



New England Fishery Management Council

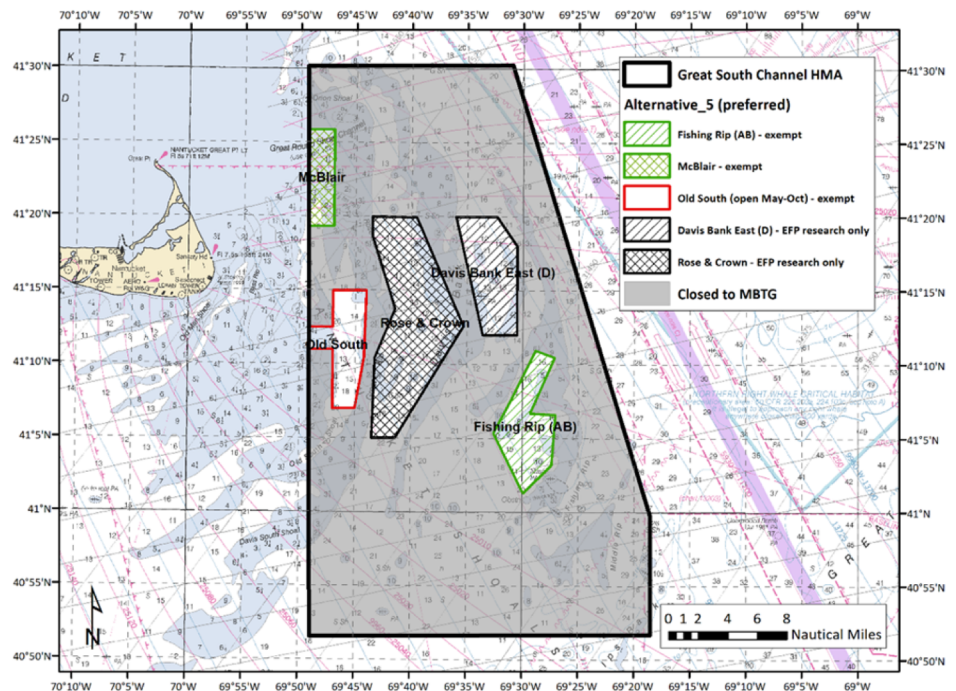
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Habitat: Council Discusses Great South Channel HMA Research Planning; Offshore Energy Updates; New Fishing Effects Model

The New England Fishery Management Council covered a wide range of habitat-related issues during its June meeting in So. Portland, ME. These fell into three categories.

- **Great South Channel Habitat Management Area (HMA) Research Planning:** This work is a follow-up to the Council's Clam Dredge Framework, which was approved in December 2018 and is currently under review by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS/NOAA Fisheries). The framework proposes to allow hydraulic clam dredge and mussel dredge fishing within three exemption areas of the HMA, and it also proposes to create two large research-only areas to investigate whether surfclam and mussel dredging could occur within the areas without harming sensitive habitat.
- **Offshore Wind Updates:** The Council received an overview of the status of offshore wind development in the Northeast region.
- **Fishing Effects Model:** The Council learned more about a new model that's now being used to calculate habitat disturbance due to fishing activity. This model is based on the Swept Area Seabed Impact (SASI) approach that the Council previously was using to assess habitat impacts, as well as models developed for the North Pacific Region. The Fishing Effects Model estimates habitat disturbance for six gear types – bottom trawl, scallop dredge, demersal longline, sink gillnet, and trap.



Great South Channel Habitat Management Area showing: (1) exemption areas where surfclam hydraulic dredge and mussel dredge fishermen will be allowed to fish either year-round (green) or seasonally (red) under the framework; (2) areas designated as research-only for surfclam/mussel fishermen (outlined in black with internal black hatching and cross hatching); and (3) areas closed to all mobile bottom-tending gear (solid grey) as part of the Council's Omnibus Essential Fish Habitat Amendment 2. – NEFMC graphic



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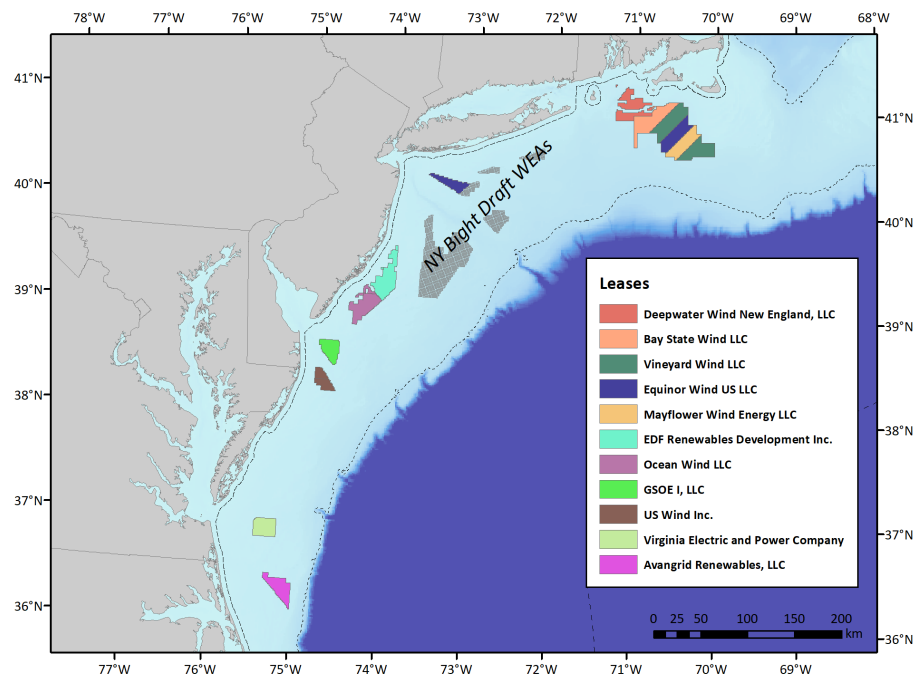
Regarding the Great South Channel HMA, the Council discussed how fishermen and scientists could use exempted fishing permits (EFPs) to pursue work in the designated research-only areas once the Clam Dredge Framework is implemented. The Council is aware that EFP proposals are forthcoming.

In general, EFPs are granted to authorize fishing activities that otherwise would be prohibited, but the projects need to support fisheries-related research and meet strict requirements. EFPs are issued by NOAA's Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office (GARFO) and are subject to a public comment period. GARFO also solicits Council feedback on EFP proposals. Importantly, the Council recommended that research conducted in the Great South Channel HMA should meet the Council's defined objectives and improve its understanding of:

- The distribution of living and non-living habitat features within the area;
- Habitat stability, including how marine life persists in relation to substrate type, tidal flow, and storm events;
- Habitat vulnerability to clam and mussel dredges, both in terms of susceptibility to habitat/gear interactions and recovery rates; and
- Why the Great South Channel HMA is important to managed species such as Atlantic cod.

Management Applications

- (1) The Council first is looking for research results that will help it directly address the question of whether or not clam and mussel dredging can be conducted in the HMA in a manner that's compatible with the Council's habitat protection objectives.
- (2) Secondly, the Council would like the research to help it evaluate the effectiveness of the HMA over the longer term.



Offshore Wind Lease Areas: The Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) has issued 15 commercial wind energy leases to date in the Northeast Region, and an additional lease sale is expected to be announced soon for the New York Bight Area. The Council will review the details and submit comments once this announcement is published. Among the current leases, BOEM has approved seven Site Assessment Plans (SAPs) in seven different states. Construction and Operations Plans (COPs) for four projects – Vineyard Wind, Bay State Wind, South Fork, and Skipjack – are under various stages of review and implementation. COPs for seven additional projects are expected to advance within the next 12 months. More proposed projects are likely. Maine, New Hampshire, and Massachusetts asked BOEM to form a Gulf of Maine Task Force.

– NEFMC graphic



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The Council also discussed the new Fishing Effects Model, which estimates the percentage of habitat disturbance caused by fishing gear over both space and time.

The model combines monthly inputs of “area swept” by fishing gear type with habitat-specific vulnerability parameters to generate estimates of disturbance. Area swept data at the trip level are based largely on vessel trip reports and logbooks. The model incorporates updated maps for six seafloor habitat types, including mud, sand, pebble, cobble, and boulder, plus a steep-and-deep habitat type to capture areas where deep-sea corals are abundant.

The Council’s Swept Area Seabed Impact (SASI) model, which was finalized in 2011, was used to support Omnibus EFH Amendment 2. Many elements of the SASI approach are included in the new model, which incorporates fishing effort data from 1996-2017. Additional data will be added going forward.

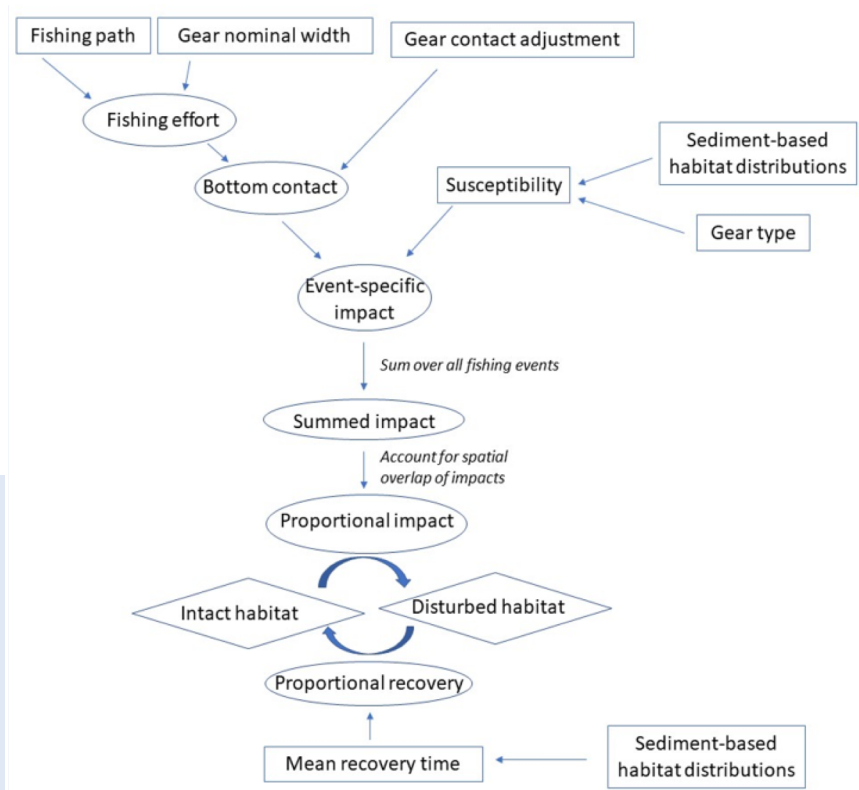
Primarily, the Fishing Effects Model will help inform the Council’s fishery management analyses. Results can be summarized relative to essential fish habitat designations to enhance stock assessments and can be used as indicators in regional ecosystem assessments.

Model development was a collaborative effort. In particular, the Council extends its thanks to research scientists at Alaska Pacific University (APU) who contributed to the development of this model. Funding for the contract with APU was provided by NOAA Fisheries.

Want More Details? Get it All on the Website!

- The Great South Channel Habitat Management Area Research Planning presentation can be found [HERE](#).
- The Offshore Wind presentation is available [HERE](#).
- The Fishing Effects Model presentation can be viewed [HERE](#). And,
- All June 2019 habitat discussion documents are posted at [HABITAT MATERIALS](#).

Fishing Effects Model Trickle-Down



– NEFMC graphic

Still have questions? Contact Michelle Bachman, the Council’s habitat coordinator and chair of the Habitat Plan Development Team, at (978) 465-0492 ext.120, mbachman@nefmc.org. And visit the Council’s [habitat webpage](#) for new developments.