

HABITAT INFORMATION USE IN STOCK ASSESSMENTS

FY2015 Request for Proposals (RFP)

Research proposals are requested for funding in FY2015 under the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), Office of Science and Technology, Fisheries Habitat Science Working Group.

IMPORTANT DATES

- **Proposal submission deadline –Tuesday, October 14, 2014 (COB)**
- Internal proposal review meeting – November/December, 2014
- Proposal ranks – December, 2014
- Final award announcements ~ January-March, 2015 (dependent on final FY2015 appropriations)
- FY14 project reporting and InPort metadata deadline – March 1, 2015

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SCOPE: This RFP is soliciting projects that will incorporate habitat information into stock assessments for stocks managed under Federal Fishery Management Plans. Preference is given to species listed under the [Fish Stock Sustainability Index](#) (FSSI) or determined to be priorities for habitat science following regional [Habitat Assessment Prioritization](#)¹ (where available; it is expected that all regions will use these criteria for the FY2016 competition). Projects focusing on stocks not meeting these criteria will not be excluded, but must provide clear justification for the alternative species proposed. Two-year proposals will be considered with adequate justification. Funding of ongoing work beyond two years may be considered, but investigators will need to reapply for funding beyond the initial two years and show adequate progress for further consideration.

The number of awards and the total amount of funding available are contingent upon FY2015 appropriations. It is estimated that up to \$660,000 will be available. It is anticipated that awards will range between approximately \$20,000 and \$100,000 per year. Some flexibility in award level may be extended for well-justified and high-priority projects.

BACKGROUND: NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) has a mandated responsibility to sustain marine fisheries and associated habitats. The [Habitat Assessment Improvement Plan](#)² (HAIP) outlines a framework to coordinate NMFS' diverse habitat research and increase support for habitat science. A major focus of the HAIP is to reduce habitat-related uncertainty in the stock assessment process and ultimately facilitate a greater number of stock assessments that incorporate spatial analyses and ecosystem considerations. Uncertainty

¹ NMFS. 2011. Habitat Assessment Prioritization. A Report by the Habitat Assessment Prioritization Working Group. Internal report, NMFS White Paper. Office of Science and Technology, NMFS, NOAA. Silver Spring, MD. 41 p.

² NMFS. 2010. Marine Fisheries habitat assessment improvement plan. Report of the National Marine Fisheries Service Habitat Improvement Plan Team. U.S. Dep. Commer., NOAA Tech. Memo. NMFS-F/SPO-108, 115 p.

in stock assessments may be reduced by considering how different habitats affect standardized estimates of abundance (*i.e.* catch-per-unit-of-effort), design of fishery-independent surveys and interpretation of survey data, catchability coefficients, life-history parameters (*e.g.* natural mortality, growth, reproduction), and stock-recruitment relationships.

This RFP complements other internal [NMFS RFPs](#) related to stock assessment, including Fisheries and the Environment (FATE), Stock Assessment Analytical Methods (SAAM), and Improve a Stock Assessment (ISA). The Fisheries Habitat Science Working Group led by the Office of Science and Technology is responsible for coordinating this RFP. The RFP coordinator will read all submissions, and any proposals that are better suited for another RFP may be redistributed accordingly. When submitting your proposal, **please indicate if a similar proposal is being submitted to another Office of Science and Technology RFP to enable better coordination of funding.**

OBJECTIVE: This RFP will support projects that provide new habitat information for improving specific stock assessments or that develop/refine methodologies for doing so using available habitat information. Example projects include:

- Using existing habitat information to improve a current stock assessment by refining estimates of population dynamics.
- Developing and testing protocols to incorporate habitat-specific data into a stock assessment.
- Estimating catch efficiency of survey gear for different habitat types to improve survey-based estimates of abundance.
- Demonstrating how to use habitat information to design efficient surveys or analyze existing survey data more efficiently.
- Refining habitat-related life history parameters.
- Using decision theory analysis to evaluate the effectiveness of including habitat parameters in stock assessments.
- Developing habitat-related tools for the stock assessment process that are applicable across multiple species and/or regions.

Innovative or experimental approaches with anticipated future contributions to stock assessments may be considered if of high scientific merit and with adequate justification. Although not a requirement, collaboration between habitat and stock assessment scientists is strongly encouraged. Other inter-disciplinary collaborations are also welcome, as are collaborations between Science Centers and with academic institutions.

PROPOSAL INSTRUCTIONS

Proposals must be submitted by COB Tuesday, October 14, 2014.

Principal investigators (PIs) should consult with regional stock assessment scientists and Fisheries Habitat Science Working Group representatives (listed below) to develop project proposals meeting the scope and objectives of this RFP. NMFS Office of Science and Technology advises that proposals be vetted through Center Directorates for awareness and approval, and requests that no more than three proposals be submitted from any one Science Center. A fourth proposal may be submitted if it is a cross-Center collaboration (either as the PI or Co-PI), but a maximum of 4 proposals will be accepted from any Center in cases of collaborations (all 4 proposals may be collaborations). Any questions about proposal limits or other RFP requirements should be posed to

regional Fisheries Habitat Science Working Group representatives in advance of the submission deadline. Submit proposals via email to Eric Buck (Eric.Buck@noaa.gov).

Proposals should include:

- *Background* – Why is the project important? What makes it appropriate to this RFP?
- *Approach* – Describe the project objectives and the methods that will be used to address the problem or question. Provide clear details about your planned approach and reasoning. Describe project timelines, and support any assumptions you make regarding study parameters, methods, sample sizes, etc.
- *Benefits* – Include a detailed statement addressing how the project will contribute to stock assessment and any additional project benefits. If the proposed work is designed to contribute to a specific stock assessment, identify a timeline and explicitly describe how the work will be incorporated into the identified assessment.
- *Deliverables* – Datasets, models, publications, reports, etc.
- *Literature Cited* – If applicable.
- *Itemized Budget* – Total and by year, if applicable. Federal labor costs, overhead, or other administrative costs for NOAA or any collaborating Federal agency cannot be included in the budget. The budget should include the following categories:
 1. Personnel (provide time and cost for all non-Federal personnel)
 2. Fringe Benefits
 3. Travel
 4. Equipment (non-expendable property with a unit cost of \$5,000 or more)
 5. Supplies
 6. Contractual (provide separate itemized budgets for each contract, and describe products/services to be obtained in the Budget Justification)
 7. Other
 8. Total Direct Charges (sum 1-7)
 9. Indirect Charges (provide rate and charges)
 10. Total (sum 8-9)
- *Budget Justification* - Brief narrative to support each budget category; please provide sufficient detail to justify the budget to reviewers. At least one of the investigators must be a NOAA employee. If other investigators are not NOAA employees, please include a statement as to how funds would be transferred if the proposal is selected for funding. The financial contact must be within NOAA, so that funds can be transferred from the Office of Science and Technology to the receiving Science Center. These will be FY2015 funds, so they must be spent or obligated to a contract/grant prior to standard cut-off dates.
- *Stock Assessment Endorsement* - A brief letter, not to exceed one page, from a stock assessment scientist familiar with the project describing the importance, relevance, and applicability of the proposed work to stock assessment.
- *Curriculum Vitae* – For all participants in the project, limited to two pages each, and including a list of collaborators over the past 48 months.

Project descriptions must not exceed 4 pages (not including references, budget, budget justification, stock assessment endorsement letter, and CVs). The project description (Approach) should clearly state objectives and must include statements of work for every year of work proposed. Proposals should be in Times New Roman with 12 point font, preferably submitted as MS Word or PDF documents. PIs are responsible for making sure proposal packages are complete. Proposals that do not adhere to RFP guidelines may not be considered.

PROPOSAL REVIEW PROCESS: The RFP coordinator will ensure that submitted proposals meet basic requirements (*e.g.* page and budget limits) prior to reviews. Each proposal will then be reviewed by ~5 members of a panel comprised of representatives from each of the NMFS Science Centers and the Offices of Science and Technology and Habitat Conservation. Both stock assessment and habitat ecology disciplines will be represented on the review panel to ensure the objectives of the RFP are met. Reviewers will vary from year to year, with individuals serving a maximum of two consecutive years. Panelists will recuse themselves from reviewing proposals originating from their own Science Centers.

Proposals will be rated according to the following criteria:

- Scientific and technical merit (40%)
- Importance, relevance, and applicability to improved stock assessments (35%)
- Project costs (10%)
- Project management and qualifications of applicant(s) (15%)

The Office of Science and Technology will compile final scores from reviewers and convene a proposal review meeting to determine final ranks. Proposal funding decisions will be announced as soon as the FY2015 budget is received and the Office of Science and Technology spend plan is approved. Comments from the proposal reviews will be available to PIs on all proposals (without attribution) after funding decisions have been finalized.

REPORTING REQUIREMENTS: A project progress report will be required 12 months after the project is funded. For multiyear projects, a progress report showing sufficient progress is required before distribution of Year 2 funding. A final project report is required within six months of project completion. PIs are strongly encouraged to present project results via a national webinar after project completion. Upon funding notification, PIs are required to submit materials to publicize projects on the Office of Science and Technology website. Products shall acknowledge funding from the NMFS Fisheries Habitat Science Working Group.

All proposals must comply with the NMFS Data and Information Management Policy. The NMFS Data Documentation Directive requires that metadata for all data collected or produced be entered and published in the NMFS Data Catalog and Metadata Repository, InPort (<https://inport.nmfs.noaa.gov/>). Failure to comply with this policy may make the PI ineligible for the next RFP cycle. Contact the NFMS Information Management Coordinator (IMC) and the InPort Librarian in your region for further details about these requirements.

FISHERIES HABITAT SCIENCE WORKING GROUP REPRESENTATIVES

Thomas Noji – NEFSC

Beth Phelan – NEFSC

Tom Minello – SEFSC

Bob McConnaughey – AFSC

Michael Parke – PIFSC

Waldo Wakefield – NWFSC

Correigh Greene – NWFSC

Mary Yoklavich – SWFSC

Terra Lederhouse – OHC

Steve Brown – OST

Kirsten Larsen – OST

Kristan Blackhart – OST

Tony Marshak – OST

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