



*New England Fishery Management Council
Press Release*

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NEW ENGLAND FISHERY COUNCIL TAKES ACTION TO PROTECT ESSENTIAL FISH HABITAT

Newburyport, MA The New England Fishery Management Council yesterday approved new essential fish habitat (EFH) designations for the 27 marine species it manages in federal waters off the coasts of Maine, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island and Connecticut. Officially known as Phase 1 of the Council's EFH Omnibus Amendment 2, the action designates "those waters and substrate necessary to fish for spawning, feeding, breeding and growth to maturity."

This marks the first time that the Council has taken a comprehensive review and refined its EFH designations since the initial designations were completed nine years ago. The new designations are the result of a complete review of the available scientific methods and best available information, both of which were the subject of a formal peer review process during the development of the amendment.

Additionally, the Council approved a number of habitat areas of particular concern (HAPCs) which are subsets of EFH. The intent of the HAPC designation is to identify those areas that are known to be important to species which are in need of additional levels of protection from adverse impacts. Areas defined as HAPCs also receive more attention when the Council and NOAA Fisheries, the Council's regulatory partner, provide comments on federal and state actions affecting essential fish habitat. They are assigned higher standards when protecting and/or restoring EFH.

The Council agreed to retain the current HAPCs for juvenile cod on Georges Bank and in several Maine rivers for Atlantic salmon. Newly approved HAPCs were added in areas in the Gulf of Maine, including the current Western Gulf of Maine and Cashes Ledge Habitat Closed Areas; inshore areas (from 0-20 meters deep) from Maine south to the Rhode Island/Connecticut border for juvenile cod; and eleven steep-walled canyons and intercanyon areas off the Southern New England and Mid-Atlantic areas to protect corals and other complex structures, such as sponges and sea pens.

The Council will consider an additional HAPC in the Great South Channel at its September 18-20 meeting in Plymouth, Massachusetts after this option receives more detailed scientific and technical review.

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