

HABITAT COMMITTEE REPORT ON CURRENT HABITAT ISSUES

The Habitat Committee (HC) will meet September 17 – 18, 2026, in conjunction with the September Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) meeting, to discuss current habitat-related issues and develop supplemental reports for Council consideration as necessary.

For the September 2026 Council meeting, the HC is submitting this Supplemental HC Report 1 in advance of the Council meeting. Supplemental HC Report 1 contains brief summaries of issues that may be of interest to the Council. Providing a summary of the issues in advance will give Council members, Advisory Bodies, and members of the public more time to read the report and prepare for follow up discussion. The HC will discuss additional issues during its September meeting and may provide additional details and/or recommendations for Council action on issues summarized in this report. These will be captured in Supplemental HC Report 2.

NATIONAL

National Fish Habitat Partnership Program

The National Fish Habitat Partnership (NFHP) recently released its [2026-2030 National Fish Habitat Action Plan](#), reaffirming a nationwide, partnership-based approach to conserving fish habitat through coordinated, science-based, and voluntary conservation efforts. The plan highlights the importance of broad stakeholder participation, including commercial and recreational fishing interests, marine fisheries councils, tribes, state and federal agencies, and conservation organizations. The Action Plan includes a goal to increase fishing community participation in fish habitat conservation by ensuring that at least 75 percent of FHP steering committees include representatives of commercial, recreational, or other fishing interests by 2030. Several of the plan's priorities also align closely with issues regularly addressed by the Council including aquatic connectivity and fish passage, science-based habitat assessment, estuarine and coastal wetland conservation, and landscape-scale coordination to improve fish habitat across freshwater, estuarine, and marine ecosystems.

Currently, there is an NFHP Board seat dedicated to a representative from fishery management councils and is currently occupied by the Director of the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council. This board seat may become available as the terms of the current role expire in February 2027. The HC previously [reported](#) on this topic in November 2025.

Presentation to the National Academy of Sciences Engineering and Medicine (NASEM) Ad Hoc Committee on *A Research Strategy for Seabed Critical Mineral Resources*

On June 29, 2026, Scott Heppell (Oregon State University; HC Chair) presented to the NASEM Ad Hoc committee *A Research Strategy for Seabed Critical Mineral Resources* on the potential impacts of deep-sea mining on fish populations, habitats, and fisheries. Dr. Heppell used this opportunity to bring fisheries concerns to the NASEM committee and framed the conversation through the lens of essential fish habitat, fish performance, and fishing activity impacts, and proposed an initial series of research topics to address some of these concerns. Dr. Heppell emphasized that deep-sea mining has the potential to have both benthic and water column impacts

through direct seafloor alteration and through the process of mineral transport to the surface and the creation of sediment plumes. Pelagic fish distributions are closely linked to thermal fronts and temperature gradients, water clarity, chlorophyll concentration contrasts, oxygen minimum zones, and light levels. Changes in thermal structure caused by discharge of deep, cold water in the water column, increased turbidity from sediment plumes, disruption of visual foraging environments, and noise impacts on acoustically sensitive species could affect movement patterns, habitat selection, and feeding success, and therefore population productivity. There is also the possibility of food web disruption if the connections between surface waters and the mesopelagic zone are altered. Fish larvae and adults may respond differently because they occupy different habitats and have different feeding requirements. Fish responses are likely to vary substantially among species, life stages, ocean regions, and fisheries, making broad extrapolations unreliable. Dr. Heppell emphasized that from a fisheries perspective the ultimate concern for changes in habitat or performance is how those changes may affect fisheries through shifts in fish distributions, reduced growth or reproductive output, changes in catchability and fishery access, increased fishing costs (fuel, travel time), and lower stock productivity and harvest quotas.

Dr. Heppell proposed an initial series of research questions and noted that for any of this research we likely cannot extrapolate across species, life history stages, ocean basins, or mesopelagic domains given the global diversity of mesopelagic systems and the species that inhabit them, and we likely cannot extrapolate results across fisheries. **The take home message:** Deep-sea mining could affect fisheries through both direct habitat loss and indirect changes to ocean conditions, food webs, fish behavior, and fish physiology. Dr. Heppell argued that significant research is needed before impacts on commercially and culturally important fish populations can be confidently assessed.

Endangered Species Act (ESA) Regulations Update

The HC notes that a [Final Rule](#) rescinding the regulatory definition of “harm” from ESA regulations was finalized on July 14, 2026, and goes into effect September 14, 2026. The HC reported on this topic in [November 2025](#).

REGIONAL

Northwest Power and Conservation Council’s Fish and Wildlife Program

The Northwest Power and Conservation Council (NPCC) adopted an updated Columbia River Basin Fish and Wildlife program ([Final Program - 2026](#)) in June of 2026. The program fulfills mandates under the Pacific Northwest Electric Power Planning and Conservation Act of 1980 (Northwest Power Act), which requires Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) to protect, mitigate, and enhance fish and wildlife affected by the Federal Columbia River Power System. It is updated every five years and sets the operational and project guidelines for hydropower operations, habitat restoration, and mitigation. The process to develop the 2026 program began in January of 2025 with a solicitation of recommendations from the relevant federal and state fish and wildlife agencies and the region’s Indian tribes along with public feedback. The final program was approved in June 2026 with the following updates to the program:

- Keeping water moving for migrating fish at critical times while still meeting regional energy needs
- Continuing to restore critical habitat throughout the Columbia Basin

- Protecting and improving infrastructure like fish screens, fish passage, hatcheries, and land purchases
- Managing predation in areas most likely to improve salmon and steelhead survival
- Measuring progress towards achieving the Council’s goals and objectives

Additional information relevant to the 2026 Program can be found on the NPCC’s fish and Wildlife website ([Fish and Wildlife](#)).

Klamath River

In a split decision, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals affirmed the district court’s ruling in *Yurok Tribe v. U.S. Bureau of Reclamation* (N.D. Cal. 2023), holding that Section 7(a)(2) of the ESA applies to Reclamation’s Klamath Project operations. The majority held that Reclamation retains sufficient contractual and statutory discretion over Project operations, including those affecting water allocation, to trigger ESA consultation obligations. The dissent argued that the force majeure and shortage provisions in the irrigation contracts establish non-discretionary duties that do not trigger Section 7’s consultation requirements. Klamath Water Users Association and Klamath Irrigation District recently filed petitions for rehearing *en banc*. Amicus briefs have been filed representing water user and agricultural groups and several counties in Oregon. As a matter of appellate procedure, the United States does not respond unless the Court directs it to do so. Reclamation is continuing its plan to reinstate consultation over Klamath Project operations, with the goal of completing the consultation ahead of the 2027 irrigation season. This is an ambitious goal. Reclamation held a July 30 meeting with interested parties to discuss development of a new proposed action. A September 30 follow-up meeting is planned to provide an update on Reclamation’s ESA Section 7 consultation approach and path forward for the Klamath Project Operating Plan and to offer an opportunity for comments and questions. The HC has reported on this topic multiple times in the past.

Ocean Observatories Initiative

At the June 2026 Council meeting, the HC reported (F.1.a Supplemental [HC Report 1](#)) that the U.S. National Science Foundation (NSF) had begun dismantling the Ocean Observatories Initiative (OOI) Major Facility, a comprehensive ocean observing network consisting of approximately 900 instruments and sensors deployed off Oregon, Washington, North Carolina, the Subarctic Pacific, and the Irminger Sea between Greenland and Iceland. The OOI’s Coastal Endurance Array consists of multiple components in Pacific Northwest ocean waters, including cabled sensors, gliders, and research moorings that collect data used for numerous applications and purposes. The University of Washington (UW) operates the cabled sensors. Oregon State University operates the research moorings and gliders.

After the June meeting, several U.S. Senators sent a [letter](#), urging the NSF to reverse course on dismantling the OOI. NSF subsequently did reverse course and announced plans to redeploy the Coastal Endurance Array equipment and instruments that had been removed. Also in June, the U.S. Senate passed Senate Bill 4822, the “[Save the OOI Act](#)” to prevent descoping of the OOI until a thorough review is completed.

Several moorings are scheduled for redeployment aboard the R/V *Revelle* in early October, including the Oregon and Washington Shelf surface moorings and the Washington Offshore

Profiler Mooring. Redeploying these moorings ahead of the developing El Niño will restore continuous observations of winds, waves, and water column conditions throughout the fall and winter. Planning is also underway for redeployments in the spring of 2027 that will fully restore mooring and glider operations across the Endurance Array. However, some subsurface cabled sensors operated by UW off Oregon will remain offline. The reason for those cabled sensors remaining offline is unclear.

On August 27, 2026, NSF issued a “dear colleague” [letter](#) requesting “*input on priorities, strategies and technologies for future NSF ocean observing systems to effectively support scientific and societal needs.*” The letter poses several specific questions and encourages responses from a wide variety of respondents. Comments are due by September 30, 2026.

CALIFORNIA

California Artificial Reef Program Plan Draft

The California Artificial Reef Program (CARP) was established in 1985 (Fish and Game Code §§ 6420 - 6425) and was never fully implemented due to lack of allocated resources. The CARP is administered by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) and is now making progress to become a state supported plan. This includes providing guidance on artificial reef materials, design, siting, monitoring and permitting, along with design criteria for increasing fish and invertebrate production in state waters.

The finalized plan is intended to serve as an evidence-based, stakeholder-informed guide to ensure that future potential artificial reef projects maximize benefits and minimize negative impacts. While the comment period for the [draft CARP](#) closed on September 4, the document remains available for review.

California Salmon Strategy Update Report March 2025- June 2026

The [California Salmon Strategy](#), introduced in January 2024, is a state-led initiative aimed at combating the decline in salmon populations. The report describes major progress made towards supporting salmon populations and protecting their habitats. The report highlights improvements in California salmon populations, resulting in California’s commercial and recreational ocean salmon fisheries being opened for the first time in three years. The report emphasizes actions taken that help improve salmon survival during drought and in a warmer climate, including restoring salmon habitat, removing barriers, improving flows and reconnecting rivers.

NOAA Decision for Evaluation of the California Coastal Management Program

On May 20, 2026, the Department of Commerce issued a [press release](#) announcing its intent to conduct a new full, formal review of California’s Coastal Management Program (CCMP), which includes the California Coastal Commission, the California Coastal Conservancy, and the San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission. On June 26, NOAA issued a [Notice of Public Meeting and Request for Comments](#) (which closed August 22, 2026) on the evaluation of the CCMP. The HC notes that a review of the CCMP was completed in 2024 and it is unusual to initiate a review so soon after completion of a prior review.

California Senate Bill 605 Wave and Tidal Energy Update

Senate Bill ([SB](#)) [605](#) directed the California Energy Commission (CEC) to evaluate the feasibility of using wave and tidal energy as forms of clean energy in consultation with appropriate state agencies, and to identify suitable sea space for offshore wave and tidal energy projects. The draft final report contains a summary of the previous three consultant reports published in [2024](#) and [2025](#) and outlines considerations for the development of wave and tidal energy in California. In addition, CEC staff are planning a remote public workshop on the draft final report on September 30, 2026. The draft final report and combined notice of availability, workshop notice, and request for comments will be posted in September, with the comment period planned to close on November 4, 2026. The Council's Marine Planning Committee reported on this topic in [September 2024](#) and [March 2025](#). In addition, the Council submitted a comment [letter](#) on the Draft Consultant Report in May 2025.

San Francisco Bay-Delta Plan

On August 19, 2026, the California State Water Resources Control Board released its [final draft plan](#) to modernize water quality protections for the Sacramento River and San Francisco Bay-Delta. The comment period closes September 18, 2026. The timing of the release of the draft plan precluded the HC from a robust evaluation or summary of the draft plan.

PFMC
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