ily available for use by fishery managers. Improved habitat science information will find a wide number of uses throughout NMFS, including managing essential fish habitat, habitat restoration, stock assessment, integrated ecosystem assessment, coastal and marine spatial planning, understanding climate change, and ecosystem-based fishery management.

Developing and implementing the *Habitat Assessment Improvement Plan*

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The *Habitat Assessment Improvement Plan* (HAIP) is the first nationally coordinated plan to focus on the marine fisheries aspects of habitat science. It addresses the lack of knowledge regarding the association of marine species and their habitats, which impedes effective fisheries and habitat management, protection, restoration, and stock assessment. Questionnaire responses from NMFS managers and scientists indicated a lack of habitat-specific data, staff to collect such data, and knowledge of interactions within the ecosystem. The HAIP establishes the framework for NMFS to coordinate habitat research, monitoring, and assessments and to increase support for habitat science. The goals of the HAIP are to: 1) assist NMFS in developing a habitat science program; 2) improve our ability to identify essential fish habitat (EFH) and habitat areas of particular concern; 3) provide information needed to assess impacts to EFH; 4) reduce habitat-related uncertainty in stock assessments; 5) facilitate a greater number of stock assessments that explicitly incorporate ecosystem considerations and spatial analyses; 6) contribute to assessments of ecosystem services (i.e. the things people need and care about that are provided by ecosystems); and 7) contribute to ecosystem-based fishery management, integrated ecosystem assessments, and coastal and marine spatial planning.

Building and funding a National Habitat Science Program in NMFS

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The team charged with developing the *Habitat Assessment Improvement Plan* (HAIP) has completed this task, which required about two years from start to finish. The NMFS Science Board has asked that this excellent team continue to work on implementing the HAIP. This will be a more complex task in which the HAIP team, and NMFS as a whole, will have less control over events and outcomes. Success will depend on persistence, creativity and flexibility, and the merit of the ideas we generate and the initiatives we pursue.

The HAIP provides recommendations that should be addressed. We will need to develop new budget and staffing initiatives, because it is obvious that additional funding is needed. It is also apparent that existing partnerships will have to be strengthened, and new partnerships developed. On one hand, it's no secret that the Federal budget is under considerable strain, so funding for new programs, no matter how important they may seem, is likely to be quite limited in the foreseeable future. On the other hand, many entities within NMFS, within other NOAA line offices, and in other federal and state agencies, as well as in academia and the private sector, have needs for better habitat science. They also have resources, expertise, and potential sources of funding to bring to the table.

The HAIP contains other recommendations that can be implemented with little or no new funding. Many of these require changes in how we do business and how we relate with one another. Holding the 1st National Habitat Assessment Workshop (NHAW), bringing together habitat scientists, stock assessment scientists, and habitat managers involved with habitat protection and habitat restoration is an important first step in bringing about these changes. This should be followed by concerted efforts to carry out ideas generated at the NHAW, as well as efforts to follow up on other recommendations of the HAIP. These include developing criteria to prioritize stocks and geographic areas that would benefit from habitat assessments, identifying and prioritizing data inadequacies for stocks and their habitats, implementing demonstration projects

Proceedings

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Joint Session of the National Stock and Habitat Assessment Workshops

Incorporating Habitat Information in Stock Assessments

1st National Habitat Assessment Workshop

Moving Towards a National Habitat Science Program

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