



National Marine Fisheries Service

Habitat Conservation and Restoration

Refine Essential Fish Habitat

NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) FY 2009 budget request includes \$1.0 million to refine essential fish habitat designations. This request supports work to improve NOAA's protection of habitats necessary to support sustainable fisheries, healthy ecosystems, and the communities and economies that depend on them.

Overview

The Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA) requires NMFS to identify and describe essential fish habitat (EFH) for all federally managed fisheries. These EFH descriptions are used as the basis for NMFS to ensure fishing and other federally regulated and permitted activities do not adversely affect these important areas. NMFS is required to protect EFH under the MSA to help support productive commercial marine fisheries, which contributed \$35.1 billion to the U.S. economy in 2006.

NMFS and the Regional Fishery Management Councils have identified and described EFH for all managed species. As NMFS learns more about the locations of various habitats and how fish rely on them throughout their lifecycle, the MSA requires NMFS and the Councils to review and revise existing EFH designations. Between 2005 and 2006, NMFS re-examined and updated EFH designations for the Gulf of Mexico, Caribbean, North Pacific, and Pacific Groundfish Fishery Management Plans (FMPs).

EFH designations must be based on the best available scientific information. The more scientifically defensible our EFH designations, the less vulnerable NOAA will be to challenges to habitat protection measures. This funding is vital to improving scientific justification concerning EFH.



Adult flounder utilizing a seagrass bed.

NMFS requests \$1.0 million in 2009 to:

- *Re-examine and refine EFH designations in New England, Mid-Atlantic, South Atlantic, and Western Pacific, and for Highly Migratory Species.*

MSA-required activities include synthesizing existing data and applying new analytical and modeling tools to ensure that the most important coastal and marine areas are designated as EFH. The resulting EFH designations will be mapped and accessible to the public, and will be justifiable because they are based on the best available scientific information.

- *Conduct research to better understand how habitats contribute to increased fish populations.*

Understanding how habitats support the growth, reproduction, and survival of species by providing food, nursery grounds and shelter, allows NMFS to ensure that the most important habitats are identified as EFH. Unfortunately this type of information is often not available. NMFS will support new research that increases our ability to quantify how habitat contributes to fishery production and ecosystem health.

- *Initiate seafloor mapping projects in high-priority areas in coordination with other NOAA entities.*

Mapping marine habitat types, bathymetry, and seafloor substrate will help NMFS predict responses to environmental and anthropogenic change and guide future decision making.

NOAA FY 2009 Budget Request (\$ in Millions)			
BUDGET LINE: Habitat Conservation and Restoration	FY 2008 Enacted	FY 2009 Program Change	FY 2009 Pres Bud Request
SUSTAINABLE HABITAT MANAGEMENT Refine EFH	\$0.8	\$0.2	\$1.0

For more information, contact: **Patricia Montanio, Director, NMFS Office of Habitat Conservation, at 301-713-2325 or visit www.habitat.noaa.gov.**