

Coastal Fish Habitat Partnerships

Spring 2017



Atlantic Coastal Fish Habitat Partnership

Atlantic Coastal Fish Habitat Partnership and Partners Initiate Black Sea Bass Habitat Research Project in the Mid-Atlantic

The [Atlantic Coastal Fish Habitat Partnership](#) (ACFHP) recently established a new collaborative project with the [University of Maryland Eastern Shore](#) (UMES), [Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council](#) (Council), and [National Fish Habitat Fund](#) (Fund) to study black sea bass habitat characteristics, fish abundance, and fish diets in the Mid-Atlantic. The project, led by Dr. Brad Stevens of UMES, is titled 'Hab in the MAB: Characterizing black sea bass habitat in the Mid-Atlantic Bight.' The new study will combine SCUBA, photography, videography, controlled angling, and stable isotope analysis techniques to better understand the importance of habitat and prey community structure on black sea bass feeding ecology.

"ACFHP and our collaborative partners are excited about the unique opportunity to work together over the next few years to collect data that will inform both science and management, and support healthy fisheries in the Mid-Atlantic region," stated Kent Smith, ACFHP Steering Committee Chair.

In the summer of 2015, ACFHP applied for and received funding from the Council to manage a short-term research project focusing on Mid-Atlantic habitat (natural and/or artificial reef) and fisheries productivity. Black sea bass was chosen as a focal species because it is managed by both the Council and the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC), and because the species is structure oriented. ACFHP formed a subcommittee of representatives from the ACFHP Steering Committee, Council, and ASMFC Artificial Reef Committee to develop a request for proposals dedicated to black sea bass habitat research and/or restoration in the Mid-Atlantic region.

After careful review of several strong proposals, the ACFHP subcommittee chose to provide a \$216,000 award to Dr. Stevens and his PhD student, Cara Schweitzer. Their study will determine if there are differences resulting in the use of artificial vs. natural habitats.

In particular, study objectives include:

1. Determining the preference of black sea bass for particular habitats by assessing their abundance, size structure, and feeding ecology within natural and artificial reefs;
2. Improving the understanding of benthic habitat structure by quantitatively assessing biodiversity, rugosity (e.g., surface roughness measurements routinely used by reef biologists), and other habitat characteristics of natural and artificial reefs; and

3. Determining if increased connectivity of habitat type increases fish recruitment, by experimentally manipulating connecting areas between isolated habitat patches.

"I'm glad that the Mid-Atlantic Council was able to work with the NFHP Board to support this important research," said Chris Moore, Executive Director of the Council. "The outcomes of this project will significantly improve our understanding of black sea bass habitat and productivity."

ACFHP is the first of the 19 Fish Habitat Partnerships (FHPs) throughout the U.S. to support a habitat research project using the NFHP Beyond the Pond Fund. The Fund is a 501(c)3 entity created in 2015 to provide the FHPs an opportunity to connect with the private sector and maximize funding and collaboration opportunities. It supports the leveraging of resources and grassroots actions to achieve maximum impact in protecting and restoring fish habitat from the local to national levels.



Blueheads & Bonneville

Take 6 minutes out of your day and get inspired! Watch "[Blueheads and Bonneville](#)", a short film about the work the [Western Native Trout Initiative](#) and the [Desert Fish Habitat Partnership](#) are doing with our partners in the Weber River, Utah, to benefit the native bluehead sucker and Bonneville Cutthroat Trout. We produced the film to celebrate the fish and their habitat, western waters and landscapes, the strong partnership that has developed for the Weber River, and the 10th anniversary of the National Fish Habitat Partnership. If you would like more information about the three projects that have already been completed, along with photos and links to time lapse video, you can read more [here](#). Many thanks to [Sage Lion Media](#), Utah Division of Wildlife Resources, and Utah Trout Unlimited for all their work in supporting this effort!





PMEP launches website to share results of assessment outcomes

PMEP launched a [new website](#) to share the results of its assessment work to date, including a preview of products that will be available this Spring.

The website, *Pathways to Strategic Conservation in West Coast Estuaries*, describes the pathway PMEPE and its partners have taken to prioritize strategic investments in estuaries. The site features links to reports and progress in the following areas:

1. [Inventory and Classification of West Coast Estuaries](#)
2. [State of Knowledge Report](#)
3. [Compile and map documented presence and abundance data for 15 focal species](#)
4. Literature review - compile and summarize past methods and literature for setting ecological priorities for estuary restoration and habitat protection
5. Refine approximate extent of estuaries
6. Map habitats within estuaries using the Coastal and Marine Ecological Classification Standard (CMECS)
7. Document tidal wetland loss for the US West Coast
8. Identify key stressors in each region (Salish Sea, Washington/Oregon/Northern California coast, Central California, Southern California Bight)
9. Identify restoration and protection strategies that address key stressors
10. Achieve consensus on metrics that address impacts
11. Complete initial set of maps and make available for West Coast stakeholders in the spring of 2017
12. Continue to refine mapping products

PMEPE seeks to enhance the ecological function and resilience of West Coast estuaries by developing a prioritization scheme to guide conservation and restoration actions supporting fish habitat functions in West Coast estuaries. PMEPE will launch its spatial data system in the Spring of 2017, making available its data layers to partners throughout the West Coast.

2017 Gulf All Hands Meeting

The Gulf of Mexico Alliance is teamed up with the Harte Research Institute for a joint meeting of the [State of the Gulf of Mexico One Gulf Summit 2017 and the 2017 All Hands Meeting](#).

Back by popular demand is the Tools Cafe' scheduled for Tuesday evening, March 28th. Priority Issue Teams, as in years past, are creating robust agendas to include updates on new actions and reports from Gulf Star award recipients. Both meetings will be held back to back the week of March 26 - 31, 2017. The location will be the [Omni Hotel](#) in Houston, Texas.

[Registration](#) is now open. Read more about the [One Gulf Summit](#). Get more information on the [2017 All Hands Meeting](#).

He`eia Estuarine Research Reserve Established on Windward Oahu

On January 18th the He`eia Estuarine Research Reserve was formally established, culminating several years of scoping and planning by numerous stakeholders. The Hawaii FHP is providing technical assistance and conservation project funding for aquatic habitat restoration at multiple sites within the newly established reserve, including a coastal wetland and a stream-mouth estuary. A recent video highlights vegetation control efforts along the estuary shoreline by the non-profit watershed alliance *Hui O Koolaupoko*.

Link to Heeia video: https://youtu.be/yi7iwwT_5S8

Other links:

Press release (NOAA) - www.noaa.gov/media-release/noaa-designates-29th-national-estuarine-research-reserve

Hui O Koolaupoko - www.huihawaii.org



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