



New England Fishery Management Council

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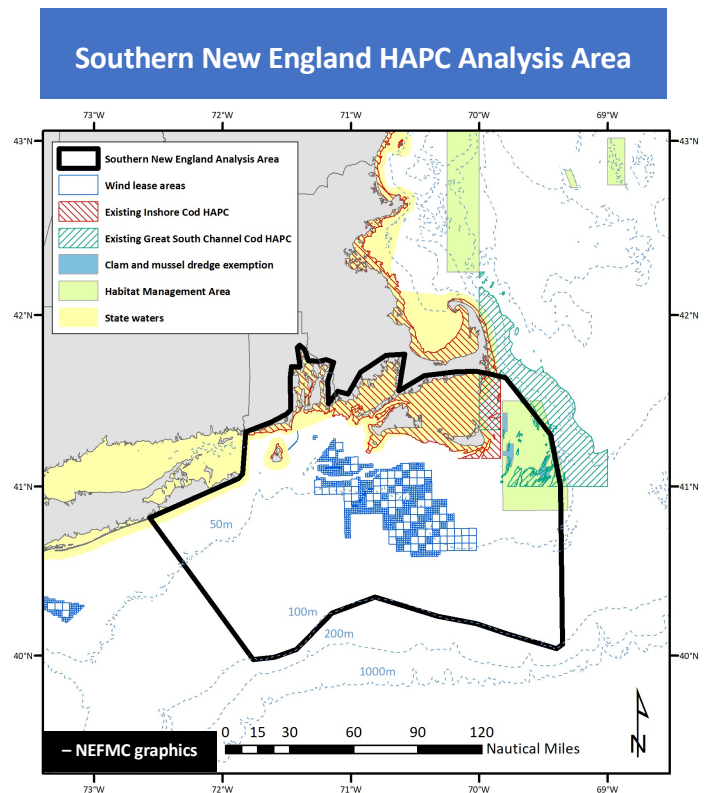
Council Initiates Action for HAPC in Southern New England; Discusses Great South Channel Habitat Management Area

The New England Fishery Management Council will be developing a Habitat Area of Particular Concern (HAPC) in Southern New England to place additional conservation focus on Council-managed species that rely on essential fish habitat (EFH) within this area, which is south of Cape Cod.

During its [February 1-3, 2022](#) webinar meeting, the Council initiated a framework adjustment to pursue the new HAPC. It also:

- Discussed the Great South Channel Habitat Management Area (HMA) and the clam industry's request for additional access to the HMA beyond the current three exemption areas (more about this on page 2);
- Received a summary of the [white paper](#) titled "Habitat Management Considerations for the Northern Edge of Georges Bank," which will help inform future discussions if the Council decides to consider habitat management changes on the Northern Edge as a work priority down the road;
- Received an update on offshore wind activities in the Greater Atlantic Region (see [presentation](#));
- Was informed that the Council was finalizing its [comment letter](#) on the Amitié Subsea Cable project, which runs between Massachusetts and France and the United Kingdom; and
- Agreed to submit a [comment letter](#) on the Running Tide Technology project, which proposes to grow kelp on the northwestern portion of Fippennies Ledge in the Gulf of Maine.

Southern New England HAPC: The Council expressed concern about offshore development activities in Southern New England that could impact scallops, Atlantic cod, which spawn in the area, and other species that rely on habitats there for various stages of their life cycles. More specifically, the Council was



The Council is proposing to develop a clearly defined Habitat Area of Particular Concern (HAPC) within the the black outlined analysis area in the map above.



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concerned about: (1) offshore wind development in the near term; and (2) potentially, offshore aquaculture development over the long term. These concerns led the Council to initiate the framework for a new HAPC to encompass locations and habitat features important to Council-managed species.

Habitat Areas of Particular Concern are a subset of essential fish habitat. In general, these areas are intended to: (a) emphasize the importance of specific areas and habitat features; and (b) strengthen the basis for conservation recommendations designed to avoid, minimize, and mitigate impacts on habitat. HAPCs can be designated based on one or more of the following criteria:

- Important ecological functions of the area;
- Sensitivity to anthropogenic (human-caused) stresses;
- The extent of current/future stresses; and/or
- Rarity of the habitat type.

The Council's Habitat Plan Development Team, Habitat Committee, and Habitat Advisory Panel will work on the details of the HAPC for further consideration at the Council's April 12-14, 2022 meeting.

Great South Channel Habitat Management Area (HMA)

The Council also discussed the current clam dredge exemptions within the Great South Channel HMA (see map at right). The HMA was developed under the Council's [Omnibus Essential Fish Habitat Amendment 2](#), which was implemented in 2018 with a one-year exemption from the HMA's mobile bottom-tending gear restriction for the clam and mussel dredge fisheries.

The Council then developed a [Clam Dredge Framework](#) to provide longer-term exemptions because the Great South Channel HMA contains important surfclam fishing grounds. The Council worked to balance conservation and industry needs by: (1) identifying areas that provided suitable bottom for clam fishing; while (2) continuing to minimize adverse fishing impacts on habitat to the extent practical.

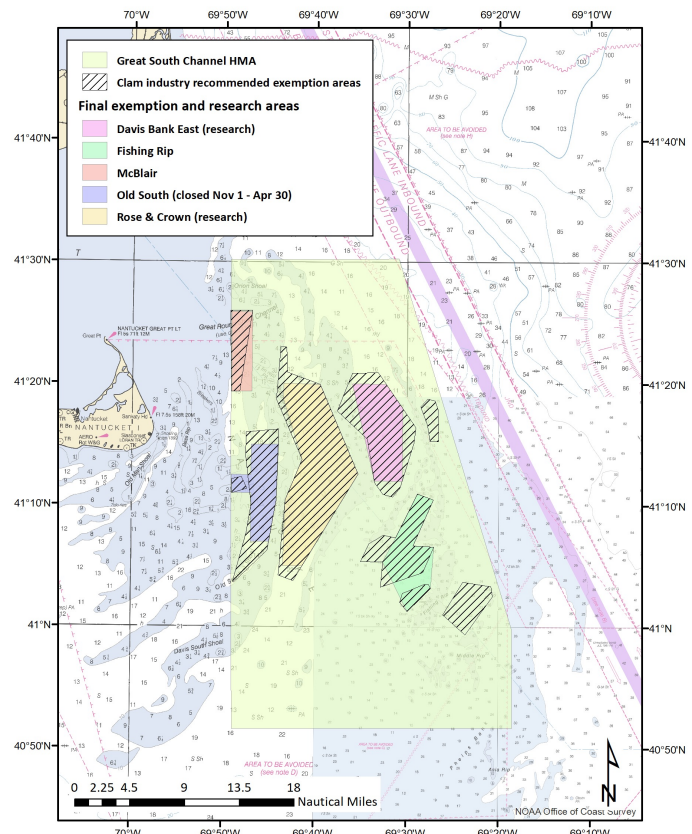
- Here is a [brief outline](#) of the history of the Great South Channel HMA and Clam Dredge Framework.

According to the clam industry, fishing only within the

HAPCs versus HMAs

- *Habitat Areas of Particular Concern (HAPCs) are non-regulatory and have no restrictions on fishing activity within the designation.*
- *Habitat Management Areas (HMAs), on the other hand, do have gear-based restrictions on fishing to minimize adverse effects of fishing on essential fish habitat.*

Great South Channel Habitat Management Area with Clam Exemptions, Research Areas





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three approved exemption areas is not economically viable. The industry has asked the Secretary of Commerce to take [emergency action](#) to provide additional access to surfclam bottom in the Great South Channel HMA. The request itself and additional correspondence can be found [here](#).

The Council discussed the industry's request, as well as research being conducted within the HMA by Coonamessett Farm Foundation under an [exempted fishing permit](#) (EFP) that was issued in 2020 by the NOAA Fisheries Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office (GARFO). The EFP was based on the [research plan](#) developed by the Council for the HMA. The work was conducted within a subset of the Rose and Crown Research Area (see map on previous page). Several industry members provided public comment during the February webinar meeting and asked the Council to grant greater access to the area by supporting the request for emergency action or addressing the situation through another vehicle.

As a first step, the Council voted to charge the Habitat Committee, supported by the Habitat Plan Development Team, with reviewing the results of Coonamessett Farm Foundation's report on the clam dredge mapping study in the Rose and Crown area.

The Council said the purpose of the review "is to ascertain the utility of this study for management of fishing gear impacts within the Great South Channel Habitat Management Area." The Council added, "This assessment could be used to support NOAA Fisheries consideration of an extension for this EFP or approval of similar EFPs."

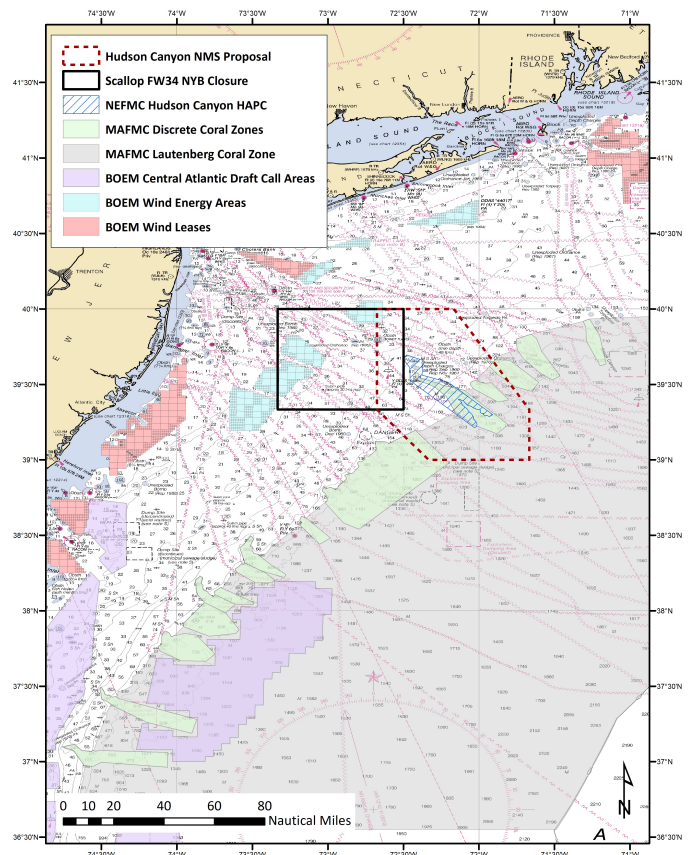


More Information

Visit the
Council's [habitat](#)
[webpage](#).

- All meeting materials related to the Council's February habitat discussion are posted [here](#).
- **Questions?** Contact Michelle Bachman, the Council's habitat coordinator, at (978) 465-0492, ext. 120, mbachman@nefmc.org.

Hudson Canyon National Marine Sanctuary Nomination Review



The Council agreed to [submit comments](#) to NOAA on the five-year review of the Hudson Canyon National Marine Sanctuary [nomination](#). NOAA is *not* proposing to designate the area as a sanctuary. The agency is only collecting comments on whether the area should remain on the nomination list. The red-hashed line in the map above outlines the area previously nominated. The black box is the New York Bight Scallop Closure Area that's proposed under [Scallop Framework 34](#).