



NOAA HABITAT CONSERVATION

NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE

HABITAT PROTECTION

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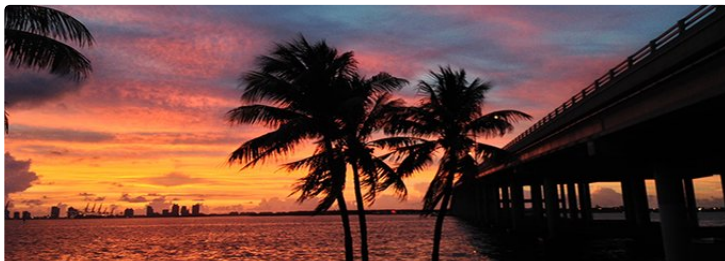


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What is Essential Fish Habitat?

Quick Facts about Essential Fish Habitat

As a Congressional mandate, Essential Fish Habitat describes all waters and substrate necessary for fish for spawning, breeding, feeding, or growth to maturity.

- Nearly 1,000 species, at multiple life stages, have an Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) description
- Regional managers have identified more than 100 Habitat Areas of Particular Concern for enhanced EFH conservation
- All federal agencies whose work may affect fish habitats must consult with NOAA Fisheries
- NOAA Fisheries staff consults on thousands of coastal and marine development activities every year
- EFH is described for federally managed species, some of which have habitats in state waters

The real estate mantra of “location, location, location” also applies to creatures living underwater. Because fish depend on their water estate to survive and reproduce, Congress improved the nation’s main fisheries law in 1996 to recognize the importance of healthy habitat for commercial and recreational fisheries. Here at NOAA Fisheries, we’re celebrating [20 years of Essential Fish Habitat](#) alongside the [40th anniversary](#) of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act.

Protecting and restoring Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) has helped to maintain productive fisheries and rebuild depleted stocks in the United States. NOAA Fisheries has used EFH authorities to support the \$200 billion annual activity of the U.S. fishing industry while protecting more than 800 million acres of habitat. Our economy and fishing industry benefit from sustainable fisheries, supported by productive habitats that provide high quality seafood both today and for years to come.

Essentially, Fish Habitat

Don’t feel alarmed if you’ve never heard of Essential Fish Habitat. NOAA Fisheries works quietly and efficiently—mostly behind the scenes—to identify EFH and to protect it. We work with partners like the regional fishery management councils to use the best available scientific information to identify, describe, and map EFH for all federally managed fish species. Fishery management councils can use this information to pinpoint sensitive habitats, and protect them by limiting certain fishing gears in those areas. We also provide advice for smart development that minimizes or avoids environmental impacts. These efforts are preventative and focus on federal-level actions that may impact marine fisheries and vital habitats.

Our EFH conservation efforts function like federal dietary recommendations: We guide people to make good choices with long-term benefits. Every year, habitat experts across the country advise federal agencies on hundreds of projects, ranging from port expansions to offshore energy development. These consultations ensure that projects funded by your tax dollars do not carelessly destroy habitat.

Read more about EFH authorities in the [Magnuson-Stevens Act](#) and its official wording in the [EFH regulatory guidelines](#).

Underwater Neighborhoods

Using the best available science, NOAA Fisheries and the regional fishery management councils have identified and [mapped EFH](#) for each life stage of nearly 1,000 federally-managed species. You can find this information in the fishery management plans of the [regional fishery management councils](#)

and the [EFH Mapper](#).

Essential Fish Habitat includes all types of aquatic habitat, such as:

- wetlands
- coral reefs
- seagrasses
- rivers

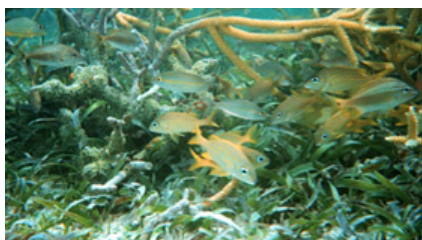
where fish spawn, breed, feed, or grow to maturity. These habitats are “essential” because, without these prime locations, fish would not be able to survive.

Location, Location, Location

High priorities for EFH conservation—called Habitat Areas of Particular Concern—have the following conditions:

- major ecological functions
- sensitivity to decline
- stress from development
- rare habitat

For example, coastal estuaries, canopy kelp, shallow corals, seagrass, and rocky reefs merit special attention from NOAA Fisheries.



Useful Links

- [Magnuson-Stevens Act](#)
- [EFH Regulatory Guidelines](#) (pdf - 104kb)
- [EFH and Critical Habitat Comparison](#) (pdf - 5.1mb)
- [Regional Use of the Habitat Area of Particular Concern \(HAPC\)](#)

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