

Summary

Meeting dates: November 13, 2015

Agenda item: Puget Sound Rockfish Conservation Action Update -- (Briefing)

Presenter(s): Dr. Dayv Lowry, Senior Research Scientist, Fish Program
Dan Tonnes, Rockfish Recovery Coordinator, NOAA Fisheries

Background summary:

Since 1996 the department has recognized that stocks of several species of groundfish in Puget Sound are degraded ([C3003](#)). Despite fishery reductions and other management actions intended to bolster these stocks, several species have continued to decline. In 2009 and 2010 the department convened a panel of stakeholders and staff to develop the Puget Sound Rockfish Conservation Plan, partially in response to the pending ESA-listing of three rockfish species. The plan was meant to guide development of a comprehensive strategy to ensure the long-term stability of populations of all rockfish species in Puget Sound, ultimately resulting in sustainable fisheries. The plan included goals and actions incorporating biological research, fishery and habitat management, and education and public outreach.

In 2010 canary and yelloweye rockfish were listed as Threatened under the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA), and bocaccio were listed as Endangered. These listing prompted NOAA Fisheries to convene a Rockfish Recovery Team in 2013 to develop a federal recovery plan for these species. Representatives from the department serve on this Recovery Team, and several elements of the pending plan draw on concepts laid out in the Puget Sound Rockfish Conservation Plan. Focusing on data gaps identified in the Puget Sound Rockfish Conservation Plan, the department and NOAA Fisheries have conducted studies to evaluate incidental mortality as a result of fishery bycatch, used remotely operated vehicles to assess rockfish abundance and distribution, modeled habitat preference and suitability, evaluated genetic diversity throughout the inland waters of Washington and British Columbia, and engaged in several education and outreach efforts.

The status of ESA-listed fish species is evaluated every five years by NOAA fisheries, allowing recent research findings to be incorporated into timely population assessments. The federal Biological Review Team is currently evaluating new genetic evidence collected by NOAA Fisheries and the department since listing. The potential implications of these data will be discussed, including possible impacts to Washington State marine fisheries. A timeline for completion of this status review and finalization of the federal recovery plan will also be presented.

Policy issue(s) you are bringing to the Commission for consideration:

N/A

Public involvement process used and what you learned:

The federal recovery plan is being developed by a team consisting of conservationists, fishery managers, ecologists, geneticists, recreational fishers, and scuba divers – all of which are experts in their respective fields. Regular meetings were held to develop draft concepts and documents, which were further reviewed and revised via e-mail. The current draft plan represents the collective, well-informed opinion of this team. This plan has also undergone preliminary review by state and tribal co-managers and will be available for full review by all members of the public after incorporating decisions reached by the Biological Review Team following their 5-year review.

Action requested:

N/A

Draft motion language:

N/A

Justification for Commission action:

N/A.

Communications Plan:

Several reports and peer-reviewed publications will be written over the next several years that detail the findings of recent abundance and distribution surveys, survey method comparisons, and novel analyses of historic data. The results of these studies will be shared with federal and multi-entity working groups focused on rockfish research, governmental co-managers, and the public (e.g., scuba diving clubs, recreational angler associations, and the general public via the Department's webpage).
