

## **CCC Habitat Workgroup Update**

**February 2015**

### **Goals and objectives of the CCC Habitat Workgroup:**

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- At the May 2014 CCC meeting, the CCC agreed to form an informal Habitat Workgroup to engage Council staff working on habitat issues with NOAA Fisheries habitat staff, specifically to:
  - Enable enhanced coordination of Federal habitat initiatives;
  - Discuss habitat requirements and their implementation; and,
  - Allow members to share tacit knowledge, experiences, and approaches on habitat issues.

### **2014 activities and accomplishments:**

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#### **Established workgroup in July 2014:**

- Consists of staff from the New England, Mid-Atlantic, South Atlantic, Caribbean, Gulf of Mexico, North Pacific, and Western Pacific Fishery Management Councils, the NMFS Greater Atlantic, Southeast, West Coast, Alaska, and Pacific Islands Regional Offices, and the NMFS Offices of Science and Technology and Habitat Conservation.
- In 2014, the workgroup was chaired by Jessica Coakley (MAFMC). Chairmanship transferred to John Froeschke (GMFMC) in 2015. Terra Lederhouse (NMFS OHC) has and will continue to serve as coordinator for the group.
- The Workgroup has improved sharing of habitat conservation information and strategies across fishery management councils and NMFS regions.

#### **Held three calls from September – November:**

- September 2, 2014: Working group kick off, made administrative decisions, including procedure for chairmanship, and identified future discussion topics.
- October 3, 2014:
  - Discussed HAPCs, including how councils identify HAPCs, how councils and NMFS Regional Offices use HAPCs as a prioritization tool, and how councils and NMFS can improve the use of HAPCs as a tool to prioritize areas for habitat conservation.
  - Discussed how councils interact with NMFS HQ and Regions on EFH issues, and how they direct the flow of formal and informal actions/consultations.
  - Fisheries Leadership and Sustainability Forum listened in to help inform a report they are writing for the MAFMC on current practices and objectives used in the identification of critical habitat areas in the U.S. and abroad.

- November 24, 2014:
  - Discussed council approaches to EFH 5-year reviews, including how each Council/Region is meeting its EFH review requirements, aspects of EFH. conservation and management included in the EFH review, what has worked well and what challenges remain to effectively complete and EFH review, and how the EFH review process can be improved.
  - The group identified some successful EFH review approaches, practices, and lessons learned and agreed that these could be summarized into a useful reference document for the Councils. Successful approaches included:
    - Separating the EFH technical review from the FMP amendment process.
    - Conduct an “omnibus” technical review of EFH information and management measures for all species in all FMPs, including a review of methods for identifying EFH, HAPCs, and assessing gear impacts.
    - Plan-by-plan or omnibus updates to the EFH designations following an omnibus technical review.
    - Considering adverse effects minimization measures/habitat management areas/gear restrictions via omnibus amendments.
    - Develop EFH source documents with information on all aspects of habitat needs, including feeding habitat, prey, ecological interactions between species, etc., to inform the review.
  
- On each discussion topic, the workgroup discussed how councils interact with NMFS HQ and Regions on EFH issues, and how they direct the flow of formal and informal actions/consultations.

### **CCC Habitat Workgroup Next Steps**

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- 1) Continued CCC Habitat Workgroup Webinars (Quarterly) - The workgroup recommends regular webinar meetings to address specific topics and case studies across the Councils and regions. Some potential 2015 topics/case studies include:

#### Habitat science needs and approaches:

- The relationships between fisheries stock size and climate/habitat perturbations.
- GIS-analyses and modeling approaches being used to identify EFH.
- Practicability analysis approaches in each region.
- Information and research needed to implement habitat/EFH approaches, e.g., baseline data to evaluate habitat condition, expand knowledge base, etc.
- Council-Science Center coordination on habitat issues, including coordination of habitat research needs.

#### Habitat management approaches:

- MSA Reauthorization and proposed habitat revisions: concepts in the draft Administration, Senate, and House bills and implications if they move forward.

- How deep sea coral protection is addressed in each region (e.g., EFH, HAPC, DSC discretionary, or ecosystem measures).
- Addressing issues beyond fishing gears, e.g., anchoring issues, etc.
- New approaches for identifying habitat-limited species and conservation objectives to better target habitat conservation activities.

Council engagement in habitat issues:

- Council interaction with partners on habitat issues.
  - Council engagement in Federal habitat initiatives (e.g., Habitat Blueprint, Fish Habitat Partnerships, etc.).
  - How habitat advisory panels are used to engage in habitat issues.
- 2) Develop materials to assist councils in meeting their habitat requirements, including needs identified during Habitat Workgroup webinars (e.g., lessons learned/summary of successful EFH review approaches and practices).
  - 3) Discuss ways to increase the impact of the Habitat Workgroup (e.g., to promote marketing of the value of EFH and critical links between habitat and fisheries, protected resources, and coastal/ecosystem management).
  - 4) In-Person Habitat Summit to coincide with 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of EFH provisions (2016).
    - o The Summit could include representatives from the councils, NMFS, and other external partners.
    - o Potential discussion topics include:
      - Current data gaps to address habitat and EFH for federally managed fisheries. Prioritizing collection of the data needed to meet Council fisheries habitat goals.
      - Types of modeling and geospatial approaches being used regionally to address gaps and limitation in data and better characterize habitat and EFH for our federally managed species.
      - The effectiveness of EFH in meeting its originally stated/intended MSA goals. Changes in approach needed to improve the effectiveness of the current EFH designation, review, and conservation processes.

**Discussion topics and questions from CCC:**

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- Do you support the proposed path forward for the habitat workgroup?
- Do you support the Habitat Workgroup organizing a Habitat Summit? Would you support investment of NMFS and Council resources to participate in a Habitat Summit?
- Do you have other requests for the habitat workgroup, including activities, topics for discussion, or products?
- Are there any other thoughts or ideas on how to improve the effectiveness of the Habitat Workgroup?