

---

# ANNUAL ESSENTIAL FISH HABITAT (EFH) REPORT, April 2024

Cathy Coon, Assistant Regional Administrator  
Charlene Felkley, EFH Coordinator  
Sean McDermott, Anchorage Branch Chief  
Dr. Jodi Pirtle, Juneau Branch Chief

HABITAT CONSERVATION DIVISION, NMFS ALASKA REGION



# COUNCIL'S ROLE IN EFH CONSULTATIONS

- Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA) provides a role for Councils in commenting on federal or state agency actions that would affect fish habitat.
- Section 305(b)(3)(A): Councils may comment on and make recommendations to the Secretary and any federal or state agency concerning any activity or proposed activity authorized, funded, or undertaken by the agency that, in the view of the Council, may affect the habitat, including EFH, of a fishery resource under its authority.
- Section 305(b)(3)(B): Councils must provide such comments and recommendations concerning any activity that, in the view of the Council, is likely to substantially affect the habitat, including EFH, of an anadromous fishery resource under Council authority.
- EFH regulations at 50 CFR 600.930(a) state that each Council should establish procedures for reviewing federal or state actions that may adversely affect the habitat, including EFH, of a species under its authority.



B2 NMFS EFH Report, section 1, pages 1-2



# COUNCIL'S EFH CONSULTATION POLICY

The Council identified the following criteria to guide NMFS in determining whether an activity is likely to be of particular interest to the Council:

- The extent to which the activity would adversely affect EFH;
- The extent to which the activity would adversely affect Habitat Areas of Particular Concern or other areas established by the Council to protect sensitive habitat features;
- The extent to which the activity would be inconsistent with measures taken by the Council to minimize potential adverse effects of fishing on EFH; and
- The extent to which the activity would conflict with Council-managed fishing operations.



B2 NMFS EFH Report, section 2, page 2

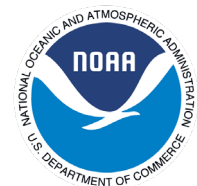


# EFH CONSULTATIONS

- **Aquaculture:** Reviewed 37 permit applications, lease amendment requests, NWP notices and early coordination.
- **Coastal Development:** Coordinated or consulted on 29 coastal development projects.
- **DOT Projects:** Coordinated or consulted on 15 projects.
- **Dredging and Harbor Improvement:** Coordinated or consulted on 8 harbor development projects.
- **Fiber Optic Cables:** Received 12 requests for consultations associated with the funding of fiber optic cable projects.
- **Hydropower:** Primary projects we focused on since April 2023:
  - Eklutna mitigation plan development, Nuyakuk licensing, Igiugig HEC monitoring, and Brady Lake, Battle Creek Amendment
- **Mines:** Coordinated or consulted on seven mining projects within Alaska.
- **Restoration:** Coordinated or consulted on six restoration projects.
- **Oil and Gas Development**
- **Water Quality:** Provided technical assistance during early coordination for 1 statewide action and 2 individual actions.



B2 NMFS EFH Report, section 2, page 2



# PROGRAMMATIC EFH CONSULTATIONS

- Evaluates a large number of individual actions up front
- Establishes EFH conservation recommendations to those activities
- Creates Regulatory Efficiency
- National Telecommunication and Information Administration (NTIA)
  - Alaska will receive > \$1 B in federal funds to support expansion of fiber optic cables into rural and remote communities.
  - Programmatic covers a large category of fiber optic cable project actions that may adversely affect EFH.
  - Our approach was recognized and lauded at a March 19 national interagency permitting working group meeting by NTIA, OMB, and CEQ
- NOAA Fisheries' Restoration Center
  - Includes Community-Based Restoration Program & Damage Assessment, Remediation and Restoration Program
  - Covers fish passage, marine debris removal, monitoring, invasive species control, etc.
  - Net benefit of restoration outweighs temporary adverse effects
  - Supports EFH and promotes healthy fisheries



B2 NMFS EFH Report, section 2, page 4.



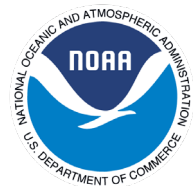
# Consultation Climate Guidance

## New Procedure for Addressing Climate Change in NMFS Essential Fish Habitat Consultations

- Increase use of climate-related information in fulfilling NMFS mandates.
- Informs action agencies, Councils, and NMFS staff on how to incorporate expected climate change effects into EFH assessments and consultations.
- Improves outcomes by accounting for expected climate change effects in the action's design.
- Includes five considerations for including climate change in EFH consultations.
  - How will climate change effects interact with an action?
  - What time periods for projecting anticipated climate change effects should be considered?
  - Select an appropriate climate change emission scenario.
  - Identify project design considerations and minimization measures.
  - Determine permitting conditions and EFH conservation recommendations
- Additionally, our revised Non-fishing Impacts Report includes climate related CRs



B2 NMFS EFH Report, section 3, page 4-5.



# 2018 – 2023 EFH 5-Year Review Completion

- Council took final action to amend the FMPs in December 2023
- We are completing the EFH Omnibus Amendments package with great progress
- Highlights—
  - New ensemble species distribution models (SDM) to describe and map EFH Level 2 (habitat-related abundance) information for species in the BSAI, GOA, and Crab FMPs,
  - EFH Level 3 (habitat-related vital rates) for select species *for the first time in an EFH Review*,
  - New SDM EFH Level 1 (habitat-related distribution) and Level 3 available *for the first time for Arctic species*,
  - Climate-informed SDM EFH descriptions and maps for Arctic species available *for the first time* in an EFH 5-year Review,
  - Updates to the Fishing Effects model and EFH Fishing Effects evaluation process, and
  - Revised Impacts to EFH from Non-fishing Activities in Alaska report with climate-related EFH conservation recommendations.
- World class analysis- shout out to HCD, Council staff, and Collaborators



B2 NMFS EFH Report, section 4, page 5.

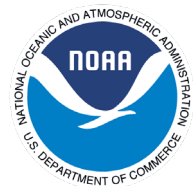


# 2024 Alaska EFH Research Plan

- EFH research recommendations were informed during the 2023 EFH 5-year Review by contributing researchers, stock assessment scientists, and Council advisory bodies.
- These recommendations were summarized as three objectives for the revised [2024 Alaska EFH Research Plan](#):
  - Objective 1: Improve EFH information for targeted species and life stages
  - Objective 2: Improve fishing effects assessment, and
  - Objective 3: Improve understanding of nearshore habitat and forage species.
- The timely objectives provide guidance for recommended habitat science advancements leading up to the next and future EFH 5-year Reviews and supporting EBFM in the Council process.
- The Alaska EFH Research Plans have also included five long term research goals that remain consistent with minor, meaningful updates since 2005.



B2 NMFS EFH Report, section 5, page 6; and Alaska EFH Research Plan





# FY24 Recommended Funding

- Predictive distribution models to support flexible management of Bering Sea crab fisheries: combined field, laboratory, and modeling approach (*continuing*)
- Predators as samplers: using food habits data to inform climate- and community-driven shifts in habitat quality for EFH species (*continuing*)
- Habitat utilization of juvenile snow crab in a warming Bering Sea (*new*)
- Developing a network of nearshore sentinel sites to enhance our understanding of climate change effects on EFH for federally managed species and their prey in partnership with tribes and coastal communities (*new*)
- Pacific salmon ocean life history stages next generation spatiotemporal and climate-informed EFH descriptions and maps (*continuing/new project*)
- Fishing effects model advancements to support EFH fishing effects evaluation and sustainable fisheries management for North Pacific species (*continuing/new project*)

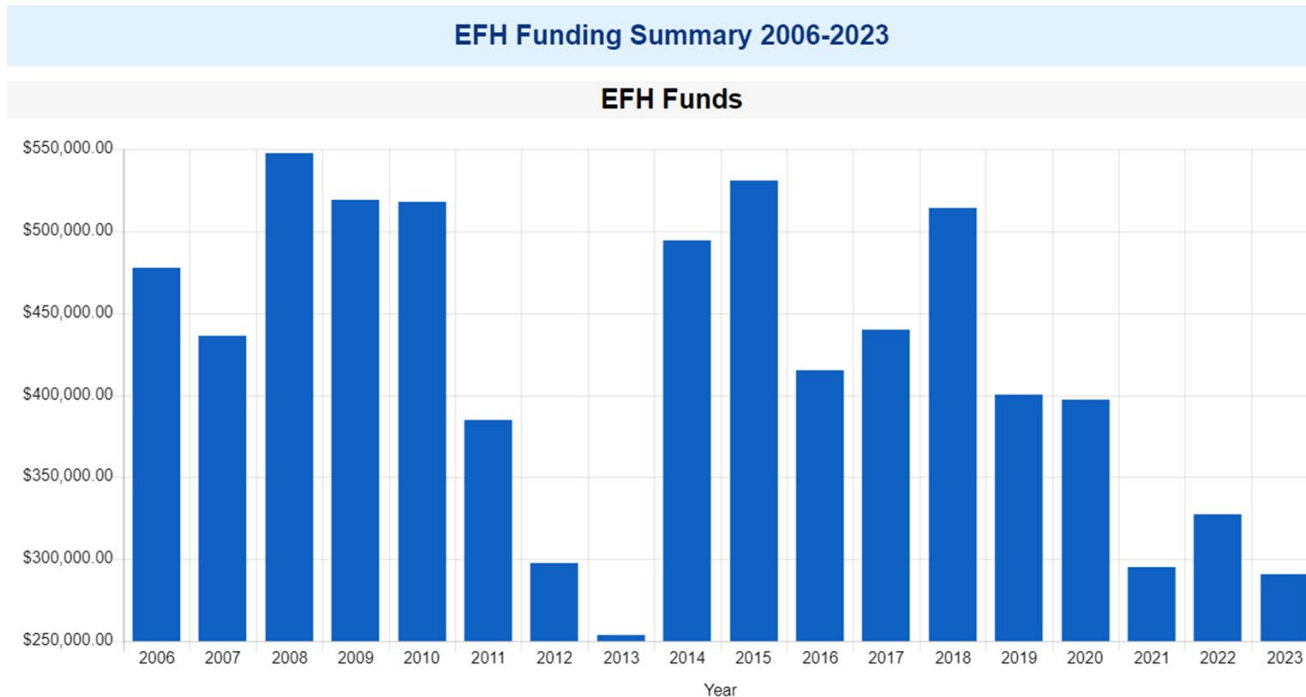


B2 NMFS EFH Report, section 5, page 7.



# Alaska EFH Research Plan Funding

Past Funding- with fluctuating budgets we are striving to do more partnerships and collaborations, and internal analysis



B2 NMFS EFH Report, section 5, page 7.



# NOAA's Restoration Center in Alaska

- In 2022, > \$10 million dollars in projects were funded to improve fish passage, coastal resilience and capacity building for underserved and tribal entities.
  - National Forest Foundation for The Resurrection: Restoration of a Watershed and Salmon in Alaska (\$3.8 million )
  - Levelock Village Council for Developing a Climate Impact Statement for Coastal Erosion and Shoreline Stability in Levelock, Alaska (\$380,000)
  - Sealaska Corporation for Assessment and Engineered Designs for Anadromous Fish Passage Infrastructure on Sealaska Lands (\$425,920)
  - The Eyak Corporation for Restoring Tribal Priority Fish Passage through Barrier Removal (\$1 million)
  - Copper River Watershed Project for Fish Passage Restoration on the Copper River Watershed (\$3.4 million)
  - Chickaloon Native Village for Tribal Fish Passage (\$1.6 million)
  - Fish passage for 2024 funding is happening now.



B2 NMFS EFH Report, section 6, pages 8-9.

# Council Coordination Committee Habitat Workgroup

- Summary of Achievements, January 2024 Meeting
  - EFH climate guidance
  - Other regions are starting to include climate related CRs
  - Other regions are inspired by the habitat science advancements in our region



B2 NMFS EFH Report, section 8, page 11.



NOAA  
FISHERIES

# Accomplishments Report

## Alaska Region's Habitat Conservation Division

Fiscal Year 2023



### Table of Contents

Our Mission.....	1
Our Developing Team.....	2
A Message from the HCD ARA.....	2
Our Retreat 2023.....	2
Team Development.....	3
Our Growth in 2023 – Completing Our Team.....	3
HCD Accomplishments By the Numbers.....	4
Habitat Division supports Regional Management in the Essential Fish Habitat 5-year Review.....	5
Kelp, Oyster and Multitrophic Aquaculture Permitting .....	6
eDNA: Consultations, Coral, and Crabs .....	6
Fish Passage and Restoration .....	7
Mendenhall Glacier Visitor Center .....	8
Cross Regional Collaborations.....	8
Habitat Conservation with Tribal Coordination and Cultural Resources.....	9
Atka Harbor Project.....	10
Publications.....	10
Presentations.....	11
Posters.....	11
Outreach, Trainings, and Workshops.....	11
Farewell Friends.....	11

### Our Mission

The Alaska Region's mission is science-based stewardship of living marine resources and their habitat in the waters of the North Pacific and Arctic Oceans off Alaska. Responsibilities include supporting sustainable fisheries, restoring and conserving protected species, and promoting healthy ecosystems and resilient coastal communities. The Habitat Conservation Division (HCD) in NOAA Fisheries' Alaska Region (AKR) supports the mission and carries out the agency's statutory responsibilities for habitat conservation under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA), the Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act, the National Environmental Policy Act, the Federal Power Act, and other laws. Habitat conservation, protection, and restoration are the foundation for sustaining the nation's fisheries. To prioritize our activities, make decisions in an ecosystem context, and strengthen the science behind our decision-making, HCD works closely with the Alaska Fisheries Science Center, other NOAA line offices, the North Pacific Fishery Management Council, other federal and state agencies, non-governmental organizations, local governments, and a variety of industry and conservation groups.

