North Pacific Fishery Management Council

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Ecosystem Committee

MINUTES

January 28, 2020 9 am – 5 pm Seattle WA

The NPFMC Ecosystem Committee met on January 28, 2020 to review recent research on skate nursery areas in the Bering Sea, an update from the Local Knowledge and Traditional Knowledge and Subsistence FEP Action Module Task Force, an update from the Climate Change FEP Action Module Task Force, priorities for the upcoming 3-year deep-sea coral research initiative, updates on northern fur seal research at the AFSC Marine Mammal Laboratory, and a report on the CCC Habitat Work Group workshop.

Committee Members in attendance:

Bill Tweit (Chairman)	Rose Fosdick	Steve MacLean (Council staff)
Jeremy Rusin	Dave Fluharty	
Gretchen Harrington	John Iani	
Theresa Peterson	Stephanie Madsen	

Members absent: Dave Benton, Jim Ayers,

Others in attendance:

Heather Coleman (ph)	Ann Marie Eich	Diana Stram
Chris Rooper (ph)	Megan Mackey	Bob Foy
Pam Goddard (ph)	Simeon Swetzof	Mike Levine
Nikoosh Carlo (ph)	Baine Etherton	Kerim Aydin
Beth Concepcion (ph)	John Jensen	Frank Kelty
John Olson (ph)	Danielle Meeker	Steve Marx
Jerry Hoff	Liz McHuron	Jeremy Sterling
Melissa Johnson	Kate Haapala	

Bering Sea skate nursery HAPC research

Dr. Jerry Hoff (AFSC) provided a presentation on research on skate nursery sites in the Bering Sea that has been conducted over the last 17 years. The Council designated discrete skate nursery areas as Habitat Areas of Particular Concern (HAPCs) in 2012 and requested that NMFS continue to monitor the areas to better understand the likelihood of impact on skate nurseries from commercial fishing. Dr. Hoff has been conducting research on skate biology, habitat, genetics, population dynamics and fishery interactions.

Dr. Hoff was asked whether, based on his research, the Council decision to identify skate nurseries as HAPC was still appropriate. Dr. Hoff stated that it is still appropriate, noting that the small, discrete sites are important because skates from different sites are genetically different, so it is important to protect the genetic diversity of Bering Sea skates. The Council originally identified six skate nursery areas, and although more skate nursery areas have been found (now approximately 24-28 sites identified) it remains important to continue to monitor the sites for impacts and changes.

After discussion **the committee expressed their thanks to Dr. Hoff for the presentation, acknowledged that much work has been done to understand the location, genetic connectedness of skates from different nursery sites, and potential impacts to skate nursery areas, encourages additional work in the BSAI and GOA, and recommends that changes to the HAPC designation are not warranted in response to this recent work.**

CCC Habitat Workgroup report

Steve MacLean (Council staff) provided a report on the CCC Habitat Workgroup workshop that occurred in Portland, OR in August 2019. The report contains proposed actions to consider Council engagement in agency consultations on non-fishing activities that may affect EFH for the Council's managed species.

The committee makes no recommendations on proposed actions at this time, but requests that the Council approve a committee meeting to discuss these activities in greater detail. The committee notes that they have recommended reconvening the Alaska Marine Ecosystem Forum on several occasions in the past, and continues to support reconvening the AMEF.

Local Knowledge, Traditional Knowledge, Subsistence Action Module Task Force Report

Dr. Kate Haapala (Council staff) provided a report from the LK, TK, Subsistence Task Force summarizing the first meeting of the task force, task force goals, and work plan. The committee asked questions on the task force goals and work plan.

Committee members questioned the mitigation strategies that the task force may recommend, without first understanding the projects or actions that may affect subsistence. The task force has not yet considered mitigation strategies, but plans to address this at their next meeting. They acknowledge the need to understand Council actions, and at what scale the actions may affect subsistence. The focus at this point is to develop the pathways to consider whether and how actions may affect subsistence rather than to develop specific mitigation.

Dr. Haapala was asked whether the task force considered education, or helping Council members understand when local knowledge or traditional knowledge can add value to decisions the Council makes. Dr. Haapala noted that the task force does consider that as part of their role, not only to inform the Council but also to inform the broader academic community to consider how LK and TK can be provided to the Council.

Committee members noted that industry knowledge should also be considered local knowledge since they have detailed knowledge of specific places. Dr. Haapala acknowledged industry's knowledge as local knowledge but the task force has not yet developed strategies to engage knowledge holders. The task force wants to ensure that they cast a wide net to understand diverse constituent bodies, including recreational fishers, commercial fishers, tribes, and local communities.

Committee members expressed concern about duplicative work between the task force and other committees such as the Community Engagement Committee, and encouraged the task force to make use of current resources and augment those efforts.

After discussion **the committee wished to express their appreciation for the presentation and the work that the task force has done in a short time. The committee requests and looks forward to additional updates. The committee has no specific recommendations at this time.**

Climate Change Action Module Task Force Report

Dr. Diana Stram (Council staff) presented a report from the Climate Change Action Module Task Force teleconference meeting that took place on January 21, 2020. The task force had a multi-day meeting planned but was forced to cancel that meeting due to unusual weather in Seattle.

After the presentation, the committee asked for clarification on the definition of some of the terms used by the task force, including resilience and adaptation. Because of the reduced time necessitated by the teleconference meeting the task force did not have time to formalize definitions of some terms, but many of the questions of the committee are slated to be discussed by the task force at their next meeting. Some committee members expressed concern about "mission creep" in the work of the task force, and were concerned that some of the work proposed may be duplicative with other groups. Committee members requested more information about how the climate change task force and the LK, TK, Subsistence task force were integrating outreach. The next meeting of the task force may be held via video-conference with opportunities to attend in both Seattle and Anchorage. The committee noted the carbon-conscious decision and commended the task force on the work that they have accomplished in a short time.

After discussion **the committee acknowledged the very impressive report given the short time between the teleconference and the ecosystem committee meeting. The committee requests and is looking forward to additional updates from the task force, but has no specific recommendations at this time.**

Deep Sea Coral Research Initiative

Dr. Jerry Hoff (AFSC) provided a summary of the previous 3-year deep sea coral research initiative (2012 – 2015) in Alaska, and presented preliminary plans for the upcoming (2020-2023) research initiative. The Deep Sea Coral Research Initiative team is developing research priorities for guiding research projects to be funded under the initiative and will conduct a stakeholder workshop in Juneau, AK on 13-15 May 2020. The Research Initiative team has requested research priorities from the ecosystem committee and Council.

The committee expressed some concern over a figure shown during the presentation that indicated that the Bering Sea shelf was coral habitat. Dr. Hoff and Heather Coleman (NMFS Deep-Sea Coral Program) clarified that the depiction was a function of the scale of the figure and resulted from presence of a small encrusting coral that colonizes crab shells and does not suggest deep sea corals are abundant on the shelf. The committee encouraged the team to consider redesigning the figure.

The committee noted that the objectives of the deep-sea coral research initiative are not yet clear. The committee stated that it would be useful to show the actions that the Council has already taken to protect corals in the BS, AI, and GOA and how that contributes to the objectives of the initiative to help define and prioritize future research. John Olson (NMFS AKR HCD) acknowledged that much work has already been done related to corals and the Council process, and identified some of the remaining work including refining and validating the models used to understand coral distribution and the effects of fishing, identifying susceptibility to damage and recovery rates. One of the proposed projects includes visiting areas closed to fishing because of Steller sea lion protection measures and examining recovery of corals that has occurred since those closures were enacted.

After discussion, **the committee noted that the Council has considered the inherent tradeoffs in identifying areas where fishing is prohibited, to protect deep-sea corals and other protected resources. The committee noted that the Council has defined a balance between protecting species such as corals and prosecuting sustainable fisheries, and considered many variables such as displacement of fisheries into other areas that have not been affected by fishing through closures of other areas. The committee requests that the Council task the committee to discuss potential research priorities before the March/April 2020 Council meeting to provide suggested priorities for Council consideration.**

Northern Fur Seal Research

Dr. Jeremy Sterling (AFSC MML) and Dr. Elizabeth McHuron (U Washington) presented information about northern fur seal research undertaken at the Marine Mammal Lab, and a joint project funded by the

Lenfest Ocean Program to model northern fur seal energetics. This continues presentations that the committee has received from the MML for the last 3 years. Co-management partners from the Pribilof Islands were unable to attend this meeting, but plan to present their co-management activities at the next ecosystem committee meeting.

Committee members noted the steep decline in northern fur seals at the Pribilof Islands since the 1950s and noted that a smaller population should have lower total energetic needs than the larger populations for which energy needs were estimated in previous studies. Dr. McHuron and Dr. Sterling described the methods used to estimate total energy requirements in the Lenftest study and the differences between their study and the previous estimates.

The committee appreciates the update from the marine mammal lab and Lenfest partners. The committee looks forward to the next update and to hearing from the co-management partners at the next meeting.

Ecosystem Committee planning

The committee identified a number of agenda items for upcoming ecosystem committee meetings including northern fur seal co-management, Essential Fish Habitat Consultations, Essential Fish Habitat 5-year review, updates from the BSFEP Action Module Task Forces, and marine invasive species. It is likely that several meetings will be necessary to address all of the agenda items already identified. **The committee requests that the Council authorize an ecosystem committee meeting in association with the March/April Council meeting where the committee will take up Essential Fish Habitat consultations, planning for the next 5-year EFH update, and hear from northern fur seal co-managers.**