

CCC Habitat Workgroup Summary of Recent Activities

Summary of July 2015 to February 2016 activities

The CCC Habitat Workgroups has held two quarterly conference calls during this period to discuss plans for the Essential Fish Habitat Summit and other science and management issues related to EFH.

Essential Fish Habitat Summit

The EFH Summit will be held May 17-19, 2016 in Annapolis, MD. A Steering Committee and Advisory Group have met several times to develop a draft topic agenda. Invitations have been sent to fishery management councils and NOAA Fisheries headquarters, science centers, and regional offices. Information can be found at

<http://www.fisheriesforum.org/our-work/special-projects/efh-summit>.

July Workgroup meeting: Refining Essential Fish Habitat

On the July 30, 2015 call, John Froeschke (GMFMC) gave a short presentation on the objectives of refining EFH. John noted that much of the research on refining EFH has involved efforts to identify the most productive areas for specific lifestages. However, this may be in conflict with benefits of describing EFH over large geographic regions. The group discussed management tradeoffs between maintaining broad EFH descriptions at the stock level and more narrowly defined species and lifestage-specific EFH descriptions. It was noted that a broader definition of EFH can provide greater ability for NMFS and councils to weigh in on impacts of non-fishing activities on EFH, but is less useful for identifying areas for targeted restoration or protection from fishing gear impacts. HAPCs are a tool that could be used to help identify more specific areas to inform restoration and fishery management decisions, especially if they are used to identify areas that provide vital habitat functions for multiple species.

November Workgroup meeting: Deep Sea Coral Discretionary Provisions

Michelle Bachman (NEFMC) gave a presentation during the November 2015 call on the NEFMC's separation of a coral amendment from their Habitat Amendment, and discussed MSA discretionary authority pertaining to deep sea corals which allows for protection of corals existing outside the bounds of EFH. The NEFMC's coral amendment proposes two conceptual approaches of discrete or broad coral zones with a range of management measures in place.

There was discussion on the challenges presented by defining the boundaries of coral protection zones, particularly the accommodation of both scientific information and stakeholder input and enforceability. Providing a range of alternatives from very precise to larger, more precautionary boundaries seems to be the most successful way to decide upon boundaries (thus far). Alaska staff suggested review of deep sea coral management measures by Great Britain, Ireland, and New Zealand, for further insight into boundary establishment.