

DECISION DOCUMENT

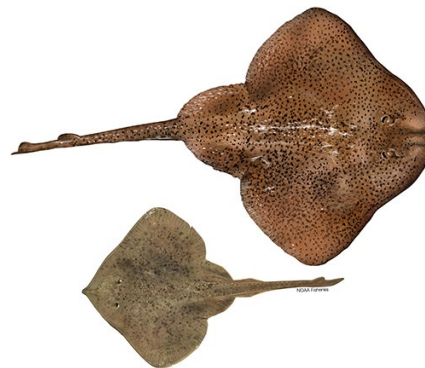
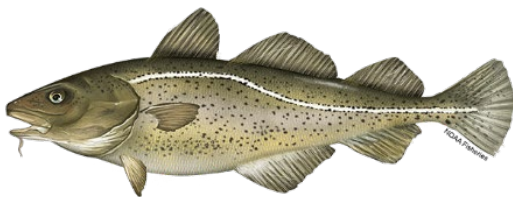
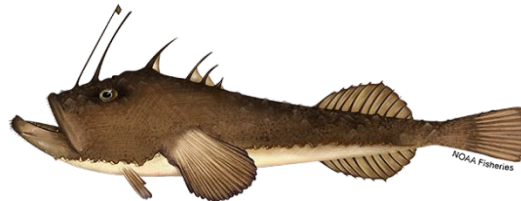
2025 ESSENTIAL FISH HABITAT FRAMEWORK

ATLANTIC HERRING FMP - FRAMEWORK ADJUSTMENT 12

MONKFISH FMP - FRAMEWORK ADJUSTMENT 18

NORTHEAST MULTISPECIES FMP - FRAMEWORK ADJUSTMENT 70

NORTHEAST SKATE COMPLEX FMP - FRAMEWORK ADJUSTMENT 13



This document was developed to help the Council select preliminary preferred alternatives for the 2025 Essential Fish Habitat Designation Framework.

For September 24, 2025 – Version 1

Anticipated Council Action:

Prior to selecting a final preferred alternative, the Council will receive a presentation on measures under consideration and their analyzed impacts on managed species, the physical environment, protected species, and human communities in the 2025 Essential Fish Habitat Designation Framework. The Habitat Committee and Advisory Panel reviewed the alternatives and framework document and recommended Alternative 2 as preferred during their meeting on September 11, 2025.

The following are anticipated Council actions:

1. Select a *preferred alternative* for Essential Fish Habitat designations for all life history stages of Atlantic cod, Atlantic herring, monkfish, smooth skate, thorny skate, barndoor skate, little skate, winter skate, clearnose skate, and rosette skate.
2. Submit the 2025 Essential Fish Habitat Designation Framework to NOAA Fisheries.

Section 4.0 EFH Designation Alternatives		Preferred by	
		AP	CTE
Alternative 1 (Sec. 4.1)	No action – continue to use existing EFH designations developed via Omnibus Habitat Amendment 2 (2018).		
Alternative 2 (Sec. 4.2)	Updated EFH designations for Atlantic cod, Atlantic herring, monkfish, barndoor skate, clearnose skate, little skate, rosette skate, smooth skate, thorny skate, and winter skate. These designations rely on data from 2000-2019 and employ species distribution models and other methods developed through the Northeast Regional Habitat Assessment and EFH Five-Year Review (completed in January 2025). This alternative would adopt updated EFH designations as a package for all ten species. The designations for individual species and lifestages are described in the following sections: 4.2.1 Atlantic cod eggs, larvae, juveniles, and adults 4.2.2 Atlantic herring eggs, larvae, juveniles, and adults 4.2.3 Monkfish eggs, larvae, juveniles, and adults 4.2.4 Barndoor skate eggs, juveniles, and adults 4.2.5 Clearnose skate eggs, juveniles, and adults 4.2.6 Little skate eggs, juveniles, and adults 4.2.7 Rosette skate eggs, juveniles, and adults 4.2.8 Smooth skate eggs, juveniles, and adults 4.2.9 Thorny skate eggs, juveniles, and adults 4.2.10 Winter skate eggs, juveniles, and adults	X	X
Information to Consider			
- EFH designations include a map and text component and are developed for individual lifestages (egg, larvae, juvenile, adult) where possible. - This action combines the result of model-based and non-modeled workflows to generate an EFH map for the juveniles and adults of each species. Egg and larval EFH maps rely on juvenile and adult species distribution model outputs as proxies given limited data on the distribution and abundance of early life history stages. - Text descriptions complement EFH maps and rely on trawl survey data, model outputs, and literature review. - The species distribution models as well as non-modeled workflows use data sets and methods developed during the Northeast Regional Habitat Assessment (2022) and the Five-Year EFH Technical Review (2025). Methods were developed in collaboration with the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council. - Feedback on the draft EFH maps and text was solicited from the Groundfish, Herring, Monkfish, and Skate Plan Development Teams and Advisory Panels. - EFH designations are non-regulatory so there is no formal rulemaking needed to update the Council's FMPs. In addition, EFH designations are administrative and do not directly affect fishing activity. - No direct impacts are expected on any of the resources evaluated (managed species, physical habitat, protected species, human communities), for either alternative. This action is expected to qualify for a categorical exclusion from the National Environmental Policy Act. - EFH designations for other species managed by the Council developed via Omnibus Habitat Amendment 2 remain unchanged and will be revised via future actions, currently planned for 2026 and 2027.			
Draft Framework References			
- Introduction (background on prior work and summary of designation methods): Section 3.0 - Fishing Effects Evaluation: Section 5.0 - Impacts of Alternatives: Section 6.0 - Full maps and text for Alternative 1 (No Action) are provided in Appendix A. - Detailed species distribution model outputs and environmental ranges are provided in Appendix B. - A summary of the EFH consultation process is provided as Appendix C.			