



Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission NEWS RELEASE

Sustainable and Cooperative Management of Atlantic Coastal Fisheries

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ASMFC Releases Fish Habitat of Concern Designations for Commission-managed Fish and Shellfish Species

Arlington, VA – In recognition of the importance of protecting, restoring, and enhancing fish habitats along the Atlantic coast for the sustainability of fisheries, the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission announces the release of its newest habitat document: *Fish Habitat of Concern Designations for Fish and Shellfish Species*. This document focuses on identifying Fish Habitat of Concern (FHOC) for fish and shellfish species managed solely by the Commission, aiming to concentrate conservation efforts on specific habitats that are ecologically invaluable and necessary to support each life stage of these species. It offers a comprehensive overview of the regulatory and policy framework for habitat descriptions in Commission fishery management plans and will serve as the primary habitat guidance document for Commission-managed species.



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FHOCs constitute a subset of fish habitat, such as submerged aquatic vegetation, spawning grounds, or types of nearshore estuarine habitat, that are of high ecological importance, rare, sensitive, or vulnerable to development threats. These areas are defined based on criteria similar to federally-designated Habitat Areas of Particular Concern under the purview of the Magnuson-Stevens Act (MSA). However, since species solely managed by the Commission do not fall under the MSA, their habitats currently lack federal legal protection, and consultation with the National Marine Fisheries Service is not required.

This document addresses this gap in protection by emphasizing the critical role habitats play in fisheries production and ecosystem function. FHOC descriptions will be updated regularly as new information becomes available. The Commission believes that by highlighting the importance of these habitats for the species under its management, stakeholders and policymakers will better understand the need for targeted conservation efforts to ensure the long-term health and sustainability of Atlantic coast fisheries. The document is available at http://asmfc.org/files/Habitat/FHOC_Designations_January2024.pdf. For more information, please contact Simen Kaalstad, Habitat Coordinator, at skaalstad@asmfc.org.

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The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission was formed by the 15 Atlantic coastal states in 1942 for the promotion and protection of coastal fishery resources. The Commission serves as a deliberative body of the Atlantic coastal states, coordinating the conservation and management of nearshore fishery resources, including marine, shell and diadromous species.