

HABITAT COMMITTEE REPORT ON CURRENT HABITAT ISSUES

Fishing Gear Effects Database - The [Fishing Gear Effects on Marine Habitats Database](#) and associated interactive online application (app) are officially available for broad distribution. The database and app compile and share literature on the impacts of fishing gear on marine fish habitats across the United States and U.S. Territories to serve as a comprehensive and accessible resource for fishery managers, researchers, and stakeholders. At the September 2024 meeting, the Habitat Committee (HC) provided the Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) with an overview, and now we recommend that the interested parties try the app and submit relevant publications via the app. This database will be a useful resource for essential fish habitat (EFH) reviews and other Council management actions.

Highly Migratory Species (HMS) EFH - Amendment 8 to the HMS Fishery Management Plan, which includes the updates to the EFH components approved by the Council in November 2023, was approved by National Marine Fisheries Service on October 21, 2024. The [Notice of Agency Decision](#) was published in the Federal Register on October 28, 2024. Updated spatial data (and metadata) will be included in the [EFH Mapper](#) as soon as possible.

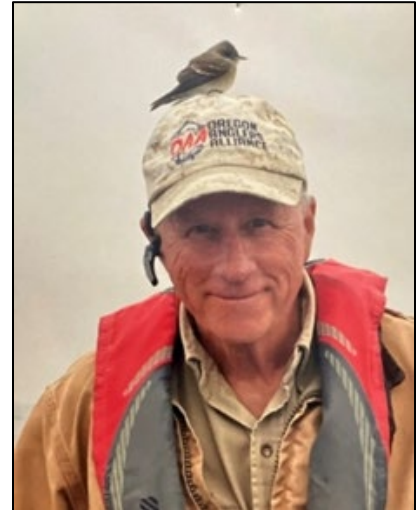
Undersea Wine Cellar - Underwater wine aging, a small but potentially locally impactful new estuary/nearshore activity, has been proposed for [estuaries in Oregon](#). The Oregon Ocean Policy Advisory Council (OPAC) has tasked its Scientific and Technical Advisory Committee (STAC) with considering the potential impacts of this activity. The HC will track the OPAC/STAC process and report back to the Council as appropriate.

Biogeochemical Cycling and Benthic Disturbance - Dr. Clare Reimers and Adrienne Chan, both with Oregon State University (OSU), gave a presentation regarding collaborative research with the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife on biogeochemical cycling and benthic disturbance on the outer shelf off Oregon. The amount of carbon stored in the upper 1 meter of marine sediments is substantial and concentrated in the coastal ocean, with one approximation as high as five times the amount stored in all terrestrial vegetation based on current global carbon budget estimates. The burial of marine carbon, and its potential release due to trawling disturbance, has new relevance in the context of climate change. There is insufficient information to make global projections about marine carbon released from trawling, but generalizations can be made. The OSU researchers recognized the Trawl Rockfish Conservation Area (RCA), which prohibited most bottom trawling between 2002-2019, as an opportunity to collect baseline information on representative habitats, associated biota, and biogeochemical fluxes, and evaluate effects of bottom trawling in newly opened areas. Although the research is ongoing, they have already gathered important baseline information, determined the sediment biogeochemistry of the area can be classified as “normal marine” with relatively high organic carbon accumulation rates, found in video surveys at the end of the 18-year closure (in 2019) relatively minimal visual evidence of trawl tracks or other anthropogenic features, and found renewed trawl activity was highest where it was historically high with large RCA areas still untrawled. Although it will require investment, they plan to continue the surveys and develop models to predict the potentially wider ecosystem impacts. To that end they are already working to use the data they’ve collected to inform a detailed sediment

submodel for the California Current Atlantis Model. The model could be used to investigate how historical trawling may have affected the broader California Current Ecosystem (CCE) or test different trawl management scenario effects on local and CCE-wide ecology. The HC intends to keep apprised of this research.

Leonard Krug - In Memoriam

Leonard was appointed to the Sport Fishing seat on the Council's Habitat Committee in September 2022. He was a committed recreational fisherman and a dedicated member of the HC in the two years he served. Although new to the Council process, he dove right in, contributing to HC discussions and learning the complex ways of the HC and the Council. Leonard passed away doing what he loved - halibut fishing off the Southern Oregon Coast. The HC will remember Leonard fondly and will miss his presence and dedication to supporting recreational fisheries.



PFMC
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