

National Essential Fish Habitat Summit

Meeting Summary
May 17-19, 2016
Annapolis, Maryland



Summit Partners

[NOAA Fisheries Office of Habitat Conservation](#)
[NOAA Fisheries Office of Science & Technology](#)
[Council Coordination Committee](#)
[Fisheries Leadership & Sustainability Forum](#)

Overview

The 2016 National Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) Summit, held May 17-19 in Annapolis, MD, successfully convened council and NOAA Fisheries habitat experts to reflect on 20 years of EFH implementation, and look ahead to the future of Magnuson-Stevens Act (MSA) EFH authorities in a changing environment. The EFH Summit was a collaborative meeting developed with input from the Council Coordination Committee (CCC), the CCC Habitat Workgroup, and planning bodies including council and agency staff from around the country. The Fisheries Leadership & Sustainability Forum (Fisheries Forum) coordinated the planning process and facilitated meeting sessions.

The meeting drew nearly 100 participants including council

members, staff and SSC members, NOAA Fisheries staff from headquarters and from every regional office and science center, and public participants representing industry, non-governmental organizations, and other management partners and federal agencies. The discussion-oriented agenda was designed to

explore successes, challenges, and regional adaptations, and support the exchange of information across roles and management regions. The EFH Summit was intended to create value in multiple ways. First, the meeting helped support networking and information exchange to strengthen the community of

practice among fishery management professionals who interact with EFH authorities in different ways. Second, discussions at the EFH Summit provided value and generated takeaways at multiple levels:

- Individual: ideas, contacts, and information participants can apply to their own work
- Regional: ideas, opportunities, and questions participants can share with regional colleagues
- Cross –regional: shared questions and challenges, and opportunities for ongoing conversation and information exchange among regions and partners.

Finally, the EFH Summit planning process—in addition to the meeting itself—was a long-term investment in



the effective use of EFH authorities. EFH and habitat experts identified the key questions, considerations, and ideas that will shape the use of EFH authorities in the future.

Sessions and discussions

The EFH Summit agenda included short presentations, full group discussions, small group breakouts,

and informal “tabletop” discussions. The following section includes highlights and themes from each session.

Opening remarks

Carrie Selberg, Deputy Director for the NOAA Fisheries Office of Habitat Conservation, spoke to the value of recognizing successes, looking forward, and communicating the importance of EFH to a broader audience. Bill Tweit, Vice Chair of the North Pacific Fishery Management Council, spoke on behalf of the CCC. He emphasized the value of regional diversity



and sharing experience among regions, and noted the opportunity for greater council engagement in the EFH process. John Boreman, adjunct professor at North Carolina State University (and retired NOAA Fisheries) reflected on the origins of MSA habitat authorities and the critical importance of habitat in successful fishery management plans.

Day 1: Identifying and reviewing EFH and HAPCs

The first day of the EFH Summit explored different regional approaches to identifying, describing, and reviewing EFH. Prior to the EFH

Summit, Fisheries Forum staff worked with council and agency staff to develop a series of short regional EFH profiles. These documents provided additional detail and a common frame of reference for EFH Summit discussions. The [full set of EFH profiles](#) and additional resources such as maps and examples of EFH descriptions are available on the EFH Summit website. A related report, [Regional use of the HAPC Designation](#), is available through



the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council’s website.

Regional roundtable

Council and agency staff participated in a “regional roundtable” session including a perspective from every council region and the NOAA Fisheries Atlantic Highly Migratory Species Management Division. These short presentations highlighted similarities, differences, and regional adaptations to the use of EFH authorities. Topics included the timing and scope of EFH reviews, information inputs, roles and responsibilities, the use of tools and modeling approaches, and successes and challenges. Speakers shared the ideas and questions raised through their EFH process including defining and refining the meaning of “essential,” organizing EFH information (e.g., identifying overlays and “hotspots” of habitat

use), capturing variability and change, engaging councils, the public, and other partners effectively, and identifying and using goals and objectives.

Practicability and effectiveness

The EFH Summit took an in-depth look at some of the most challenging EFH requirements, focusing on the mandate to minimize to the extent practicable adverse effects from fishing. The group also considered approaches for evaluating the effectiveness of actions to conserve EFH and minimize adverse effects from fishing. Speakers from the New England, Alaska, and Pacific regions shared their experience with these topics in the context of their regions' fisheries, ecosystems, and information sources, focusing on the handoff from habitat science to fishery management decisions. Participants explored practicability and effectiveness in more depth through facilitated breakout discussions that considered the information, tools, goals, objectives, metrics, and other inputs that could contribute to evaluating effectiveness.

Day 2: EFH authorities in a changing environment

The second day of the EFH Summit considered how habitat science and the implementation of EFH authorities are evolving—and will continue to evolve—in response to a changing world. Participants explored four different dimensions to the topic of change.

from building collaborations and maintaining effective and positive working relationships.

The five regional NOAA Fisheries EFH coordinators then shared experiences with an array of emerging issues that include military training and testing, open ocean aquaculture, storm impacts and coastal resilience, oil, gas and liquid natural gas infrastructure and development, alternative energy, acoustic impacts, sediment



diversion, invasive species, mining, and fiber optic cables. The growth of these emerging issues enhances the need as well as the opportunity for communicating across management regions, and between the councils and agency.

Partnership and collaborations

Day 2 of the EFH Summit concluded with four examples of partnerships that support and enhance the effective implementation of EFH authorities. These examples primarily focused on collaborations with federal partners, including as the Navy and the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, for purposes that include research, coordination, and other shared needs. Speakers shared

their experience and lessons learned from building collaborations and maintaining effective and positive working relationships.

Day 3: Looking ahead

The EFH Summit concluded with a series of discussions focusing on takeaways and emerging opportunities to implement and leverage EFH authorities effectively.

EFH and ecosystem-based management

Day 3 began with an exploration of the role of EFH authorities in supporting ecosystem-based fishery management approaches. Speakers proposed that this is a two-way process: EFH authorities can support and complement EBFM approaches, and ecosystem information can inform the use of EFH authorities. Participants explored the linkage between EFH and EBFM, and the shared goal of maintaining fishery productivity.

Regional discussions

The EFH Summit concluded with five facilitated breakout discussions focusing on the Alaska, Pacific,



communication among the habitat and EFH community. Specific topics of interest for ongoing information exchange include climate change, ecosystem-based management,

Pacific Islands, Southeast, and Greater Atlantic regions. Each group considered the following questions:

- Individual takeaways: What is something new you learned at the EFH Summit that you wouldn't have known otherwise?
- Regional takeaways: What new ideas, questions, and opportunities are you interested to continue exploring in your region?
- Cross-regional takeaways: What topics discussed at the EFH Summit are good opportunities for ongoing information exchange among regions and partners?

The individual and regional takeaways from the EFH Summit are different for each participant and regional group of colleagues. These takeaways and new ideas will provide opportunities for regions to continue the conversation following the meeting.

At the cross-regional level, participants confirmed the value of

cumulative impacts, funding high priority science needs, and continuing to improve communication between councils, regional office habitat conservation divisions, and science centers. Participants also identified opportunities to communicate between regions with similar interests and questions, such as the use of fishing impact models.

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Follow-up and next steps

Meeting materials

All materials from the EFH Summit including the agenda, presentations, regional EFH profiles, and resources provided by participants and speakers are available on the [EFH Summit website](#).

CCC update

Fisheries Forum and NOAA Fisheries Office of Habitat Conservation staff provided an update on the National EFH Summit at the CCC meeting, May 25-26 in St. Thomas, USVI. Participating council leadership shared positive feedback regarding their participation in the EFH Summit, and the value of providing this opportunity for information exchange. The CCC voted to continue the CCC Habitat Workgroup into 2017, and have the group provide an update at one of the 2017 CCC meetings. This presentation is available on the [May 2016 CCC Meeting website](#).

Technical memorandum

NOAA Fisheries Offices of Habitat Conservation and Science & Technology will develop a NOAA Tech Memo with a more detailed summary of the discussions from the EFH Summit.

