

**ESSENTIAL FISH HABITAT - ROCKFISH CONSERVATION AREA AMENDMENT
INFORMATIONAL UPDATE**

The Essential Fish Habitat/Rockfish Conservation Area (EFH/RCA) Project Team continues developing the analysis for potential modifications to EFH conservation areas, the trawl Rockfish Conservation Area (RCA), and closing waters deeper than 3,500 meters to all bottom contact gear. The Team reported to the Council in September that it is making progress, but has encountered challenges related to a very complex analysis and suite of alternatives. The Council asked for a progress update at the November 2017 meeting.

Issues with the data continue to require time beyond what was anticipated. Some Team members have either been reassigned or taken new positions creating heavy workloads for available Team members. However, data and technical issues have largely been resolved and the Council has contracted with Dr. Ed Waters to assist the Team with the economic analyses. The Team is currently focusing on compiling a complete Preliminary Draft Environmental Impact Statement (PDEIS) for internal review in late-January and early February 2018. The Team recommends hosting a publicly-available meeting or webinar before the April Council meeting to provide an overview of the alternatives and analyses. The PDEIS is anticipated to be ready in mid-late March for the advanced April 2018 Briefing Book.

The PDEIS will consist of six chapters. The status of each is as follows:

Chapter 1 (Introduction, Purpose and Need, etc.)	1 st draft completed and reviewed. 2 nd draft pending.
Chapter 2 (Description of Alternatives)	1 st draft completed and reviewed. 2 nd draft pending.
Chapter 3 (Affected Environment)	Pending completion of Chapter 4
Chapter 4 (Analysis of Alternatives)	1 st draft in progress.
Chapter 5 (Synthesis Alternatives)	Pending completion of Chapter 4.
Chapter 6 (Consistency with Applicable Law)	Pending completion of Chapter 4.

The Team is committed to providing information sufficient for Council action at the April 2018 meeting. The schedule is less than ideal because the time periods for review, comment, and Council action overlap the March 2018 Council meeting, the groundfish harvest specifications schedule, as well as other major workload items requiring Council staff, National Marine Fisheries Service staff, and Team member time.

The current table of alternatives is on the following page.

Subject Area	Action Alternatives						
1. EFHCA changes (re-openings and new closures)	1.a Collaborative	1.b Oceana, et al. (modified per November 2016 Agenda item F4b CDFW report)	1.c MTC* (as modified by November 2016 F.4.a Supplemental GAP Report)	1.d Garibaldi reef South (from “None” in F4a Project Team Report appendix table F4-a, November 2016)	1.e Rittenburg bank modifications in NMS report (In November 2016 Agenda item F4b Supplemental NMS Report)	1.f Potato Bank correction	1.g New EFHCAs within RCA, based on presence of priority habitats (<i>WA only</i>)**
2. Adjustments to Trawl RCA	2.a Remove the trawl RCA (PPA for OR&CA)			2.b Remove the RCA, and in WA implement discrete area closures for overfished species	2.c Remove RCA, and implement block area closures for groundfish species and protected species, particularly salmon (PPA for OR&CA)		
3. Use MSA Sec. 303(b) discretionary authorities	3.a Use MSA Sec. 303(b)(2)(A), 303(b)(2)(B), or 303(b)(12) to close waters deeper than 3,500 m to bottom contact gear, consistent with September 2015 Agenda Item H.8.a, Supplemental NMFS Report . (<i>Preliminary Preferred</i>)						

*These are found on page 32 of Agenda item F.4.c, Supplemental Public Comment 2, November 2016. This alternative is mutually exclusive with Alternative 1b.

**The Team merged all EFHCA alternatives into a single subject area, meaning that Alt 1.g is now listed along with the other EFH-related alternatives.

PFMC
11/14/17