

HABITAT COMMITTEE REPORT ON HABITAT ISSUES

The Habitat Committee (HC) met virtually June 2, 2025, to discuss current habitat-related issues. The following report highlights relevant items for Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) consideration.

National Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) Oil and Gas Leasing Program - At the [direction of Interior Secretary](#) Doug Burgum (in response to Executive Order 14154, “[Unleashing American Energy](#)”), the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) has initiated a [new five-year OCS Oil and Gas Leasing Program](#) (Program) to replace the current (2024-2029) Leasing Program. Currently, oil and gas leasing off West Coast states is prohibited, under former President Biden’s Executive Order 14008. On April 30, 2025, BOEM published a [Request for Information](#) in the Federal Register on the new Program. The new Program identifies 27 planning areas in three OCS Regions (Pacific OCS, Alaska OCS, Gulf of America OCS). BOEM is requesting information on the uses of the sea and seabed, marine productivity and environmental sensitivity, including fisheries, navigation, existing or proposed sea lanes, military activities, subsea cables, potential offshore alternative energy sites, potential sites of deepwater ports, and other anticipated uses of the resources and space of the OCS. The 45-day public comment period closes June 16, 2025. Given this timeline, the HC does not advise the Council to comment on the RFI but does want to bring this to the Council’s attention. Also for the Council’s attention, the states of California, Oregon, and Washington will be commenting on BOEM’s proposal to open the Pacific OCS to oil and gas leasing. The HC will be tracking this process and will report back to the Council as things progress. The HC expects the Council will want to comment on this important Federal action at the next opportunity. For reference, the Council’s 2018 comment letter on the current Oil and Gas Lease Program is linked below. <https://www.pcouncil.org/documents/2018/03/2018-letter-to-doi-on-oil-and-gas-leases.pdf/>

Columbia River System Operations (CRSO) environmental review - The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Bureau of Reclamation (co-lead agencies) are extending the public comment period deadline for the CRSO Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) to August 15, 2025. The co-lead agencies are expected to announce virtual informational meetings this summer. In early April, the co-lead agencies delayed the virtual meetings and extended the scoping period in response to the Council on Environmental Quality’s removal of National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) implementing regulations. This delay allowed the agencies time to assess any NEPA process changes, align agency objectives, and better describe their proposal to the public for more informed feedback during the scoping period. In March 2025, Council directed the HC to develop a draft comment letter. The states and Tribes are working to coordinate comments on the Notice of Intent and pending that coordination, the HC will prepare a draft comment letter on behalf of the Council for a Quick Response review.

Hells Canyon Hydropower Relicensing - After a series of delays, the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) Division of Hydropower Licensing informed Idaho Power Company on April 23, 2025, that the updated schedule for issuance of a draft and final SEIS would be no later than September 2025 and May 2026, respectively. This SEIS addresses the effects of relicensing

the Hells Canyon Project. In June 2023, the Council requested the Habitat Committee respond to the SEIS and we will continue to track this evolving timeline.

Yuba River Resilience Initiative agreement - This agreement is a joint project with the state of California and the local Yuba Water Agency. According to [NOAA](#), the project will provide reliable irrigation water sources for the agricultural economy of California's Central Valley, while allowing fish to reach new habitat that will benefit local salmon populations as well as sport and commercial fisheries. The [Yuba River Resilience Initiative](#) includes infrastructure improvements to support agriculture while also benefiting fish, and includes preserving existing flow agreements. On April 25, 2025, Yuba Water, California Department of Fish and Wildlife, and the National Marine Fisheries Service formalized the [comprehensive restoration agreement](#) for the Yuba River, which includes a unique project to help salmon and other threatened fish get around Daguerre Point Dam in the lower Yuba River. The collaborative agreement includes major actions to help recover imperiled fish:

- **Construction of a new fishway** (a channel resembling a natural river) that salmon, steelhead, sturgeon, and lamprey can follow to get around the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' Daguerre Point Dam to reach more than 10 miles of healthy spawning habitat in the lower Yuba River.
- **Construction of a modernized water diversion at Daguerre Point Dam** to supply irrigation water south of the lower Yuba River that will protect fish passing the intake.
- **Initiation of a comprehensive reintroduction program** to support recovery efforts of spring-run Chinook salmon with a goal of returning them to their original habitat in the North Yuba River above New Bullards Bar.

Marine Heatwave Impacts on Maturity and Growth of a Nearshore Rockfish in the Northeast Pacific Ocean - Dr. Scott Heppell, Habitat Committee Chair, presented new work (in press, Rosemond et al; Ecological Applications) on how Marine Heatwaves (MHWs) affect reproductive output and growth of black rockfish. Water temperature is a well-recognized component of freshwater habitat, but less focus has been placed on understanding how elevated temperatures affect marine species. Rosemond et al. collected samples across multiple years, with a focus on the intense MHW of 2014-16 and during cooler and less intense MHW years from 2017-2021 to identify impacts of warmer waters on reproductive output in rockfish. During MHW years, age at maturity increased by 1-2 years and size at maturity increased by approximately 3 cm. More females also gave up on spawning (abortive maturation) during MHW years. The overall proportion of individuals that successfully released larvae was $\frac{1}{3}$ lower during intense MHWs. Individual fish did grow faster during MHW years, likely because energy was allocated solely to growth and not split between growth and reproduction. If the MHW is a proxy for a warmer ocean, then these results imply potential for some species to have lower productivity in the future. This work was incorporated in the 2023 Oregon black rockfish assessment (Cope et al 2023).

Habitat Committee Membership

Finally, the Habitat Committee is sad to learn that Dr. Correigh Greene has departed National Marine Fisheries Service and therefore his time with the Council's Habitat Committee has come to an end. The HC wants to acknowledge and appreciate the substantial contributions that Dr. Greene has made over the years to improving fish habitat throughout the region. In his 13 years on the HC, Dr. Greene has been instrumental in conducting salmon habitat research in the Pacific

Northwest, developing salmon ecosystem indicators (stoplight tables), and ably chairing and vice-chairing the Habitat Committee itself. Correigh's presence and leadership will be missed.

Council Action

There is no Council Action for habitat issues at this time, but there will likely be a Quick Response comment letter on the Columbia River CRSO over the summer.

Citations

Rosemond, R.C., Head, M., and S.A. Heppell. 2025. Marine Heatwave Impacts on Maturity and Growth of a Nearshore Rockfish in the Northeast Pacific Ocean. *Ecological Applications*, in press.

Cope, J.M., A.D. Whitman, A.M. Berger, L.K. Rasmuson, and R. C. Rosemond. 2023. Status of Black Rockfish (*Sebastes melanops*) in 2023 in state and federal waters off Oregon. Pacific Fishery Management Council, Portland, Oregon. 248p.

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