Species of Concern Program F2007 Report

NOAA Fisheries
Office of Protected Resources

The List of Species

There were no changes to the list of Species of Concern in 2007 so there continue to be 42 Species of Concern. However, a number of species may be removed from the program in 2008 as a result of listing actions under the Endangered Species Act. The Cook Inlet Beluga whale is currently proposed for listing as endangered and a final rule is expected in 2008. Status reviews were completed for black abalone, Atlantic sturgeon, non-listed Gulf of Maine DPS Atlantic salmon, cusk, and white marlin. Listing determinations are being prepared for these species at this time.

Grants

The program received 6 new external proposals in 2007. Unfortunately the program did not receive additional funding so no new projects could be funded. Staff reviewed the submissions and provided constructive feedback to the authors to help encourage them to resubmit in the future. The two ongoing projects were funded at the same level as 2006. A NEPA EA and FONSI were completed for years 2 through 5 of the Gulf of Maine project.

Internal funding of $180,000 was competitively awarded to 7 projects from NMFS Science Centers and Regions. Unlike past years, the competition was open to proposals for work on listed species. Ten proposals were submitted, but all funded projects were for work on Species of Concern.

Thorny skate , *Raja radiata*. © Bernd Ueberschaer, Fishbase.

Cusk. *Brosme brosme*. Courtesy Norwegian Seafood Export Council.

What are Species of Concern?

"Species of Concern" are species or vertebrate populations for which there is concern or great uncertainty about their status. Species of Concern are not protected by the Endangered Species Act. As resources permit, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries) conducts a review of the status of each Species of Concern to determine if it warrants listing as an endangered or threatened species under the ESA. NOAA Fisheries believes it is important to highlight species for which listing may be warranted so that federal and state agencies, Native American tribes, and the private sector are aware of which species could benefit from proactive conservation efforts. NOAA has a grant program to fund such efforts.

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Program Activities

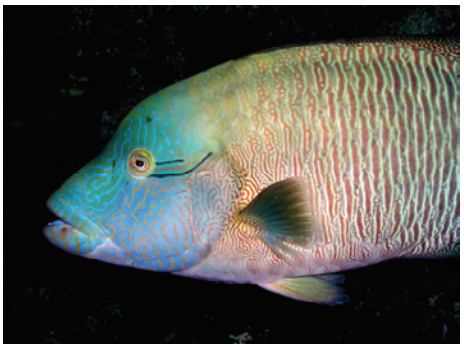
Policy Activities

The internal guidance document for adding or removing species from the program was updated to clarify the roles of Regions, Science Centers, and Headquarters in the process.

The idea to use IUCN Red List criteria to determine whether a species should be added to the program was considered with a detailed trial but was ultimately rejected.

Fact Sheets

We made significant changes to the fact sheets for the Species of Concern program this year. A new 2 page "Highlights" fact sheet was created to serve as a better education and outreach tool for higher level policy makers, educators, and students to learn about the species. A colorful, image filled format was created for these fact sheets and they are available for download on the program's website (nmfs.noaa/pr/species/concern). The original, more detailed fact sheets were updated to a new format with more information on status, research needs, and references and range maps for all species.



Humphead wrasse, *Cheilinus undulatus.* Courtesy Jim Maragos, USFWS.

Outreach

NMFS undertook significant outreach this year. The national program coordinator presented the program to the attendees at the Joint Meeting of Ichthyologists and Herpetologists in St Louis, the American Fisheries Society in San Francisco, and the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies in Louisville. Over 250 people were introduced to the program and 900 pieces of Species of Concern literature (brochures, species lists, and fact sheets) were distributed.

Brochure, Flyers, and Poster

A program brochure and flyers at the national and regional level were created to aid in outreach and education for the program. The national program flyer is available on the website. A poster was created for use at conferences, workshops, and meetings.

Over 250 people were introduced to the program at 3 conferences.

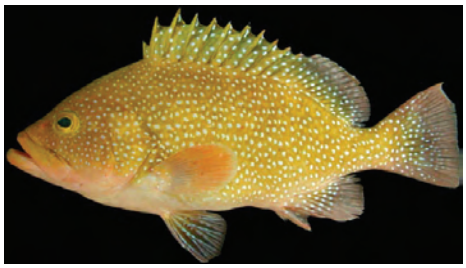
The national coordinator collaborated with the National Estuarine Research Reserve Program to develop 10 fact sheets and background material for SOCs that occur in estuaries to be used on their estuaries.gov website.

The national coordinator developed a 350 person stakeholder contact list. He also created a Species of Concern database with biology, ongoing projects, and overlap of SOCs with various projects.

Partnerships

The national coordinator presented the SOC program to Teaming with Wildlife Coalition staff who lead lobbying effort for the $80 million parallel State Wildlife Grants program of USFWS. He also presented the program to National Marine Sanctuary program Research, Education, and Condition Report staff. They agreed to include SOCs in their Condition Reports as indicator species as appropriate and further collaborate on education programs including listing of SOC species in the Sanctuary Encyclopedia (marinelife.noaa.gov/) and in OceansLive.org, their ocean education website.

The national coordinator presented the SOC program to NMFS' Habitat Protection Division and they agreed to collaborate with their Cooperative Habitat Protection Partnerships conservation program and to help fund some ongoing SOC grant projects in FY08.



Speckled hind, *Epinephelus drummondhayi.* Courtesy USGS.

Regional and Science Center Accomplishments

Alaska

Blue King Crab: Analyzed the status of species for possible inclusion as a Species of Concern. Ultimate decision was not to nominate the species.

Northwest

Black Abalone: Participated on Black Abalone Status Review Team.

Green Sturgeon: Continued to disseminate the best available scientific information regarding the distribution and relative abundance of Northern DPS green sturgeon to inform NMFS' Sec. 7 consultations on activities that may impact green sturgeon in CA, OR, WA, and AK.

Southwest

Black Abalone:
1) Participated in black abalone tagging studies on San Nicolas Island and San Miguel Island.

2) Developed Scope of Work and Sole Source Documentation for contracts and interagency agreements with the University of Washington, Channel Islands National Park, and the University of California at Santa Cruz.

3) Wrote positive 90-day Endangered Species Act finding.

4) Organized and participated in black abalone status review team meetings .

Outreach: Coordinated with Aquarium of the Pacific on improving their abalone exhibit and outreach material.

Policy and Guidance: Helped develop Best Available Science Working Group/White Paper.

Northeast

Atlantic Sturgeon: Completed an ESA status review report and prepared a listing determination.

Cusk:: Authored a draft formal ESA status review report which is currently undergoing review.

River Herring: Attended the river herring symposium at the Northeast Fish and Wildlife Conference and discussed options for moving forward with these species.

Atlantic White Marlin: Participated on the formal ESA status review team and assisted in development of the status review report.

Multi-species Issues:
1) Participating on the Science and Data Committee for the Atlantic Coastal Fish Habitat Partnership as several species under

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Black abalone, *Haliotis cracherodii*

Publications and Presentations

Popular Articles

Meadows, D. in press. Alewife and blueback herring are Species of Concern facing many threats. American Currents. 34(1).

Meadows, D. & M. Aquarone. 2007. Ocean Zones. pp. 27-37 in: Hidden Depths: Atlas of the Oceans. HarperCollins, New York. Highlights *Oculina*.

Somma, A., et al. in press. Conservation and the Endangered Species Act: The NMFS' Cooperative and Proactive Approaches. In: Our Living Ocean. National Marine Fisheries Service, Washington, DC.

Meadows, D.W & M. Harrison. 2007. Dusky shark is listed under Species of Concern. OceansLive.org.

Scientific Publications

Meadows, D., et al. in press. Threatened fishes of the World: *Alosa alabamae*. Envi'tal Biol. Fishes.

Moser, M. & S. Lindley. 2007. Use of Washington estuaries by subadult and adult green sturgeon. Envi'tal Biol. Fishes. 79:243-253.

Adams, P. et al. 2007. Population status of North American green sturgeon *Acipenser medirostris*. Envi'tal Biol. Fishes. 79: 339-356.

Atlantic Sturgeon Status Review Team. 2007. Status Review of Atlantic sturgeon. 174 pp. http://www.nero.noaa.gov/prot_res/CandidateSpecies Program/AtlSturgeonStatusReviewReport.pdf .

Atlantic sturgeon, *Acipenser oxyrinchus*. Courtesy Univ. of Maine.

Conference Presentations

Damon-Randall- K. The designation of 3 new Species of Concern in the Northeast, American Fisheries Society annual meeting, San Francisco, CA.

Drake, J. Species of Concern program. Gilbert Ichthyological Society annual conference, Seattle, WA.

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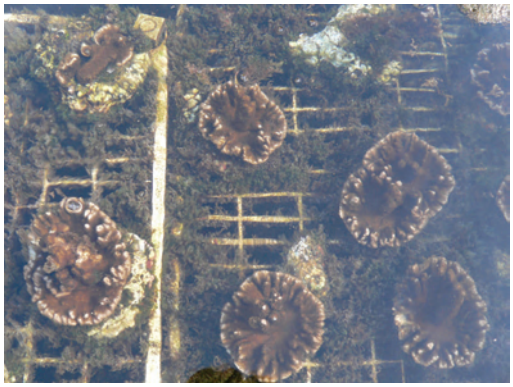
For more information on any of these activities please contact:

Dwayne Meadows, Ph.D.
1315 East West Highway
Silver Spring, MD 20910
USA

Phone: 301-713-1401
Fax: 301-427-2523
E-mail: Dwayne.Meadows@noaa.gov

We're on the Web!

www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/species/concern/



Close-up of Hawaiian reef coral propagation tank at Waikiki Aquarium.

Goals of the Species of Concern Program

- To increase public awareness about these species;
- To identify those species potentially at risk and in need of protective measures before listing under the ESA becomes necessary;
- To identify data deficiencies and uncertainties associated with the status of the species;
- To work cooperatively with regional co-managers and concern groups to obtain the information necessary to evaluate species status and threats;
- To identify conservation opportunities; and,
- To work with Federal and state agencies, Native American tribes, and the public to act proactively to conserve the species.

Regional Accomplishments (Continued)

consideration by the partnership are NER SOC.

2) Participated in a transboundary protected species working group meeting with Canada (several transboundary species are SOC).

3) Participated on the Species of Concern Technical Advisory Committee for the Maine Proactive Species Conservation Program project on rainbow smelt, Atlantic sturgeon, and Atlantic salmon.

Southeast

Atlantic White Marlin: Led formal ESA status review process.

Goliath Grouper: Status review completed January 2007 which determined species did not warrant SOC status anymore. Species was removed from SOC program.

Pacific

Hawaiian Reef Coral and Inarticulated brachiopod:
1) Received internal grant to conduct field surveys.

2) Issued a contract to the Waikiki Aquarium to create an outreach and education exhibit.

3) A second aspect of the contract is to partner with Dr. Rob Toonen (Hawaii Institute of Marine Biology) to confirm the genetic identity of the purported Hawaiian reef coral colonies observed in Kaneohe Bay, Oahu.

4) Continued successful asexual propagation of Hawaiian reef coral at Waikiki Aquarium under FY 2006 contract and began propagation of Inarticulated brachiopod under that contract.

Humphead Wrasse and Bumphead Parrotfish:
For a second year in a row the region funded the purchase of additional ecological acoustic recorders to support the NMFS Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center in the development of passive acoustic monitoring.