS's management plan is currently being updated, with a draft slated for the end of 2024. The new plan will guide sanctuary activities for 5-10 years and will place greater emphasis on the impacts of climate change. The management plans for the Greater **Farallones** and **Cordell Bank** sanctuaries will also be undergoing review soon, with scoping beginning this winter. The sanctuaries will be treated as one management unit for the purposes of the management plan review.

Promoting sanctuary use: As part of its "Get Into Your Sanctuary" initiative, the Office of National Marine Sanctuaries has promoted recreational fishing opportunities for veterans at the Olympic Coast NMS, hosted a photo contest to raise awareness about the natural and cultural importance of sanctuaries, and implemented a "Fishermen in the Classroom" project, in which students interact with and learn directly from commercial fishermen about their lifestyles and the challenges of providing seafood products to consumers.

In addition to these activities, the Office of National Marine Sanctuaries reported on:

- A NOAA survey of deep-sea corals and sponges using remotely operated vehicles, identifying several new species and a previously unknown glass sponge reef
- A study monitoring urchin and kelp densities at Tanker Reef in Monterey Bay

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Coast Guard Activities

The U.S. Coast Guard conducted 1,564 fisheries boardings on the west coast in 2023, finding 23 fisheries violations, 82 commercial safety violations, and 167 recreational safety violations. Twenty-two percent of the commercial fishing vessels boarded had safety violations, and five percent of those involved hazardous conditions that resulted in the termination of the voyage.

The Coast Guard conducted 3,321 search and rescue cases in coastal and inland waters off the west coast, saving more than 800 lives and helping another 4,500 people. Specific to commercial fisheries, the Coast Guard responded to 258 search and rescue cases and saved 17 lives.

A Coast Guard rescue crew from Air Station Astoria safely hoists two men into an MH-60 Jayhawk helicopter near Willapa Bay, Washington, Feb. 5, 2023. (USCG)

In February 2023 the Coast Guard helped the F/V *Ethel May*, a 46-foot crabbing vessel in distress, near Willapa Bay, WA. The vessel had been struck by waves, and only two of the three people on board were able to enter the inflatable life raft. The Coast Guard and local law enforcement searched over 1,000 miles by air, sea, and land to find the vessel. Once spotted, a rescue helicopter spotted two men inside a life raft, and they were safely hoisted on board. The helicopter and other Coast Guard boats continued to search for the vessel and the remaining person for 15 hours, covering 290 square miles, but came up empty. They did spot debris floating inside Willapa Bay and along the Pacific shoreline, indicating the vessel had broken apart, Coast Guard officials said.

In September 2023, the 51' steel tuna troller F/V *Judy* reported to the Coast Guard that they had run aground in Yaquina Bay, OR when the operator fell asleep. Members of the Yaquina Bay Coast Guard Station responded. No search and rescue was needed. The vessel was eventually salvaged, after several attempts, on June 30 with Coast Guard assistance.

In October 2023, the Grays Harbor Coast Guard Station received a report of an overdue fishing vessel, the F/V *Evening*, out of Westport, WA. The Coast Guard launched an air and surface search from three different Coast Guard Districts.

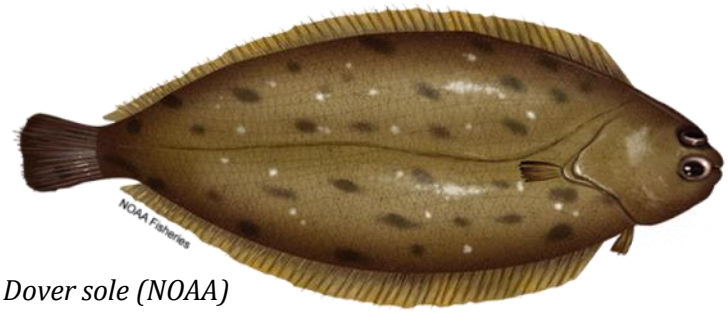
The Coast Guard searched for two missing crew of the *Evening* for 12 days in a search that covered 14,000 square miles. A day later, a crew member was found alive by a Canadian fishing family in a life raft 70 miles northwest of Cape Flattery. He was taken to a hospital on Vancouver Island and was in stable condition. The remaining crew member, Mick (or Mike) Diamond, was never found. The survivor said that the boat capsized after it got caught in a trough between rough swells, and that Diamond told the surviving crew member to get to the life raft while he took control of the vessel. (See full article).

In other Coast Guard news, two new fast response cutters, the USCGC *David Duren* and USCGC *Florence Finch*, will be homeported in Astoria starting in mid-to-late 2024. These are multiple-mission platforms for offshore search and rescue and law enforcement. See the full USCG report here.

COUNCIL SETS HARVEST SPECIFICATIONS, MANAGEMENT MEASURES FOR 2025-2026 GROUNDFISH FISHERIES

In April the Council adopted final harvest specifications for all groundfish stocks and stock complexes, except California quillback rockfish.

The Council adopted "default harvest control rules" for all stocks and stock complexes, except for rex sole, shortspine thornyhead, Dover sole, and California quillback rockfish. (Harvest control rules are used to calculate how much harvest for a stock or stock complex can occur on an annual basis.) By adopting the default, the harvest control rules from the 2023-24 biennium do not change. However, the Council adopted alternative harvest control rules for rex sole, shortspine thornyhead, and Dover sole, which are provided in the April decision document. The specifications reflect a slightly higher level of risk tolerance (P*) than in the last biennial cycle.



Dover sole (NOAA)

The Council adopted status quo management measures for most stocks, with some changes for the next biennium. In addition, the Council adopted a decrease of 60 mt to the petrale sole set-aside, an increase of 8 mt for yelloweye rockfish, and a 2 mt starry flounder set-aside, as recommended by tribal representatives.

California quillback: California quillback harvest specifications were adopted in June. The Council recommended the "acceptable biological catch" rule as the rebuilding strategy for this stock, resulting in 2025 and 2026 annual catch limits of 1.3 mt and 1.5 mt, respectively. The rebuilding target is 2060, with a maximum rebuilding timeline of 2071. The Council also removed this stock from the nearshore rockfish complexes off California and will manage it as an individual stock.

Quillback rockfish are a nearshore stock occurring offshore from California to Alaska; three-quarters of the harvest is caught by recreational fishers. A 2021 stock assessment of quillback rockfish in California waters estimated that the population was below the overfished threshold level, leading to cutbacks in the recreational and commercial fisheries. However, these cutbacks did not reduce the catch of quillback as much as desired, and the Council closed the quillback fishery in November for the rest of 2023.

California quillback were designated as overfished in December 2023. In November 2023 the Council heard lengthy public comment on the assessment and rebuilding analyses, including testimony by Dr. Ray Hilborn of the University of Washington and Dr. Mark Maunder. The Scientific and Statistical Committee discussed their testimony and reported back to the Council for more discussion in March 2024. During that meeting, the Council adopted a range of rebuilding strategies for analysis.

New management measures: The Council adopted a suite of new management measures, which are discussed in detail in the Council decision document. Of note, the Council plans to:

- establish a directed open access permit program to improve understanding of the fishery by managers
- correct electronic monitoring regulations related to discard and retention
- require recreational anglers to have a descending device on board while fishing in Federal waters
- modify vessel transit requirements for California recreational vessels in Federal waters
- update the scientific name of Pacific sand lance and common name of Pacific spiny dogfish in Federal regulation.

In addition, the Council made changes to the allocation structure and management for shortspine

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thornyhead, which will now be managed as a coastwide stock. The Council will review the allocation structure of this stock in the next biennium.

In making its management measures, the Council adopted Amendment 33 to the groundfish fishery management plan. The amendment specifies the California quillback rockfish rebuilding plan and removes shortspine thornyhead from the list of formally allocated stocks.

Exempted fishing permits: The Council only received two exempted fishing permits for review for 2025-26: one from the West Coast Seafood Processors and Oregon Trawl Commission, a proposal to collect information on bycatch of salmon and other species of concern while conducting a trawl fishery targeting midwater rockfish without existing gear/time/area restrictions; and one from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife to collect cowcod, yelloweye rockfish, and quillback rockfish from the recreational fishery in California. The Council recommended both for implementation by NMFS in the 2025-26 biennium.

A researcher with cowcod (NMFS Northwest Fisheries Science Center)

FINAL ACTION ON SABLEFISH GEAR SWITCHING TAKEN

The Council has been considering limiting gear switching—the use of non-trawl gear to catch northern sablefish in the trawl individual fishing quota fishery—since 2017. The Council selected a preliminary preferred alternative for this action in November 2023, which it modified in April 2024 when setting its final preferred alternative.

Under the final preferred alternative, gear switching would be limited only in years when sablefish quota pound availability is low—specifically, when the northern sablefish annual catch limit is below 6,000 metric tons (mt). When the annual catch limit is above 6,000 mt, there would be no restrictions on gear switching. The limitation would be imposed by issuing gear-specific quota pounds (quota pounds for "any gear" and quota pounds for trawl gear only).

Some of the provisions that differed from the earlier version include changes to how "legacy participants" are defined and managed. Also, the Council included provisions for transfer of ownership among family members. As they become available, a complete description of the Council action and supporting analyses will be posted on the Council's gear-switching webpage.

FIXED GEAR MARKING AND ENTANGLEMENT RISK REDUCTION

New gear-marking regulations will apply to groundfish pot and longline fisheries to help NMFS to better account for entanglements of whales and other protected species. Currently, when a whale gets tangled in fishing gear, the fishery where the gear originated can only be identified about half the time. While groundfish gear is required to have some markings (e.g, vessel registration number on the buoy), unless marking requirements are expanded there will still

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2024 SALMON SEASONS SET

In April the Council adopted recommendations for 2024 west coast ocean salmon fishing. The seasons provided recreational and commercial fishing opportunities in northern areas of the coast, but included significant reductions and closures on the southern coast.

Forecasts for West Coast Chinook and coho stocks in 2024 were a mixed bag. Federal requirements to conserve Fraser River (Canada) coho, lower Columbia River natural coho, southern Oregon/northern California coho, Puget Sound Chinook, Klamath River fall Chinook, and Sacramento River fall Chinook were the main constraints for setting this year's ocean salmon fisheries.

"The forecasts for Chinook returning to California rivers this year are again very low," said Council Chair Brad Pettinger. "Despite improved drought conditions, the freshwater environment that contributed to these low forecasted returns may still be impacting the overall returns of Chinook."

Although fisheries north of Cape Falcon (in northern Oregon) were limited by the need to constrain catch of lower Columbia River natural coho, two natural coho stocks that were previously declared overfished (Queets River and Strait of Juan de Fuca) are now considered rebuilt.

South of Cape Falcon, opportunity for coho retention along the Oregon coast was also reduced compared to last year due to the lower coho forecast. However, some natural coho stocks showed improvement.

WDFW staff conducting surveys in the Snohomish River Basin, a large watershed in Snohomish and King counties. (WDFW)

All ocean recreational and commercial salmon fisheries were closed along the California coast. The state of California recommended the closures due to the low abundance forecast for the state's target stocks and the historically low numbers of spawner returns for Sacramento River winter Chinook, Central Valley spring Chinook, and the Upper-Sacramento subpopulation of Sacramento River fall Chinook.

"This has been another challenging year for the Council, its advisors, fishery stakeholders, and the public, to say the least," said Council Executive Director Merrick Burden. "The economic impact of closing a good portion of the west coast ocean salmon fishery will negatively impact the people that participate in the fishery, and the small businesses in coastal communities that rely on the salmon fishery."

SEVERAL SALMON STOCKS SUCCESSFULLY REBUILT

Several salmon stocks that were previously classified as overfished have now been rebuilt, according to NMFS.

Snohomish River natural coho, Queets River natural coho, and Strait of Juan de Fuca natural coho were classified as overfished in 2018. The Council adopted rebuilding plans for each of the stocks, and in 2022 Snohomish River natural coho were designated rebuilt. Queets River natural coho and Strait of Juan de Fuca natural coho were designated rebuilt in 2023.

Similarly, Klamath River fall Chinook and Sacramento River fall Chinook were classified as overfished in 2018. Rebuilding plans for the two stocks were implemented in 2019, and Sacramento River fall Chinook were declared rebuilt in 2021. Klamath River fall

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Chinook has not yet been rebuilt.

In 2023 another stock, Queets River spring/summer Chinook, were declared overfished. Since January 2024, members of the Salmon Technical Team, along with tribal and state comanagers and Federal and Council staff, have been working on a rebuilding plan. Due to the limited data available for this stock, which is a small component of a much larger complex, future recommendations will likely stress habitat restoration efforts and improving data collection. The Council is set to adopt a draft rebuilding plan in September 2024 and aims to finalize it by November. The Council is required by law to adopt rebuilding plans for any overfished stock.

PROGRESS CONTINUES ON REMOVING KLAMATH DAMS

The removal of the Klamath River dams continues ahead of schedule. Drawdowns for J.C. Boyle, Copco 1, and Iron Gate Dam reservoirs have been completed, and J.C. Boyle dam was breached in late July and has been completely dismantled (see photo, page 1). The cofferdam at Iron Gate dam is set to be removed later this fall.

The complete removal of the four dams will open up about 400 miles of habitat for anadromous Chinook, steelhead, and lamprey, and 70 miles of habitat for coho listed under the Endangered Species Act.

In 2023, Copco No. 2 dam was removed completely. Iron Gate Hatchery was decommissioned in December 2023 and portions of the hatchery were demolished. More than four million fall-run Chinook and 127,000 coho eggs were transferred to Fall Creek hatchery in December, with good results. Fall Creek Hatchery has released several pulses of fish and has more scheduled.

The removal of all the dams is expected to be complete this fall, in time for the fall run of Chinook salmon. The restoration of the former reservoir footprints is currently underway and will continue for several years until vegetation is successfully established and water clarity has returned to baseline conditions.

The next steps are completing dam removal, assessing fish passage throughout the system, work on fish passage and habitat restoration, and monitoring.

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SALMON SHORTS

There is a new plan to help **recover depleted salmon in the Columbia River Basin.** The agreement between the Federal government, tribes, states, and non-governmental organizations commits $200 million in new funding to salmon and steelhead hatcheries and $100 million for actions that improve salmon and steelhead populations, including habitat improvements, predation reduction, and ecosystem recovery work... As of July 1, **beavers are no longer considered "predators" in Oregon.** New rules protect beavers from being killed at will by private landowners and classify them as "furbearers" instead of predators. Landowners must try non-lethal measures to remove beavers from their property and only then can get a permit to kill them. Beavers are ecosystem engineers that create important habitat for salmon and mitigate drought... The **Sacramento River Fall Chinook Workgroup** has been meeting to work on the science behind managing Sacramento River fall Chinook, and has identified some areas for improvement. The workgroup will meet over the summer and fall to work on the technical aspects of forecasting Sacramento River fall Chinook runs. See their report here... **California's Yurok Tribe regained some of its traditional lands to serve as a new gateway to Redwood National and State Parks**. The Yurok are the first Native people to manage tribal land with the National Park Service. The tribe had already been restoring salmon habitat for three years on the property, and thousands of juvenile coho and Chinook salmon and steelhead have already returned to Prairie Creek. The Yurok tribe is also helping lead efforts in the removal of the Klamath dams.

ECOSYSTEM STATUS REPORT

The California Current Integrated Ecosystem Assessment report was presented to the Council in March. The report is developed yearly by the NOAA California Current Integrated Ecosystem Assessment Team.

Northern anchovies (Monterey Bay Aquarium)

The team reported that ecosystem signals in the California Current in 2023 were mixed, with many favorable signs. (The California Current is the main current affecting the entire west coast.) The year began with a La Niña and negative Pacific Decadal Oscillation values, which typically indicate cool, productive conditions. Periods of strong upwelling provided expansive cool and productive coastal waters and mitigated offshore heatwaves.

Surveys found abundant anchovies and juvenile groundfishes, and good productivity at several seabird colonies. Higher abundances of sardine have also been observed in nearshore southern California and in albacore diets. These positive signs were encouraging, especially as the west coast entered a potentially strong El Niño that will likely continue through spring. The moderately strong El Niño of 2015/16 began with an unprecedented large marine heatwave that brought mostly unfavorable conditions to the coast. Conditions leading into the current El Niño are much more favorable, and the ecosystem appears resilient to the recent heatwaves.

This positive "preconditioning" before the current El Niño may have helped buffer the system against negative impacts; however, other indicators raised concern. As the year progressed, upwelling declined in most of the current, allowing less productive warm water to enter, especially in the north. The system also experienced lower krill biomass, declines in sea lion pup indicators, and multiple harmful algal blooms that caused marine mammal strandings and disrupted shellfish fisheries.

Landings for most commercial fisheries declined, California salmon fisheries were closed, and the outlook for adult salmon returning to the Central Valley in 2024 was poor. While improvements in freshwater indicators and smolt outmigration survival were promising signs, marine conditions were less promising.

The report emphasized the value of considering ecosystem conditions when identifying risk for fisheries. Downturns in stock abundance negatively impact fishing communities, especially the most vulnerable communities that are less able to adapt. Efforts to assess risk associated with ecosystem conditions can help make decisions that lessen these impacts. While the California Current ecosystem proved reasonably robust to climate and ocean conditions in 2023, this resilience won't last forever due to a backdrop of rapid and accelerating climate change. Methods for interpreting unusual conditions must evolve, especially as species and habitats are confronted with new combinations of conditions and "new normals" replace historic expectations.

WORK ON ECOSYSTEM AND CLIMATE INITIATIVE CONTINUES

The Ad Hoc Ecosystem Workgroup has been working on Ecosystem Initiative 4, "Ecosystem and Climate Information for Species, Fisheries, and Fishery Management Plans." Last September the workgroup presented "risk tables" as a way to introduce climate and ecosystem information into the process for setting catch limits along with an example application to two groundfish species, sablefish and petrale sole. In consultation with the workgroup, NMFS Science Center staff are further developing the risk assessment methodology for use in groundfish stock assess-

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Highly Migratory Species News

COUNCIL RECOMMENDS TWO NIGHT-SET BUOY GEAR EXEMPTED FISHING PERMITS

In June the Council recommended two exempted fishing permits (EFPs) for highly migratory species to NMFS: one from Stephen R. Mintz and one from Wesley Langowski. Both EFPs propose to use night-set buoy gear. The Council limited the EFPs to no more than 10 pieces of night-set buoy gear per set.

Although the Council normally follows a June-September schedule for reviewing EFP applications for highly migratory species, in this case the Council made their final recommendation in June, because the Council has previously reviewed and recommended EFPs for this type of fishing.

INTERNATIONAL MEETINGS RESULT IN BLUEFIN TUNA AGREEMENT

International meetings between June and September resulted in countries around the Pacific agreeing that Pacific bluefin tuna catch limits can be increased starting in 2025, based on results of the latest stock assessment, which shows the stock has surpassed the rebuilding target established by the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission and the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission. This is good news for the West Coast, because it increases opportunities to further develop fisheries for this stock.

Additionally, Mr. David Hogan from the Department of State announced that the U.S. and Canada have agreed to reinstate the terms of their previous fishing and port access regime for 2024 on a voluntary basis. They plan to resume negotiations later this year for a long-term fishing agreement. ⭘

Coastal Pelagic Species News

FINAL ACTION TAKEN ON SARDINE SPEX AND MANAGEMENT MEASURES

The Council set harvest specifications and management measures for Pacific sardine in April (see decision document), based on a biomass estimate that showed the biomass had increased. However, a subsequent court order resulted in NMFS adopting harvest specifications that were identical to the prior fishing year. In June the Council adopted updated terms of reference and accepted practices for coastal pelagic species stock assessments.

TWO EXEMPTED FISHING PERMITS APPROVED

In April the Council recommended two recurring exempted fishing permit (EFP) proposals by the California Wetfish Producers Association for approval by NMFS. The Coastal Pelagic Species Nearshore Cooperative Survey provides sampling to validate aerial estimates, and provides sampling of coastal pelagic species biomass in shallow waters off Southern and Central California inaccessible to NOAA ships. The California Wetfish Producers Association EFP describes biological sampling in Southern and Central California waters to continue a time-series of fishery-dependent biological data for use in sardine biomass models and stock assessments. The requested amounts are 150 mt and 520 mt, respectively. ⭘

National Marine Sanctuaries continued from page 5

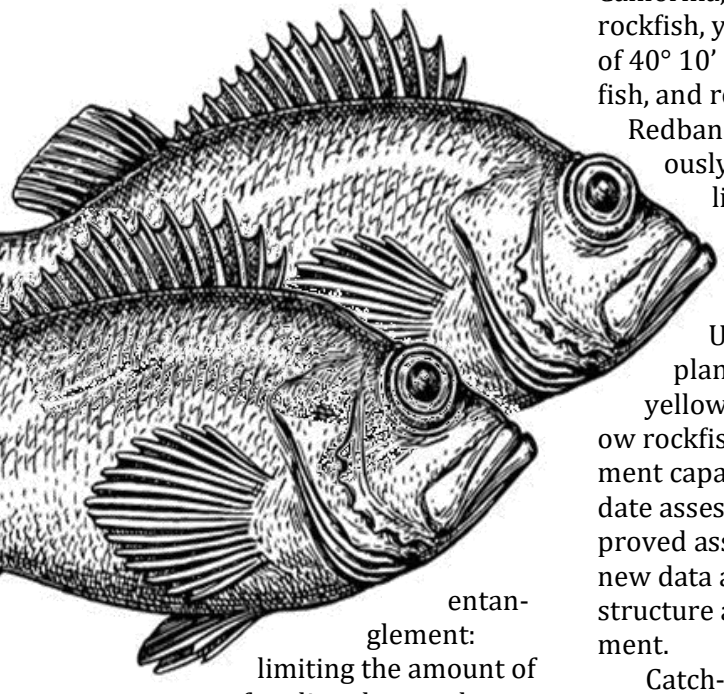
- Efforts to restore kelp forests in the Gulf of the Farallones, focusing on kelp propagation and urchin removals
- A study in the Gulf of the Farallones, Cordell Bank, and part of Monterey Bay sanctuaries that found that these areas hold approximately 9 million metric tons of carbon in their surface sediments; and
- The West Coast Soundscapes program, which aims to understand the underwater soundscape in sanctuaries along the West Coast. ⭘

Continued from page 8

be a lot of uncertainty about the origins of entanglements.

Vessels using pot and longline gear in the limited entry fixed gear, directed open access, and individual fishing quota sectors will be required to have gear-specific buoy and line markings.

The Council also adopted two measures to reduce the risk of entanglement: limiting the amount of surface line that can be used, and allowing vessels to voluntarily use one set of surface gear rather than using it on both ends of the groundline, as is currently required. Both measures would reduce the amount of line in the water (surface and vertical line respectively), which would lower the risk of entanglements by whales or other species. Additional measures may be included in a NMFS "best practices" guide.



The Council also recommended some minor changes to biodegradable escape panel regulations.

STOCK ASSESSMENT SCHEDULE, DEFINITIONS DISCUSSED

In June the Council settled on a groundfish stock assessment schedule for 2025 and preliminary list of species to assess in 2027.

Benchmark (or full) assessments will be undertaken for sablefish, quillback rockfish off California, rougheye/blackspotted rockfish, yellowtail rockfish north of 40° 10' N. lat., chilipepper rockfish, and redbanded rockfish.

Redbanded rockfish was previously managed as "data limited," and this will be the first time a full assessment is undertaken.

Update assessments are planned for widow and yelloweye rockfish, with widow rockfish prioritized if assessment capacity is limited. An update assessment reruns an approved assessment model with new data added and the same structure as the last full assessment.

Catch-only projections will be done for petrale sole, canary rockfish, shortspine thornyhead, darkblotched rockfish, black rockfish off Oregon, and bocaccio. These projections update previous catch estimates with recent data.

In 2027, the Council has preliminary plans to conduct benchmark assessments for Pacific spiny dogfish, English sole, cowcod, lingcod (north and south of 40° 10' N. lat.), petrale sole, and possibly yelloweye rockfish and candidate slope rockfish species.

The Council used an online groundfish assessment prioritization tool developed by NMFS in making their decisions. The number of managed species far exceeds the capacity to conduct assessments during each management cycle, and this tool allows scientists to consider a wide range of fishery, economic, and population attributes in an objective, transparent way.

The Terms of Reference utilized by the Scientific and Statistical Committee, which spell out how stock assessments and rebuilding analyses are reviewed, were also updated for the coming stock assessment cycle.

SUR RIDGE CLOSED TO BOTTOM CONTACT GEARS

An area at Sur Ridge in Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary will be closed to commercial groundfish bottom contact gear.

The closure is a collaboration with Office of National Marine Sanctuaries and aims to close the area from the impacts of fishing in order to conduct deep-sea coral restoration and research.

Starting in September 2023, the Council considered three locations in the Sanctuary for the closure (Sur Ridge, Año Nuevo Canyon, and Ascension Canyon). The Council recommended a schedule to review the progress of the coral restoration and research projects in the future.

STOCKS TO BE DEFINED

In 2022 NMFS informed the Council that the status of some stocks couldn't be determined due

(Continued on page 16)

Rueben Lasker, cont'd from page 2

overcast night erased the horizon. Hauling back the first of five tows, the crew delivered a tub of ocean life that we sorted, identified, and sampled for various studies back on shore. The tows are designed to capture juvenile rockfish and other life in the water column like anchovy, krill, and, lately, pyrosomes (thank you, climate change). Over the next three days we saw all of the species of juvenile rockfish; the venerable Chief Scientist Keith Sakuma oversaw the identification of fish the width of a quarter or smaller. Unfortunately, my measures to avoid seasickness only went so far, and I turned green at the start of my first shift. For those who haven't had the pleasure of going to sea in a working vessel, the perfume of diesel and fish is intoxicating.

Before and during each tow, members of the scientific crew are assigned to watch for marine mammals on the bridge and upper decks to avoid interactions or accidental capture of sea lions and dolphins in the midwater trawl net. I jumped at the chance to go above and climbed four sets of ladders to reach the bridge, a large room surrounded by windows bathed in a cosmic red glow from multiple screens lighting the path forward. The mammal station is a raised platform next to an open side window, allowing the observer to look 180 degrees for sea life, effectively granting the lucky observer dog-out-of-car-window status. After the assigned watch time, my ears and cheeks back in place, I hurried down to the lab to help finish sorting and clean up before the next haul back and tub delivery.

My trip on the *Reuben Lasker* was on the second leg of four scheduled for Spring/Summer 2024. Our leg was supposed to last for 12 days and sample waters off Northern California. Historic "lines," with set latitudes and longitudes that radiate from the coast, provide timeseries data about species and oceanographic conditions, allowing comparison across years and even decades (the survey began during the El Niño event of 1983). It was not to be, though. On day four, I awoke in the afternoon to the gentle drip of water on my arm. After a frantic attempt at covering my pajamas and throwing on boots, I rushed to the bridge to report the stream of water coming from the ceiling. A rapid inspection later, it was determined that the anti-roll tank (a swimming pool of fresh water engineered to minimize boat roll that happened to be above Becky's and my cabin) was leaking; a patch from 2023 hadn't held and the rough weather had produced pressure within the tank that opened a seam. Sadly, this marked the beginning of the end, and we redirected back to San Francisco with an ETA of 13:30 the following day for repairs.

I spent my last 20 hours retracing my night shift steps, forcing myself up early to fully enjoy my last day on deck. The sunrise wasn't to be as it was foggy and overcast, but the day was a joy. The Farallon Institute ornithologist Brian Hoover welcomed me to the top deck, talked me through various bird sightings, and educated me on the life of seabirds. I saw plenty of phalaropes and even a Sabine's gull. Midday, we steamed under the Golden Gate Bridge and were treated to a typical Bay Area weather pattern—sunshine on the city—as we docked just below the Bay Bridge and parted ways.

Upcoming Council meetings	**City**	**Dates**	**Location**	**Public comment portal opens**
September 2024	Spokane, WA	Advisory bodies start Wednesday, September 18 Council session starts Thursday, September 19	DoubleTree by Hilton Spokane Center	8/14/24
November 2024	Costa Mesa, CA	Advisory bodies start Wednesday, November 13 Council session starts Thursday, November 14	Hilton Orange County/Costa Mesa	10/9/24
March 2025	Vancouver, WA	*Tentative*: Advisory bodies start Wednesday, March 5 Council session starts Thursday, March 6	Hilton Vancouver Washington	TBA
April 2025	Spokane, WA	*Tentative*: Advisory bodies begin Wednesday, April 9 Council session begins Thursday, April 10	DoubleTree by Hilton San Jose	TBA

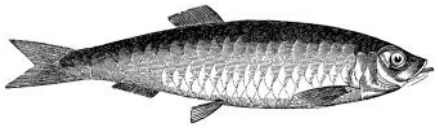
CCC meeting, cont'd from page 4

that councils be involved in defining these areas.

Staff from the councils and NMFS have been working for years to integrate regulations under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) and the Magnuson-Stevens Act. A new policy, the culmination of years of effort, outlines ways for councils to be involved in developing measures to protect species listed under the ESA. Several Pacific Council experiences were cited as models for how any new process should work.

NMFS is also developing a new directive in which lead councils would be identified when stocks shift from one fishery management council region to another. This directive does not currently affect the Pacific Council.

Budget: The CCC discussed the long-term fiscal outlook for councils and NMFS. Since 2019, council funding has declined, and all councils expressed concern regarding their fiscal status. Council Executive Directors and NMFS leadership will meet to share approaches, tools, and discuss priorities in an effort to help support one another with tightening fiscal conditions.



LEGISLATION AND FEDERAL ACTIVITY

The Sustaining America's Fisheries for the Future Act, which would update and reauthorize the Magnuson-Stevens Act, was recently introduced by Congressmen Jared Huffman (D-California) and Ed Case (D-Honolulu). Huffman is Chair of the Water, Oceans, and Wildlife Subcommittee, and Case is a committee member.

This legislation is the culmination of a two-year-long process Rep. Huffman led to get stakeholder input, including a nationwide listening tour and release of a discussion draft for feedback.

In addition, the White House announced three new ocean protection strategies in June that may impact Council-managed fisheries. **The National Strategy for a Sustainable Ocean Economy** will guide U.S. ocean policies to conserve healthy ecosystems, support resilient communities, and advance sustainable economic development. **The Protecting and Restoring Ocean Life** initiative will expand and use biodiversity information to help protect and conserve marine ecosystems and maximize the ocean's benefits to people; and the **Using Environmental DNA** (eDNA) initiative will focus on using eDNA to understand life in the ocean and how it's changing.

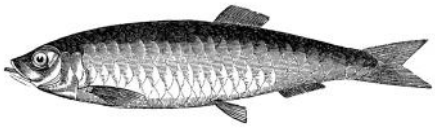
COUNCIL AND NMFS CONTINUE WORK ON EQUITY AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE PLAN

In May 2023, NMFS introduced their national Equity and Environmental Justice Strategy.

Among other things, the strategy aims to identify and better involve underserved communities, provide equitable delivery of services, and prioritize equity and environmental justice in NMFS' work. The NMFS West Coast Regional Office is working on a plan to apply the national strategy to the West Coast.

Earlier this year, at NMFS' request, the National Academy of Sciences published a report on equity in fisheries management that discusses these issues.

The Council's Ad-hoc Equity and Environmental Justice Committee met in June to discuss the NMFS plan and the National Academy report. The committee will work with Council staff to review Council processes and products, noting where there might be improvements that would address equity and environmental justice considerations. The committee will meet over the summer and report to the Council later this year.



(Continued from page 11)

ments. This methodology will be reviewed by the Scientific and Statistical Committee and considered by the Council at its September 2024 meeting. It may then consider using the risk table methodology during the 2027-2028 groundfish harvest specifications process. Work is also ongoing to convert current "stoplight tables" for salmon stocks into a risk assessment framework. This may be reviewed this fall if the work is completed.

The Council plans to wrap up the initiative in September 2024 by identifying ways that ecosystem and climate information can be introduced into its regular management processes. ❹

Salmon, continued from page 10

Hear a podcast about Klamath Dam removal from California Trout.

KLAMATH RIVER FALL CHINOOK WORKGROUP MEETS

The ad-hoc Klamath River Fall Chinook Workgroup helps the Council develop interim management measures for Klamath River fall Chinook (which are designated as overfished) as they adapt to the removal of the Klamath River Dams.

One of the Workgroup's first tasks was to provide data for the 2024 preseason salmon process. Based on the 2024 forecast for Klamath River fall Chinook, the maximum exploitation rate allowed under the Pacific Salmon Fishery Management Plan is 25 percent. However, the Council chose a more conservative exploitation rate of no more than 20 percent in 2024, based on the Workgroup's recommendation. The Workgroup will continue to develop a management framework for these Chinook that can be used until the river and salmon abundance stabilize, which experts say could take 10 years or more.

Groundfish, continued from page 13

to a lack of definition in the groundfish fishery management plan. Amendment 31 defined an initial set of groundfish stocks, and in June the Council started work on a proposed fishery management plan amendment that would address those species scheduled for assessment. This issue will be discussed next in September.

NMFS FORMS TAKE REDUCTION TEAM

NMFS is forming a West Coast Take Reduction Team to address three marine mammal stocks and five commercial fixed gear fisheries that have a tendency to "take" species listed under the Endangered Species Act. ("Take" means "to harass, harm, pursue, hunt, shoot, wound, kill, trap, capture, or collect, or to attempt to engage in any such conduct.") In April, the NMFS Office of Protected Resources gave a presentation on this issue to the Council.

While the Take Reduction Team will look at all pot fisheries (including Federal sablefish, California spot prawn, and Dungeness crab in Washington, Oregon, and California), the Council's role is to provide expertise on the Federal sablefish pot fishery. The Team will meet by late November to discuss ways to reduce take in these fisheries. Additional fisheries or marine mammals may be included later.

The Team includes commercial fishermen from the Dungeness crab and sablefish pot gear fisheries, along with representatives from relevant governmental agencies. In June the Council named Bernie Burkholder, Paul Clampitt, Bob Eder, Clint Funderberg, Scott Hartzell, Harrison Ibach, Dave Kasheta, Poggy Lapham, David Lethin, and Larry Thevik to the team.

For more information

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- Acronyms and Definitions

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