



New England Fishery Management Council

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Eric Reid, *Chair* | Thomas A. Nies, *Executive Director*

MEMORANDUM

DATE: March 7, 2022
TO: Habitat Committee
FROM: Eric Reid, Habitat Committee Chair

SUBJECT: Charge to Committee for March 17, 2022 meeting

There will be a Habitat Committee meeting on March 17, 2022. We will begin promptly at 1:00 p.m. and expect the meeting to end by 5:00 p.m. Please register for the webinar if you have not already done so: <https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/2538856332393707790>.

Purpose

The objectives for this meeting are to: (1) discuss and recommend one or more alternatives to designate a new Habitat Area of Particular Concern (HAPC) in Southern New England; (2) receive an update on PDT review of a progress report related to an Exempted Fishing Permit-based research project in the Great South Channel Habitat Management Area (HMA), (3) discuss current offshore development issues of interest to the Council (wind, cables, and aquaculture), (4) discuss and recommend updates to the Council's habitat-related research priorities, and (5) discuss other business as needed. If you have other business items, please let me know and provide any related materials to Ms. Bachman for distribution.

Southern New England HAPC

In February, the Council initiated an action to consider the designation of a new HAPC in Southern New England. The PDT is developing an alternative for the Committee to consider and potentially recommend for final action during the April Council meeting (document 5, see discussion in documents 3a and 3b). The Committee should recommend any revisions to the alternatives or the objectives for the action and should also recommend additional analyses or information that would support the Council's decision.

Great South Channel HMA

The Great South Channel Habitat Management Area (HMA) was designated via Omnibus Habitat Amendment 2, and three exemption areas for surfclam and mussel dredge vessels were created through a subsequent framework. The surfclam fishery has expressed concerns related to the economic viability of the fishery in the three exemption areas, given the scale and location of the exemption areas, and an industry member recently recommended that emergency action be considered to improve fishing opportunities. An Exempted Fishing Permit was issued by GARFO, allowing Coonamessett Farm Foundation (CFF) to conduct a research project in the area between May 2020 and February 2022.

The Council discussed this issue at length in February, passing the following motion:

That the Habitat Committee supported by the Plan Development Team review the results of Coonamessett Farm Foundation's clam dredge mapping study, conducted in a subset of the Rose and Crown area under an Exempted Fishing Permit (EFP), once a report has been provided to the Council. The purpose of this review is to ascertain the utility of this study for management of fishing gear impacts within the Great South Channel Habitat Management Area. This assessment could be used to support NOAA Fisheries consideration of an extension for this EFP, or approval of similar EFPs.

On February 15, the PDT reviewed a progress report for this project (document 6) and provided feedback to CFF, both during the meeting and subsequently by sharing the meeting summary (document 3a). Note that a final report is pending completion later this spring. Staff will summarize input provided to CFF by the PDT. The Committee should provide additional feedback to CFF, if desired, and should also discuss the utility of the study for management of the HMA. The Committee will report out to the Council on this discussion in April.

Offshore development issues

Cable updates

The Amite telecommunications cable is planned to run from Lynn, MA across the Gulf of Maine and through international waters, making landfall along the English and French coasts. The Council provided comments to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers related to the EFH consultation for this project (see document 8). Staff will provide any updates available as to the progress of this consultation and permitting for the project.

Offshore Wind updates

Diverse engagement related to offshore wind science and development is ongoing. Staff will provide a short summary of recent work and near-term issues that will require staff or Committee work. Updates will include leasing in the NY Bight, Central Atlantic call area development, the upcoming Gulf of Maine taskforce meeting, an upcoming Port Access Route Study for the approaches to ME, NH, and MA, and other items.

Aquaculture updates

During February, the Council provided comments to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers on the Running Tide project, which is seeking a permit to grow kelp on vertical lines on Fippennies Ledge (see document 8). Staff will provide any updates available on this project. Staff will also update the committee on the Blue Water Fisheries project, which proposes to grow steelhead and Atlantic salmon off the coasts of NH and MA. The timing of a Council action on Atlantic salmon aquaculture authorization is directly related to the timing of the EIS for BWF.

2022-2026 Council Research Priorities

The Council updates research priorities annually. The PDT is currently reviewing the items related to habitat and offshore development issues and will provide recommended revisions to the Committee (document 7). Committee members should review these recommendations and suggest other additions, revisions, or deletions if needed. These recommendations will be collated by staff and provided to the Scientific and Statistical Committee in May. Revisions to the list will be approved by the Council in June.

Other business

Staff will provide a short update as to the status of 2022 work. Members can use this time to raise any other business items not otherwise on the agenda.

Meeting Materials

The documents listed below will be posted to

<https://www.nefmc.org/calendar/mar-17-2022-habitat-committee-webinar>. If you have any questions about the materials, please contact Ms. Bachman (mbachman@nefmc.org; 978-465-0492 x120).

1. Tasking memo from Committee Chair Eric Reid (*this document*)
2. Habitat Committee meeting summary – January 18, 2022 ([link](#))
3. Habitat PDT meeting summaries
 - a. February 15, 2022
 - b. March 9, 2022 (Draft)
4. Staff presentation covering all topics
5. Draft SNE HAPC Framework
6. EFP #19066 Progress Report – Coonamessett Farm Foundation – February 2022
7. 2022-2026 Research priority recommendations w/Habitat PDT input
8. Correspondence