



# Priorities for Fiscal Year 2025

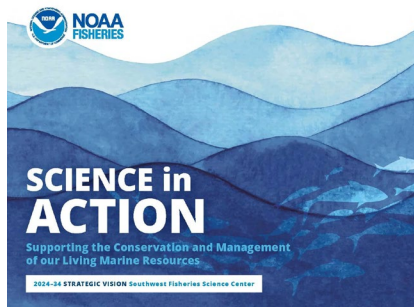
Reference: [FY2025 NOAA Fisheries Priorities](#)

## Purpose

This Southwest Fisheries Science Center (SWFSC) Annual Priorities Memo (APM) for Fiscal Year 2025 defines our mission in support of NOAA Fisheries and the activities most critical to achieving them in the coming year. It also acknowledges our fiscal landscape, as well as our strategic approach and funding priorities for meeting our core mission while maintaining focus on emerging needs.

## Our Mission

Our mission is to generate and communicate the scientific information necessary for the conservation and management of the Southwest region's living marine resources.



We are guided by our Congressional legislative mandates, goals and priorities. We are also guided by the strategic planning documents of the [Department of Commerce](#), [NOAA](#), [NOAA Fisheries](#) and the [West Coast Region](#) and the [SWFSC 10-year Strategic Vision](#). Additional documents outline work plans and areas of emphasis and emerging needs for the NOAA Fisheries and SWFSC (see [Appendix A](#)). Collectively, these documents and initiatives represent our core mission and emerging needs for FY25.

## Fiscal Landscape

With this APM we lay out a vision for FY25, recognizing that in this year we are at the confluence of both tremendous opportunity, particularly with the resources included in the historic Inflation Reduction Act, as well as substantial challenges. We are well into IRA execution and are beginning to see the benefits of these additional resources on our surveys, laboratory analyses, modeling work, and provision of scientific advice in support of our mandates and core to our 10-Year Vision. We also continue to be challenged by the rate of change occurring in our regional ecosystems, keeping up with technology shifts, and the growing requirements for managing the day-to-day of our

work. Our objectives and success metrics are substantial, even as we take on more. Our Center remains committed to conducting and representing science in our region.

**Recurring “Base” Appropriations:** The President’s FY25 NOAA Budget request included decreases for the overall NOAA Fisheries budget, with the exception of a few targeted increases to support assessing and minimizing the effects of offshore wind activities. At this time, Congress has not yet passed a full-year appropriation and we are operating under a three-month Continuing Resolution until December 27.

Our Center Management Fund, the portion of our budget used to administer and support all of our science programs (e.g. HR, procurement, IT, facilities, etc.), is currently stabilized at the level of FY22. SWFSC’s facilities, while some of the newest in NOAA Fisheries, are aging and those costs are rising along with inflationary costs for other science support. Depending upon the final Center budget appropriation, we will assess our Management Fund to determine whether adjustments are necessary. In addition, increased agency fee-for-service programs within NOAA to support corporate services will continue to shift resources toward greater efficiencies.

**Reimbursable and Partnership funding:** SWFSC routinely accepts funding from other federal agencies when we are best positioned to do work that benefits both agencies. In some cases, we rely on other partners to help achieve our objectives. As has become common, much of the work planned for FY25 will not be accomplished without partnerships and leveraging of funds. These include funding from other federal and state agencies to support salmonid recovery and other Endangered Species Act (ESA) and Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) activities (e.g., abalone, cetaceans, turtles and aquaculture). These types of partnerships have become integral to how we accomplish our mission.

**Inflation Reduction Act funding:** In late FY22, Congress passed the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), a bill that includes substantial [five-year funding for NOAA \(\\$3.3B\)](#). NOAA Fisheries has received an unprecedented appropriation to tackle climate change in [several critical areas](#): including \$349 million for Climate-Ready Fisheries, as well as investments in several other areas. The SWFSC received nearly \$20M in IRA funding in FY23 and FY24 and expects another approximately \$6M combined in FY25 and FY26 within the Climate-Ready Fisheries category for several research projects and activities associated with Pacific Salmon, Essential Data Acquisition, and the Climate, Ecosystems and Fisheries Initiative IRA Subcomponents.

The IRA funding represents a historic opportunity to integrate new, temporary funding into our Center’s efforts to transform how we address the challenges mentioned above and in our 10-Year Strategic Vision. The administration and execution of these funds will drive our success and thus be priorities. We will work within available resources in FY25 and FY26 to execute the funding we have been given using guidance from our Headquarters offices and in conjunction with our Regional Office, tribal and other partners. Specific IRA investments are noted below within the Core and High Priorities.

### Three-Year Outlook (FY25-27)

The following list represents our most significant efforts, organized by the goals of our 10-year Strategic Vision, that we reasonably expect to accomplish over the next three years. [This table](#) provides a list of additional activities tied to our decadal Vision.

#### **Vision Goal 1: Foundational and Breakthrough Science (FY25-27)**

- Pacific salmon – Over the next few years, IRA funding is being used to dramatically accelerate ongoing efforts to develop information and tools that aim to improve decisions toward salmon recovery. This work will be done in collaboration with cooperative institute partners, following the guidance and outcomes in our recent [salmon recovery science strategy](#).
- Integrated West Coast Pelagics Survey fully operational by 2025/26 – Over the next two years, IRA funding is being used to complete integration of the West Coast pelagics surveys for coastal pelagics and hake.
- West Coast Cetacean Assessment Survey – In FY25, IRA funding will be used to complete the execution of a cetacean assessment survey and follow-on analyses to produce abundance estimates and surface densities used in our annual Pacific Stock Assessment Reports. Completion of new marine mammal survey software for use by all NOAA Fisheries Science Centers will also be accomplished.
- West Coast Climate, Ecosystems, and Fisheries Initiative (CEFI) Decision Support Team Formation and Initial Products – IRA funding is being used by SWFSC, working with NWFSC, to support its CEFI Decision Support Team and deliver initial products toward Climate Ready Fisheries.
- Offshore Wind Energy advancements – We will begin implementation of our West Coast Offshore Wind Strategic Science Plan, with particular emphasis on establishing a long-term monitoring program to evaluate potential ecosystem effects of wind-energy development.

#### **Vision Goal 2: Science Force Multipliers**

- Partnerships – We will prioritize building new partnerships with tribal, university, federal and state organizations to establish trust in new areas, particularly offshore wind, and to implement IRA priorities, particularly for Pacific salmon.
- Infrastructure – Spearhead effort with OMAO to codify a UxS best practice document for NOAA and implement such practices to augment and better utilize available research-vessel resources.
- Data Governance – Implement several new Openscapes workflows to increase efficiencies; Meet new Public Access to Research Results requirements by 2026.

#### **Vision Goal 3: Mission Enablers**

- Recruit and maintain a diverse, highly capable workforce through continued investments in paid internship and training opportunities.

- Use new IRA Communications resources to expand development of stories and other outreach materials regarding Pacific salmon and other IRA investments

## FY25 Priorities

We continue with our annual priority-based resource allocation process that consists of:

1. A [West Coast Geographic Strategic Plan](#) and supporting SWFSC 10-Year Strategic Vision;
2. Descriptions for each Major Activity in the Center;
3. Ranking Criteria (based on NMFS Criteria) (see Appendix B);
4. Annual Priorities Memo;
5. Priority and Risk-Based Allocations of Funding;
6. Performance Plans Aligned with Center's Prioritized Activities and SES Performance Plan; and
7. Communication to Staff.

**NMFS GOAL 1: Adaptively manage fisheries for sustainability and economic competitiveness to grow the Blue Economy.** (from *NMFS FY25 Priorities and Guidance*)

The Center provides the science which serves as the basis for federal fishery management. The scientific advice we provide to the NOAA Fisheries West Coast Region (Region), the Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council), and international management bodies allows the establishment of annual catch limits while preventing overfishing and continuing protection of marine ecosystems and listed species. Our work under this goal also supports efforts to advance aquaculture science for finfish.

The following are **core priorities** for SWFSC base programs under this goal in FY25:

- Stock assessments, high priority economic analyses and fisheries surveys for Coastal Pelagic Species (CPS), Highly Migratory Species (HMS), Groundfish, and Pacific salmon. Within this list, priority will be given to stocks that are commercially and/or recreationally fished in California Current Large Marine Ecosystem (CCLME) waters and have significant economic impacts on the West Coast, as well as those identified through Treaties and international agreements with Regional Fishery Management Organizations (e.g. CCAMLR, WCPFC/ISC). Specific activities include benchmark stock assessments of groundfish stocks decided upon by Pacific Fisheries Management Council, Pacific sardine stock assessment update, and Pacific salmon stock abundance and fishing effort forecasts for 2025, as well as Antarctic assessment activities in support of CCAMLR.
- Completion of first operational CCLME Integrated West Coast Pelagics Survey for CPS and hake (IRA-supported).
- Participation in Take Reduction Teams; bycatch monitoring and identification in CCLME fisheries.

- Regional implementation of the NOAA Climate, Ecosystem and Fisheries Initiative (IRA-supported).
- Additional steps toward integration of the CPS summer survey with NWFSC's hake survey (IRA-supported).

**High priorities** for SWFSC base programs under this goal in FY25 as funding allows:

- Management Strategy Evaluation for Pacific bluefin tuna, requested by international Regional Fishery Management Organizations, the Pacific Fisheries Management Council and WCR.
- Select fisheries surveys and life history studies and activities (outside those outlined under Core Priorities) that support the above core priorities.
- Ecosystem research to continue implementation of the agency's Ecosystem Based Fisheries Management Roadmap and U.S. strategic interests in Antarctica.
- Aquaculture-related priorities will continue to include: research and out-planting toward recovery of white abalone (a Species in the Spotlight) and research on yellowtail tuna species.
- Research to understand offshore wind energy's impacts on trust resources and on our research surveys (IRA-supported).

**NMFS GOAL 2: Safeguard protected species and propel their recovery** (from *NMFS FY25 Priorities and Guidance*)

The Center conducts science that contributes to the recovery of species listed under the Endangered Species Act and/or the Marine Mammal Protection Act, and the protection of their habitats.

**Core priorities** for SWFSC base programs under this goal in FY25:

- Completion of FY24-25 CA Current marine mammal survey (IRA-supported)
- Updated marine mammal assessments (abundance and trends, population structure, health and condition, and placement into an ecosystem context) for CCLME species under the Marine Mammal Protection Act. (IRA-supported)
- Highest priority Recovery Plan research actions for ESA-listed species, especially (but not limited to) Species in the Spotlight (Pacific leatherback turtles, Sacramento River winter run Chinook salmon, Central California Coast coho salmon, and white abalone).
- ESA-listed marine turtle monitoring, modeling, research and assessments, especially for Species in the Spotlight Leatherback turtles.
- Research, management, and support activities focused on ESA-listed Species in the Spotlight winter run Chinook and California coastal coho salmon, as well as Upper Klamath Basin coho, to support WCRO decision-making (including dam removal and reintroductions and translocations). (IRA-supported)
- ESA listing petitions requiring science support.

- Bycatch monitoring and identification in CCLME fisheries.
- Highest priority activities to address the effects of climate change on protected species, especially those with temporary funding support from IRA. (IRA-supported)

**High priorities** for SWFSC base programs under this goal in FY25 as funding allows:

- High priority research in support of ESA Distinct Population Segments.
- CCLME whale entanglement risk assessments.
- Commitments to outside agencies, such as the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, Bureau of Ocean Energy Management and U.S. Navy to support our core MMPA and ESA mandate priorities.
- High priority research to understand potential impacts of offshore wind energy development on ESA-listed and protected species trust resources.
- High priority research to reduce or mitigate threats to Antarctic fur seals that breed in the South Shetland Islands, Antarctica.

**NMFS GOAL 3: Diversify our workforce and support our mission accomplishment through organizational excellence** (from *NMFS FY25 Priorities and Guidance*)

**Core priorities** for SWFSC base programs under this goal in FY25:

- Core management/operations, including mandatory computing upgrades and funded facility maintenance and repair.
- Implementation of innovative technologies that increase information content per unit of cost while reducing overall costs (e.g. UxS systems and 'Omics)
- Storing, processing, analyzing and making publicly accessible large data streams (i.e. cloud computing) being generated by innovative technologies.
- Training and development of staff, as well as increasing diversity, inclusion and accessibility efforts to provide opportunities to our workforce and bolster our ability to withstand attrition.

**High priorities** for SWFSC base programs under this goal for FY25:

- Implementation of innovative technologies that serve as asset multipliers to improve spatial or temporal survey coverage for purposes of addressing questions related to wind energy, climate change, etc.
- Implementation of agency-funded facilities projects and full completion of the Antarctic Cape Shirreff field camp facilities.
- Providing infrastructure to store, process, and analyze data streams (i.e. cloud computing) generated by innovative technologies.

While we will continue our efforts to tighten our scientific focus in FY25, we expect the base resources available to support research in the Southwest will likely remain considerable. We will need to make strategic decisions in FY25 on the activities we choose to conduct and those not noted above as core or high priority will be examined

for continuation or sunset. However, any selection of programs to be eliminated, or reduced in scale, will be done strategically and transparently.

## **Strategic Approaches for Addressing Priorities:**

### **Partnerships**

Partnerships have long been important to carrying out our work, and that importance will continue in FY25. Center scientists are empowered to seek external funds to support the above priorities, as needed. Any external funds or partnerships sought must serve to meet the Center's priorities above and have the support of Division Directors and the Center Management Team.

### **Cost Containment**

We expect future budget constraints will hamper our ability to collect core data and address emerging fisheries, marine mammal/turtle and operational issues. Our people are by far our greatest asset and staffing costs are by far our largest expense. These rise each year on average by 3-6% and we generally do not receive commensurate increases in budget to cover these costs. We also face increased maintenance expenses from aging facilities. Given these challenges and those outlined above we look to innovate and partner in new ways to collect and analyze data. We will continue to take steps to contain these costs over the short and longer term to allow SWFSC to devote adequate resources to support research operations.

### **Alignment of Research Activities and Workforce Capabilities**

In this environment, we will need to focus on providing SWFSC science advice and services based on trade-offs between internal base funding levels, staffing requirements, technological advances, strategic partnerships and shared priorities among the SWFSC, West Coast Regional Office, Pacific Fishery Management Council, and NMFS Headquarters. The following strategies will be used to align our workforce capabilities and research activities with fiscal realities:

- Use reassignments where possible to fill labor shortfalls
- Use SWFSC resource allocation process to incentivize this workforce realignment
- Continue progress in research integration through cross-divisional staff integration
- Continue efforts to control federal and contract labor costs through hiring limits

### **Conclusion**

In FY25, SWFSC will proceed with our plans to continue to deliver high-quality scientific advice to our management partners in the Southwest, nationally, and internationally. We expect the need to prioritize our work will increase. Our highly trained and professional staff will work together to achieve our highest priorities for the year in support of our mission for fisheries, protected species, and ecosystem-based management.

## Appendix A – Strategic Guidance Documents

In addition to the DOC and NMFS strategic plans, multiple plans and strategy documents external to the Center guide our activities each year. These include, but are not limited to, the [NOAA Fisheries Seafood Strategy](#), [NOAA Fisheries Climate Science Strategy](#) and associated [Western Regional Action Plan](#); [NOAA Fisheries Ecosystem Based Fishery Management Policy, Roadmap](#) and [Western Regional Implementation Plan](#); [Southwest Fisheries Science Center Decadal Strategy for Pacific Salmon Recovery Science](#); [NOAA Fisheries Equity and Environmental Justice Strategy](#); and planning documents of partner agencies with shared objectives. NMFS has also identified nine species occurring in US waters that require immediate action to prevent extinction, but that have prospects for improvement from conservation actions; five of the nine occur within the West Coast Region. This “[Species in the Spotlight](#)” is a major agency initiative to change the trajectory of these species and place them on the road to recovery and SWFSC is the primary science provider for most of them.

## Appendix B - Criteria for SWFSC Activity Assessment<sup>1</sup>

### Key Questions and Evaluation Scale

1. Mission Requirement: Is the activity, requirement, or service specifically directed by statute or mandate (citable)? This may include judicial orders, treaties, conventions, or budget language.
  - a. Yes (5 points)
  - b. No (0 points)
  
2. Substitutability: Is the activity, requirement, or service unique to your FMC?...Unique to NOAA Fisheries? Can the effort (or similar effort) be executed by a partner, state/local entity, or other organization?
  - a. Unique to SWFSC (5 points)
  - b. Unique to NMFS (3 points)
  - c. Could be done by another entity. (0 points)
  
3. Strategic Alignment: Does the activity, requirement, or service directly (citable) address SWFSC Priorities and Annual Guidance?
  - a. Yes (5 points)
  - b. No (0 points)
  
4. Return on Investment: Is the expected return on investment of executing the activity, requirement, or service considered high (proof, evidence of

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<sup>1</sup> \* NMFS criteria adapted to SWFSC.



performance)? What is the value of the anticipated outcome (e.g., agency indices increased, more fish available to fishers, more species assessed, improved assessments, fewer violations, greater seafood production, better environmental information provided to managers, habitat limitations removed)?

- a. High return/value; near-term benefit (5 points)
  - b. Moderate return/value; medium-term benefit (2 points)
  - c. Lower return/value; long time to see return (0 points)
5. Risk if not funded: What are the political risks (list them) associated with not investing in the activity, requirement, or service? Environmental risks (list them)? Economic risks (list them)? Are the risks short-term, long-term?
- a. High risk (5 points)
  - b. Moderate risk (3 points)
  - c. Low risk (0 points)
6. Capacity to Execute: Is there current infrastructure (e.g., facility, expertise, funding) in place to effectively support the activity, requirement, or service? Has the activity, requirement, or service been executed successfully in the past (identify evidence)? Is the agency goal of the activity, requirement, or service likely to be met (define goal) by this investment?
- a. We've done it before and can do it again (5 points)
  - b. New activity but we have what is needed to do it (3 points)
  - c. Crucial support is missing (0 points)