



Essential Fish Habitat

- ! One of the greatest long-term threats to the viability of commercial and recreational fisheries is the continuing loss of marine, estuarine and other aquatic habitats. Recognizing this threat, the 1996 Magnuson-Stevens Act requires Regional Fishery Management Councils to identify and describe Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) for all managed species under their jurisdiction. EFH includes waters and substrate necessary for spawning, breeding, feeding or growth to maturity. Fishery management plans (FMPs) prepared by Councils must minimize to the extent practicable adverse effects by fishing on such habitat and identify actions to encourage EFH conservation and enhancement.
- ! Addressing these requirements, the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council considered the significant lack of scientific knowledge about the life histories and habitat requirements of many management species in areas under its jurisdiction, i.e., Hawaii, American Samoa, Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands and the remote U.S. Pacific islands. It has adopted a precautionary approach in designating EFH and has also identified habitat areas of particular concern (HAPCs) for its four FMPs.
- ! The Precious Corals FMP, for example, recognizes that pink coral, gold coral, and bamboo coral are generally found between 350 and 1,500 meters and black corals occur between 30 and 100 meters. Precious corals require solid substrate areas with strong to moderate currents to help prevent the accumulation of sediments, which would smother young coral colonies and prevent settlement of new larvae.
- ! The Bottomfish FMP not only defines EFH but also designates all escarpments/slopes between 400-280 meters and three known areas of juvenile opakapaka habitat (two off Oahu and one off Molokai) as HAPC.
- ! Adult spiny lobsters are typically found on rocky substrate in well protected areas, in crevices and under rocks. EFH includes waters from 0 to 100 meters deep. Banks in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands with summits of less than 30 meters deep are designated as HAPC, as they support successful recruitment of juvenile spiny lobster.
- ! Because vast areas outside of EEZ waters are EFH for pelagic management species (such as tuna and billfish), the Council participates in appropriate international forums to manage these species. For example, it is working closely with the Multi-lateral High Level Conference on Highly Migratory Species on the Conservation and Management of Highly Migratory Stocks in the Western and Central Pacific, which met in Honolulu in February and is scheduled to meet here again in September.

- ! Because marine debris originating from fishing operations outside the Council's area may impact EFH, the Council works with international bodies to address this issue and is co-organizing an international conference on marine debris to be held in Hawaii in 2000.