

Annotated Agenda
MAFAC Meeting – October 25-October 27, 2011
Washington, DC

1. Title of Discussion: Habitat Blueprint

2. Presenters: Eric Schwaab, Assistant Administrator for Fisheries
Brian Pawlak, Acting Director, Office of Habitat Conservation

3. Objective/Purpose: **[Informational & Action]** - This presentation will provide an overview of NOAA's Habitat Blueprint. The purpose of the presentation is to solicit advice from MAFAC on the geographically based approach defined in the Blueprint and to identify methods (policy, regulatory and operational) for successful Blueprint implementation.

4. Background/Synopsis:

Recall that in May, MAFAC put forth a set of recommendations to the Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Task Force (GCERTF) that laid out a set of high-level priorities for restoring the Gulf of Mexico ecosystem. These recommendations reflect the committee's knowledge of and interest in habitat conservation.

Habitat loss and degradation is increasingly recognized as a challenge to sustaining living and natural marine resources and it is an issue that NOAA is addressing head-on as we turn the corner, moving beyond overfishing.

NOAA is taking a new approach to develop and implement habitat-based solutions to support healthy and productive ecosystems. The approach is laid out in a draft framework, the 'Habitat Blueprint,' and focuses on collaboration, prioritizing activities, and understanding, protecting, and restoring habitat for the benefit of our living marine resources and communities.

In the draft Habitat Blueprint, NOAA lays out four broad approaches to addressing habitat loss and degradation:

1. Implement regional habitat initiatives as immediate opportunities to test habitat-based solutions;
2. Establish geographic priorities to focus long-term habitat science and conservation efforts;
3. Implement a systematic and strategic approach to habitat science for effective decision-making; and
4. Strengthen policy and legislation at the national level to enhance our ability to affect meaningful change.

We are most interested in gaining MAFAC's input on the second and fourth approaches (establishing geographic priorities and strengthening policy and legislation).

The regional initiatives (Approach 1) are already underway. Their purpose is to preserve or improve the habitat condition within a defined geographic area and on a scale greater than an individual restoration project. Each includes a science component through integration of information, modeling, decision support, and/or monitoring. At the September Leadership Council meeting in Annapolis, Maryland, each region presented their habitat initiatives.

Information about the initiatives will be sent to MAFAC members prior to the meeting. **** These documents are still in draft form and should not be distributed.****

5. Options / Issues for Discussion:

- How do you think NOAA Fisheries should approach identifying geographic priority areas (Approach 2)? What are the potential implications and pitfalls?
- Who are key external stakeholders we should engage in developing the priority areas, and how should we engage them?
- What are key policy opportunities we can use (within existing MSA provisions) to promote the Blueprint? What are the policy barriers?

6. Preferred Recommendation:

Record of Decision:

Decision, Next Step(s) and/or Action:

Assigned to: Due Date: