

NEW ENGLAND FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

Habitat Committee

I. STATUS

- A. Meetings: The PDT met in mid-December to plan for 2026 work including the 2026 Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) Designation Framework.
- B. Essential Fish Habitat Designation Framework (2026): The Council will continue EFH revisions via a framework to the Northeast Multispecies and Atlantic Sea Scallop Fishery Management Plans to consider revisions to all remaining northeast multispecies (large and small mesh) and scallops. Methods will be similar to the 2025 Framework, with species-specific adjustments as necessary. Species distribution modeling work is underway and includes a model specific to sea scallops. Coordination with the Groundfish, Whiting, and Scallop plan coordinators and PDTs will determine information sharing processes.
- C. Essential Fish Habitat Designation Framework (2025): The Council took final action in September to recommend updating EFH designations for Atlantic cod, Atlantic herring, monkfish, and the seven skate species. The Mid-Atlantic Council confirmed the EFH designation for monkfish in October. The framework document will be submitted to GARFO in early 2026.
- D. Evaluation of Great South Channel Habitat Management Area Surfclam Exemption Areas: The Council will review and evaluate existing and emerging information related to the surfclam exemption areas within the broader context of the Great South Channel (GSC) Habitat Management Area (HMA). Multi-year research conducted under an Exempted Fishing Permit (EFP) will be completed in March 2026 with a final report to follow. Council staff will prepare a technical report.
- E. Ocean Planning: Staff continue to coordinate with partners on offshore wind issues including regional monitoring standards, fisheries compensation, and status of wind projects. Staff are also following marine carbon dioxide removal, offshore oil/gas leasing, and potential for offshore mineral mining in the Mid-Atlantic region. Staff also continue to engage with ROSA, NROC, and the Stellwagen and Hudson Canyon Sanctuaries.
- F. Atlantic Salmon Aquaculture Framework: Proposed rule publication is pending NOAA review.

II. COUNCIL ACTION

Initiate 2026 EFH Framework.

III. INFORMATION

- 1. Staff presentation
 - 2. Recent Meeting Summaries
 - a. Habitat PDT, December 8, 2025
- Habitat, Ocean Planning, and other correspondence is archived [here](#).