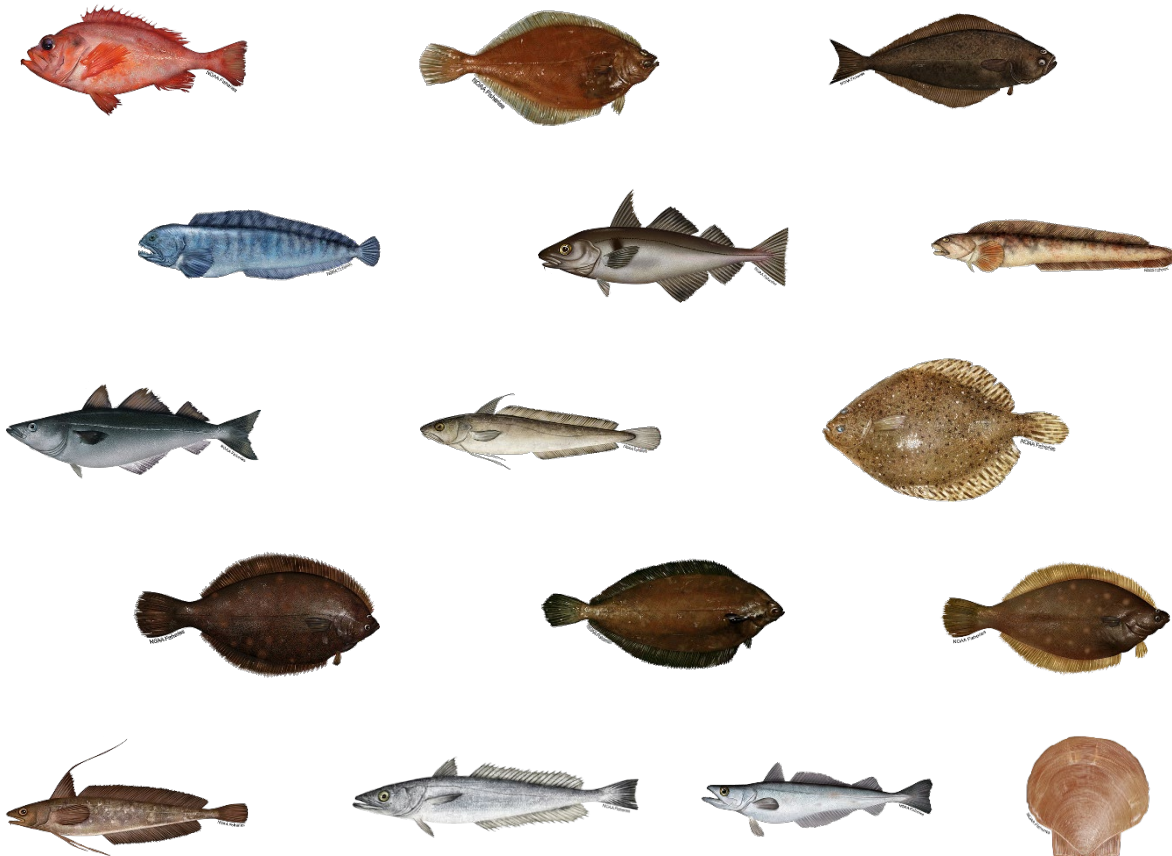


DECISION DOCUMENT

2026 ESSENTIAL FISH HABITAT FRAMEWORK

ATLANTIC SEA SCALLOP FMP - FRAMEWORK ADJUSTMENT 41

NORTHEAST MULTISPECIES FMP - FRAMEWORK ADJUSTMENT 73



This document was developed to help the Council select preliminary preferred alternatives for the 2026 Essential Fish Habitat Designation Framework.

For September 16, 2026

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 2026 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 August 20, 2026.

The following are anticipated Council actions:

1. Select a *preferred alternative* for Essential Fish Habitat designations for all life history stages of Acadian redfish, American plaice, Atlantic halibut, Atlantic sea scallop, Atlantic wolffish, haddock, ocean pout, offshore hake, pollock, red hake, silver hake, white hake, windowpane flounder, winter flounder, witch flounder, and yellowtail flounder.
2. Submit the 2026 Essential Fish Habitat Designation Framework to NOAA Fisheries.

Decision Document: 2026 EFH Framework

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 16 species. These designations rely on data from 2002-2022 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 sixteen species. The designations for individual species and life stages are described in the following sections: 4.2.1 Acadian redfish larvae, juveniles, and adults 4.2.2 American plaice eggs, larvae, juveniles, and adults 4.2.3 Atlantic halibut eggs, larvae, juveniles, and adults 4.2.4 Atlantic sea scallop eggs, larvae, juveniles, and adults 4.2.5 Atlantic wolffish eggs, larvae, juveniles, and adults 4.2.6 Haddock eggs, larvae, juveniles, and adults 4.2.7 Ocean pout eggs, larvae, juveniles, and adults 4.2.8 Offshore hake eggs, larvae, juveniles, and adults 4.2.9 Pollock eggs, larvae, juveniles, and adults 4.2.10 Red hake eggs, larvae, juveniles, and adults 4.2.11 Silver hake eggs, larvae, juveniles, and adults 4.2.12 White hake eggs, larvae, juveniles, and adults 4.2.13 Windowpane flounder eggs, larvae, juveniles, and adults 4.2.14 Winter flounder eggs, larvae, juveniles, and adults 4.2.15 Witch flounder eggs, larvae, juveniles, and adults 4.2.16 Yellowtail flounder eggs, larvae, 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. Separate egg and larval maps were not developed; maps for juveniles and adults combined with text descriptions will support EFH consultations and other work. - Text descriptions complement EFH maps and rely on trawl survey data, model outputs, commercial catch data, expert input, 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 and refined during the development of the 2025 EFH Framework and the 2026 EFH Framework. - Feedback on the draft EFH maps and text was solicited from the Groundfish, Whiting, and Scallop 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 deep-sea red crab and Atlantic salmon updated via Omnibus Habitat Amendment 2 remain unchanged and will be revised via future action(s), currently planned for 2027.			
Draft Framework References			
- Introduction (background on prior work and summary of designation methods): Section 3.0 - Expert feedback process and map and text adjustments developed based on that feedback are described in Sections 3.6.5 and 3.6.6, respectively. Maps showing these adjustments are in Appendix E.			

Decision Document: 2026 EFH Framework

- Alternatives under consideration: Section 4.0
- Fishing Effects Evaluation: Section 5.0
- Applicable Laws and Executive Orders: Section 6.0
- Full maps and text for Alternative 1 (No Action) are provided in Appendix A.
- Species' environmental ranges from survey data and maximum extent of depth usage on the continental slope are provided in Appendix B.
- A summary of the EFH consultation process is provided as Appendix C.
- Detailed species distribution model outputs including density maps are provided as Appendix D.
- Detailed designation methods are provided as Appendix E. This is revised from the 2025 EFH Framework to include modeling approaches for Atlantic wolffish, Atlantic halibut, offshore hake, and Atlantic sea scallop.