

# Essential Fish Habitat Summit

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Location TBD

3 days, Late April/early May 2016 TBD

## Objective

Assess and identify opportunities and successful approaches for the effective implementation of the Magnuson-Stevens Act essential fish habitat (EFH) authorities.

## Context

In the 1996 Sustainable Fisheries Act amendments to the Magnuson-Stevens Act Congress declared, "One of the greatest long-term threats to the viability of commercial and recreational fisheries is the continuing loss of marine, estuarine and other aquatic habitats. Habitat considerations should receive increased attention for the conservation and management of fishery resources of the United States" and included new authorities and requirements for NOAA Fisheries, the regional fishery management councils, and other federal agencies to protect and conserve habitats necessary to fish for spawning, breeding, feeding, and growth to maturity. Over the last twenty years, an extensive nationwide EFH program has been implemented to identify EFH for managed fisheries, protect EFH from adverse effects of fishing, and to minimize the adverse effects from non-fishing activities. EFH has been identified for more than 1,000 managed species at multiple lifestages, and NOAA Fisheries and the regional fishery management councils have protected more than 800 million acres of EFH from fishing and non-fishing activities. This EFH Summit will bring together scientists and managers from NOAA Fisheries and the eight regional fishery management councils to assess 20 years of EFH implementation and to identify best practices, successful approaches, and novel solutions to improve the effectiveness of the national EFH program in protecting and restoring habitats essential to maintaining and rebuilding sustainable fisheries.

## Terms of Reference

- 1) Assess current state of habitat science and identify major data gaps that should be addressed at the national level.
- 2) Identify successful approaches to EFH identification and review.
- 3) Evaluate the effectiveness of actions taken to minimize adverse effects of fishing on EFH.
- 4) Identify opportunities to integrate habitat information into the fishery management process and EBFM.
- 5) Identify opportunities to ensure effective communication and coordination between NMFS and councils on non-fishing impacts.

## Products

The Habitat Workgroup may seek publication of Summit discussions and outcomes in a special issue of a journal.

## Additional details

- The Fisheries Leadership and Sustainability Forum will work with the CCC Habitat Workgroup to facilitate planning of the Summit and will provide professional facilitation services at the Summit in 2016.
- The Summit will allow for opportunities for public input.

## Proposed sessions

### 1. State of EFH science and management.

During this session, participants will receive a brief overview and discuss the current state of habitat science. Additional data and research topics will be addressed throughout all sessions focused on the remaining four TORs. Each session will also identify major data gaps that should be addressed at the national level.

### 2. EFH identification and review.

During this session, participants will receive a presentation on the status of the state of the information/science being used to identify and describe EFH, share approaches to EFH and HAPC identification, and consider what has and has not worked well. Potential discussion or trigger questions may include:

- What makes certain habitat characteristics “essential”?
- Are we any closer to level 4 than we were in 1998 and does it matter?
- Can we identify habitat-limited species?
- How can we make EFH reviews more successful?

### 3. Minimizing adverse effects of fishing on EFH.

During this session, participants will receive a presentation on the status of the state of the information/science being used to assess the impacts of fishing on EFH, evaluate the regulatory actions taken to minimize the adverse effects of fishing, and share data, models, and tools developed to aid in decision-making. Potential discussion or trigger questions may include:

- How can we develop adverse effects minimization actions, including management tools beyond closures, and determine the objectives of management measures?
- How can we choose management actions when quantitative data on fish-habitat linkages and impacts of fishing gear on habitats is not available?
- How do we define practicability and improve practicability analyses?

### 4. Integrating habitat information into EBFM.

During this session, participants will receive presentations from a fishery scientist and a fishery manager on current efforts to integrate habitat information into the fishery management process and into council efforts to implement ecosystem-based fisheries management. Participants will also discuss and identify opportunities within each region to better include habitat information into these processes. Potential discussion or trigger questions may include:

- How can we develop habitat-based control rules, indicators, etc.?
- How can we include habitat information in stock assessments and inform management strategy evaluations?
- What is the relationship between stock size and climate/habitat perturbations?

### 5. Communication and coordination between NMFS and councils on non-fishing impacts.

During this session, participants will share regional processes to engage fishery management councils in non-fishing impacts to EFH, identify data and information useful for EFH consultations, and other opportunities to collectively address non-fishing impacts to EFH. Potential discussion or trigger questions may include:

- What characteristics of EFH and HAPC descriptions are useful to NMFS when evaluating non-fishing impacts and designing/implementing habitat restoration projects?
- How can fishery management councils engage habitat advisory panels/committees in other habitat issues?
- What methods can NMFS and fishery management councils use to link EFH consultations to fisheries needs (e.g., to stock status and economic information)?