



D2 Essential Fish Habitat 5-year Review Plan

December 2025

Action Memo

- Council Staff: Anita Kroska
- Other Presenters: Dr. Jodi Pirtle (NMFS Alaska Region)
- Action Required:
1. Review the Discussion Paper with a proposed plan for the 2028 EFH 5-year Review
 2. Provide direction regarding the scope and focus of the evaluation, and whether the Council wishes to initiate a process to establish priorities for HAPC consideration

BACKGROUND

The Council will receive a presentation on the discussion paper with a proposed approach for the 2028 Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) 5-year Review. The proposed approach for this review cycle is based on direction received from the Council during the 2023 EFH 5-year Review (final summary report posted as a reference) and reflects current priorities of the Council and NMFS. The SSC is scheduled to review the plan at a future meeting (tentatively February 2026), including proposed methodology for the upcoming review.

As specified in the regulations and guidelines that implement the EFH provisions of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA), the Councils and NMFS are required to review the EFH components of Fishery Management Plans (FMPs) and revise or amend these components based on available information at least every five years. This process, and the summary report that results, is referred to as an EFH 5-year Review. The objective of an EFH 5-year review is to evaluate and synthesize new information for each of the ten EFH components and determine whether changes to the FMPs are warranted. The opportunity to advance the science supporting an EFH 5-year review is also an important reason for this endeavor.

The current discussion paper presents the proposed plan for the 2028 EFH 5-year Review, following the Council's EFH Roadmap and based on Council direction received in 2023. The document sections describe the EFH review process, ten EFH components of FMPs, and ongoing work available to contribute new information for this review.

Development of the EFH 5-year Review is a multi-year effort, and staff are seeking input from the Council now, at the outset, on the scope and any key questions the Council wishes staff to explore. As described in the paper, the proposal focuses on the Council's BSAI and GOA Groundfish and BSAI Crab FMP species, and the following actions and components are currently prioritized:

Component 1: EFH descriptions and identification

- Develop and present new data, methods, species distribution models (SDMs), EFH maps, and habitat information for a subset of Council-managed species: sablefish, pollock, Pacific cod, Pacific ocean perch, and arrowtooth flounder in the BSAI and GOA FMPs, and all five species of crab in the BSAI Crab FMP.

Component 2: Fishing activities that may adversely affect EFH

- Run the Fishing Effects (FE) model with updated fishing effort data, methods, and the updated EFH maps for the subset of species from Component 1 and complete an EFH FE evaluation based on this new information.

Component 6: Conservation and enhancement of EFH

- Review the results of the EFH FE evaluation, existing conservation and enhancement measures, and decide whether additional measures should be recommended.

Component 7: Changes to the availability of major prey species for Council-managed species

- Present new data and prey habitat information, develop methods, SDMs, and maps for select prey species.

Component 9: Research and information needs for EFH description and evaluation of impacts

- Review recommendations for EFH research priorities and information needs as necessary.

Component 10: Review and revision of EFH components of FMPs

- Review the draft summary report from the 2028 EFH 5-year Review and decide if FMP amendments are warranted.

Additionally, the Council may wish to initiate a process for **Component 8: Identification of Habitat Areas of Particular Concern (HAPC)** as part of the 2025 EFH 5-Year Review. The Council has established a formal process for selecting HAPCs, that begins with Council action to identify priorities for HAPC consideration, followed by a public request for proposals for specific sites for HAPC inclusion. The Council can initiate the HAPC process at any time (see Section 2.8 of the attached discussion paper).