

## 12 HAPC recommendations

Habitat areas of particular concern (HAPCs) are areas within essential fish habitat (EFH) that may require additional protection from adverse effects. Essential fish habitat is designated for the managed species identified in the Council's five Fishery Management Plans (BSAI and GOA groundfish, BSAI crab, Scallop, and Salmon). The EFH guidelines provide that HAPCs may be identified as specific types or areas of habitat within EFH, based on one or more of the following four considerations:

1. The importance of the ecological function provided by the habitat.
2. The extent to which the habitat is sensitive to human-induced environmental degradation.
3. Whether, and to what extent, development activities are, or will be, stressing the habitat type.
4. The rarity of the habitat type.

The Council will consider HAPCs that meet at least two of the four HAPC considerations above, and rarity will be a mandatory criterion of all HAPC proposals.

### 12.1 HAPC nomination processes

In 2005, the Council formally revised its approach to the designation of HAPCs by adopting a site-based approach. To date, there has been one HAPC nomination process, initiated in October 2003, which resulted in the implementation of several HAPC designations in the Gulf of Alaska and the Aleutian Islands in 2006. For the initial 2003-2004 HAPC process, the Council identified two specific priority areas for HAPC proposals:

1. Seamounts in the exclusive economic zone (EEZ), named on National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) charts, that provide important habitat for managed species.
2. Largely undisturbed, high-relief, long-lived hard coral beds, with particular emphasis on those located in the Aleutian Islands, which provide habitat for life stages of rockfish or other important managed species.

Additionally, nominations were to be based on best available scientific information and include the following features:

1. Sites must have likely or documented presence of Fishery Management Plan (FMP) rockfish species.
2. Sites must be largely undisturbed and occur outside core fishing areas.

The Council received 23 HAPC proposals from six different organizations. The proposals were reviewed by the Plan Teams, and by staff to consider management, enforcement, and socioeconomic issues. Ultimately, the Council identified a range of alternatives, staff completed an analysis, and the Council established several new HAPCs. Management measures for these HAPCs were implemented in August 2006.

### 12.2 Recommendations currently on table for Council HAPC consideration

Since the Council last initiated a HAPC proposal cycle (in 2003-04), there have been various occasions on which the Council has considered HAPC priorities or candidate sites. In some cases, the Council has directed that these priorities or areas be brought forward for their upcoming consideration of whether to re-initiate a HAPC proposal cycle (summarized in Table 14).

During the 2003-4 HAPC proposal cycle, six proposals were received that did not meet the Council’s designated priorities at that time. These identified two sites in the Bering Sea with dense aggregations of soft corals; three deepwater canyons, two in the Bering Sea and one in Prince William Sound; 54 pinnacles in the Gulf of Alaska; 82 pinnacles in the Aleutian Islands; and the Eight Fathom Pinnacle in the Gulf of Alaska. The Council minutes from April 2004 note that these proposals were removed from the current analysis, but were placed on hold for further consideration under the next HAPC cycle. The proposals would be considered “alive”, and need not be re-submitted, although it was expected that the submitters would participate in updating and revising their proposals.

In 2006-2007, the Council considered whether to initiate a HAPC proposal process during discussion related to Bering Sea Habitat Conservation. There were two parts to this discussion. First, the Council reviewed the previous HAPC cycle process, and decided that a review of process was needed to address Plan Team and public concerns. Some of these concerns included: how the Council assembles proposed HAPC nominations; the need to ensure uniformity in the information provided in the proposals; and the need for better definitions of the HAPC criteria, such as the requirement for ‘rarity’ of candidate HAPCs. The Council formally revised the HAPC process to address many of these concerns, and asked the SSC to provide further definition of the HAPC criteria prior to the next Council call for proposals. Following discussion through an SSC, agency, and Plan Team workgroup, the Council adopted the SSC’s recommended revisions to the HAPC criteria at the February 2010 Council meeting.

Secondly, in 2007, the Council considered whether to set a HAPC priority for Bering Sea skate nurseries and/or Bering Sea canyons. A summary of available research on these subjects was prepared and presented. Following public input and Plan Team and SSC review, the Council determined that it would be premature to initiate a call for proposals as there were no identified conservation concerns at that time. These habitat priority types are also brought forward for the Council’s upcoming HAPC priority consideration.

In June 2009, the Council considered whether to set priorities for identifying HAPCs and resolicit for HAPC proposals. The Council opted to postpone this decision pending the completion of this five-year EFH review. The Council chose to synchronize the timing of the two actions so that the results from the five-year review can be considered in setting HAPC priorities, and the HAPC proposal cycle that might result.

**Table 14 Recommendations on HAPC priorities from previous Council discussions**

<b>HAPC discussion at the Council</b>	<b>Priority types forwarded for consideration in 2010</b>
2003-2004 proposal process: proposals submitted that did not meet with the Council’s designated priorities at that time	dense aggregations of soft corals (2 sites identified in the Bering Sea) deepwater canyons (2 in the Bering Sea, 1 in Prince William Sound) pinnacles (54 in the Gulf of Alaska, 82 in the Aleutian Islands)
2006-2007 discussion of Bering Sea Habitat Conservation	skate nurseries (in the Bering Sea) deepwater canyons (Pribilof and Zemchug)

**12.3 Recommendations on HAPCs from the 5-year review**

In April 2009, the SSC recommended that the Council consider permanently changing the timeline for consideration of HAPC priorities and candidate sites to align it with the EFH 5-year review. Currently, the HAPC cycle is designated to be considered by the Council on a three-year cycle, or initiated at any time by the Council.

Additionally, Table 15 identifies recommendations on HAPC priorities that resulted from the EFH 5-year individual species reviews, for the Council’s consideration in the next HAPC proposal cycle.

**Table 15 Recommendations on HAPC priorities from the individual species reviews**

Council FMP	Species	Recommendation
BSAI and GOA Groundfish	Sablefish	<p>Areas of extensive and intensive bottom trawling should be of concern. An abundance of pre-recruit sablefish 1-3 yrs old were noted in the late 70s and early 80s in some areas that are currently trawled intensively. Pre-recruit sablefish have been absent or present in only much reduced numbers since. Research on the ecosystem effects from intensive trawling should be conducted. Small unobtrusive research closures would be a responsible step for NMFS in determining whether EFH is adversely affected.</p> <p><i>Note, this recommendation was originally made by the individual species authors, and forwarded by the Groundfish Plan Teams.</i></p>
BSAI Groundfish	Skates	<p>The Council may want to consider closing known skate nurseries to fishing activity. I know the Council has discussed this in the past; I'm not sure where things stand at the moment.</p> <p><i>Note, this recommendation was originally made by the individual species author, and forwarded by the BSAI Groundfish Plan Team.</i></p>
BSAI Crab	Red king crab	<p>The Council should consider identifying red king crab spawning habitat as a HAPC priority type. A specific area in southwest Bristol Bay has been identified that may provide important habitat for red king crab spawning, with direct oceanographic transport to juvenile rearing areas. Should the Council choose to move forward with this as a HAPC priority, the CPT would be prepared to put forward a proposal to the Council to nominate this area as a HAPC in the time frame the Council allows for these proposals, as it appears to meet the criteria identified by the Council for HAPCs (e.g., ecological function, rarity).</p> <p><i>Note, this recommendation was made by the Crab Plan Team.</i></p>