



# New England Fishery Management Council

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## Habitat: Council Reviews Great South Channel HMA Research Proposal; Receives Offshore Wind Updates

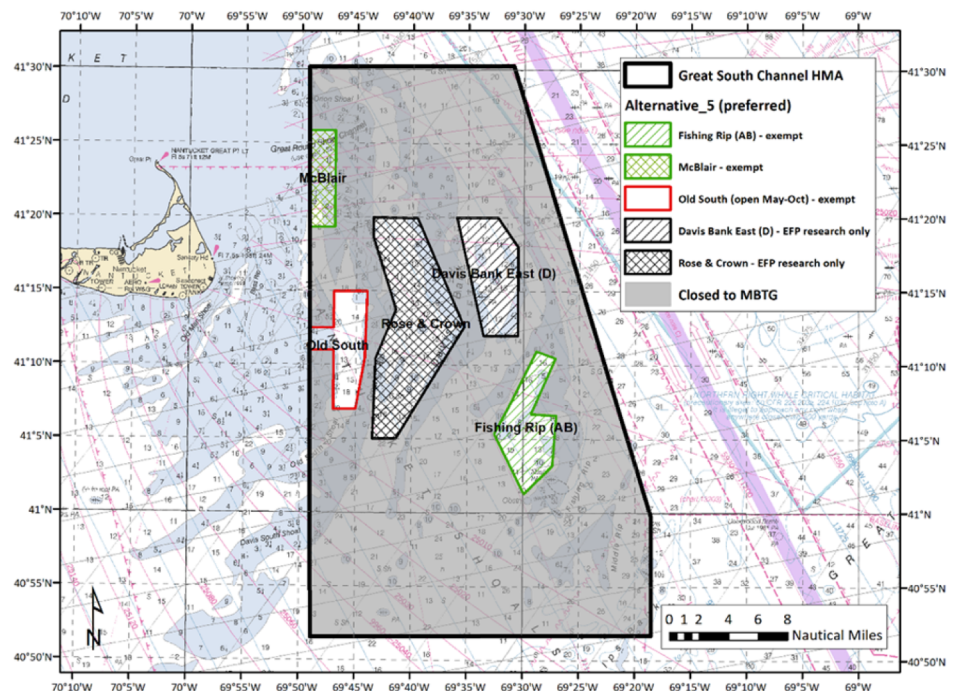
The New England Fishery Management Council discussed several offshore wind and habitat-related issues during its late January meeting in Portsmouth, NH, including a proposed exempted fishing permit (EFP) for the Great South Channel Habitat Management Area (HMA) that would allow surfclam and mussel dredging within a defined portion of Rose & Crown – one of the HMA's research-only areas.

The HMA was created through the Council's Omnibus Essential Fish Habitat Amendment 2, which was implemented [April 9, 2018](#). Surfclam dredge vessels were granted a one-year exemption to continue fishing in the area. The exemption expired April 9, 2019.

The Council developed a [Clam Dredge Framework](#) as a trailing action to the amendment to consider allowing the use of clam dredge gear and, subsequently, mussel dredge gear within the HMA if the gear could be used without harming sensitive habitat.

The framework contains one seasonal and two year-round exemption areas where surfclam and mussel fishermen could operate, as well as two research-only areas to gather additional information to determine whether clam and mussel dredging could be conducted in a manner that's compatible with the Council's habitat protection objectives.

Although a final rule for the Clam Dredge Framework hasn't been published yet, the National



**ABOVE:** The 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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Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS/NOAA Fisheries) received an exempted fishing permit application for a multi-phase project from Coonamessett Farm Foundation (CFF). NMFS's Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office (GARFO) worked with CFF to scale back the project and begin with what is being called Phase 1.

NMFS now is collecting public comment through February 11, 2020 on its "preliminary determination" that the EFP application "contains all of the required information and warrants further consideration." Under the EFP, five vessels would be allowed to fish for surfclams and mussels with dredge-mounted, forward-facing cameras to characterize substrate types where surfclam and mussel fishing occurs within the Great South Channel HMA. NMFS said, "CFF contends that this information will support future consideration of HMA dredge exemption areas."

On the first day of the New England Council's January meeting, NMFS consulted with the Council about this project. The Council voted to send a comment letter to GARFO in support of an EFP for Phase 1. The Council will work on the letter and incorporate comments from the Habitat Committee regarding the project's overall efficacy.

## Offshore Wind, BOEM

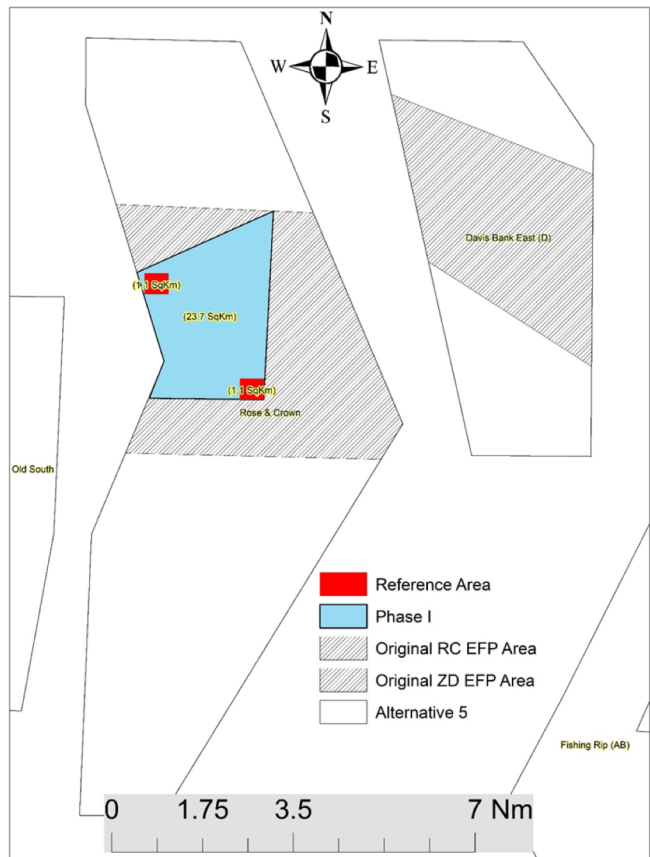
The Council also received offshore wind updates from its staff and the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM). The staff update included a broad overview of floating turbine technology. The presentations are available [here](#).

During its discussion, the Council developed two recommendations that it will forward to BOEM. These were that:

1. Habitat surveys in wind lease areas be conducted early in the process and at a resolution and scale that are useful for understanding the effects on essential fish habitat and Habitat Areas of Particular Concern; and
2. Spatial planning for wind farms in the Gulf of Maine be transparent, involve the fishing community, and avoid unsolicited bids.

### Coonamessett Farm Foundation Application for Exempted Fishing Permit (EFP)

- Read the EFP Federal Register [notice](#).
- Read the full CFF [project proposal](#).



**ABOVE:** The blue Phase I area within Rose & Crown is under consideration for an exempted fishing permit (EFP) that would allow clam and mussel dredge fishing under certain conditions. – NMFS graphic

**QUESTIONS?** Contact Michelle Bachman, the Council's habitat coordinator, at (978) 465-0492, ext. 120, [mbachman@nefmc.org](mailto:mbachman@nefmc.org)