

Habitat Blueprint Workgroup Meeting Summary

July 20, 2021

- Recap of guidance from Habitat Committee and previous items from WG – tracking process is ongoing and staff have idea for how to approach.
- Reviewed the scope of work and provided progress to-date

Blueprint contents:

- Info that has been collected is detailed and background info and contained in appendices
- Blueprint contents estimate of page numbers for each section in the Blueprint
- OC strategy: website include a clear statement for the public on how the Council approaches habitat, “What is Council’s role in Habitat”

WG input:

- Did not identify anything missing at this time but will keep in mind as the draft develops.
- Agreed that the blueprint would be a concise summary with the audience being the public, Council members, agencies and NGOs, AP.
- Valuable to reach out to potential users and who will be relying on this information so they can provide feedback on structure.
- Important to have path forward in terms of how the Council, AP, etc. fulfills their role.
- Current info on habitat is overwhelming and getting heavier (wind, climate, EOs, etc)
- A concise document also prevents breakdowns in communication and keep lines of communication uncluttered

Habitat Policies & Accessibility

- Question: How often are there inquiries from the public/press on what the Council’s position is on projects? From NMFS and others
 - Not often from the public or press. More often from NGOs, NMFS, other states
 - Press responses routed through Kim with Roger’s input.
- Positions on legislation often comes up at CCC level, not so much among the general public. SAFMC policies proven useful at the CCC level, nationally, in sharing info about habitat actions and positions, and in developing positions on legislation
- Current initiatives under current admin will necessitate more Council visibility re their role and there needs to be a strategy to provide easy access to information.
- **ACTION:** Outreach and accessibility are important. Through OC strategy, develop a process communicating positions and policies. Provide easy website access to policies and define why they exist
- **ACTION:** There needs to be a simple statement in the Blueprint that the public can pick up on the council’s role when it comes to habitat.

Policies and Procedures for reviewing projects impacting EFH (comments process)

- Roger summarized how process worked as laid out in the original Habitat Plan in 1998
- Coordination has been initiated thru HCD and criteria to define significance of a project have been used to determine which projects the Council comments on.
- Three different levels of review: no formal review, desk review, and full-blown review

WG Input:

- The Council has a suite of options available when issues related to EFH arise tied to tempo/flow to tempo of Habitat AP, Council meetings, etc. We do have the ability to address things a little quicker.
- If you need the AP to weigh in on something a little sooner we can we do a virtual meeting or reach out informally to chair and sub-panel chair and then meeting would not be as formal and need to be noticed in the FR.
- HCD can give a report to Habitat AP more regularly to keep Council informed of possible issues and allow for the review process to play out more proactively
- Habitat sub-panels could hold informal meetings as has been done in the past. We could formalize a little more to make that process more defined.
- Blueprint needs to spell out logistics/procedure so it is very transparent and to offset any legal or other issues.
- When it's been a timing issue, NMFS can get involved to obtain extension so the Council has opportunity to weigh in.
- Don't have IPT tool for habitat like we have for "fish department" – this allows more nimbleness of communication between APs and Council Committees
- States may get more information than the Council depending on the issue.
- The process flowchart is really important to spell out things like when the Council is notified and how it happens.

Recommendations:

- AP more regularly engaged in 'filtering' habitat issues and permits and comment opportunities to identify those that may be of concern ("significant") to the Council
 - Goal is to be more proactive, robust and transparent in the process for "notifying" council of an issue
 - Discussion of proposed projects, comment opportunities should be a routine part of regularly scheduled AP meetings.
 - Consider Webinar meetings held between regular semi-annual meetings (result in quarterly meetings) to address developing projects and opportunities Short, focused on pending projects and comments
 - Report to Council on projects, recommendations for "significant" projects, and recommendation for nature of Council response
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- HCD updates at AP meetings –

- address activities, eg the 2014 overview presentation.
 - At least every other year if not annually
- IPT process for habitat issues?
 - To efficiently develop comments and responses
 - Need to brainstorm this one
- Sub-panel engagement as needed outside of regular AP meetings
- Outline in the Blueprint:
 - process for reviewing ongoing projects and identifying those considered “significant”.
 - Address the role of AP, HCD, Council staff, Council members.
 - Consider criteria or triggers that define significance (intent is to clearly ID projects to elevate to council significance, based on a priori traits, not to restrict comment only to projects that meet the criteria)
 - Process for developing comments within the typical time constraints. Address logistics of getting input or recommendations from the AP to the Committee, Council or Chair.
 - Webinar meetings, “desk review”, subgroup conference call

Tracking Consultations

- Roger will work for HCD to obtain analyses like was done for 2014 for the Fall 2021 AP meeting.
- Important to note that the work being done by NMFS HCD relative to EFH is on behalf of the Council thru their EFH mandates

Job Description for AP:

- **ACTION:** staff develop a draft job description for Habitat AP.
 - Will include description of AP’ structure and charge/role
 - Address AP membership, meetings, expectations
 - Review with workgroup via email, goal of approving at the next meeting

The Job Description will make it clear in the blueprint that there will be times this conflict arises and the role of the Council as the decision-maker.