

Public Participation

Comment period now open for the Stellwagen Dedicated Habitat Research Area (DHRA) with Northern Reference Area

The New England Fishery Management Council (NEFMC) is undertaking a public process to improve protection of Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) for groundfish (cod, haddock, etc.).

As part of this process, the Council voted (13/2/1) to select the Stellwagen Dedicated Habitat Research Area (DHRA) with Northern Reference Area as a preferred alternative in its Draft Omnibus EFH Amendment 2 including Draft Environmental Impact Statement. The DHRA is located in its entirety in the Western Gulf of Maine Closure Area, where commercial groundfishing gear has been restricted since 1998.

There are no new commercial groundfishing closures associated with the DHRA. The Northern Reference Area, a small section of the DHRA, would additionally exclude recreational fishing for groundfish, thus providing a control site so important in the development of good scientific design.

The sanctuary's 2010 Final Management Plan calls for the Office of National Marine Sanctuaries (ONMS) to consider establishing research areas and reference areas in the sanctuary. The DHRA with Northern Reference Area overlaps 22 percent of the Stellwagen Bank sanctuary.

Comment NOW!

The public comment period opened on October 10 and will close on **January 8, 2015**. You can submit your comments by mail, email or fax. Please include "OA2 DEIS Comments" in the subject line or on the outside of the envelope. Public hearings will also be held throughout the Northeast Region from November 24, 2014 through January 7, 2015.

Email to: nmfs.gar.OA2.DEIS@noaa.gov

Mail to:

John K. Bullard, Regional Administrator
Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office
55 Great Republic Drive
Gloucester, MA 01930

Fax to: 978-281-9315

Public Hearings: For more information about the dates, times and locations for these public hearings, go to the New England Fishery Management Council website:

<http://www.nefmc.org/calendar>

Creation of the Stellwagen DHRA with Reference Area would provide a location where scientists and resource managers, through controlled scientific study, could better understand fishing gear impacts on Essential Fish Habitat relative to ecological changes occurring in Massachusetts Bay and the Gulf of Maine.



Haddock. Credit: NOAA/SBNS and NURTEC/UConn.

With the resulting sound science, resource protection agencies would be better able to get unambiguous science-based answers to guide decision-making that supports healthy fisheries and better conserves marine biodiversity.

Supporting Documentation

Charter/Party Boats

- According to analysis of Vessel Trip Report data, the Northern Reference Area (Option B: Preferred Alternative) would not have a major impact on charter/party boat fishing.
- In 2012, for example, only three boats accounted for 49 percent of all charter/ party boat fishing trips in the Northern Reference Area.
- In general, around 30 charter/party boats fished the Northern Reference Area annually during 1996-2012, with four boats accounting for 42-96 percent of all trips each year during this period.

Recreational Boats

- Results from both the 2010 and 2012 Massachusetts Recreational Boater Surveys indicated that private recreational fishing is not a prevalent activity within the Northern Reference Area.
- No “areas fished” (2010) or “locations fished” (2012), as specified by fishermen completing the surveys, were in the preferred alternative – Northern Reference Area.
- Survey data from May – October 2010 indicate that six of 191 areas of activity (3.1 percent) involving fishing were located in Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary.

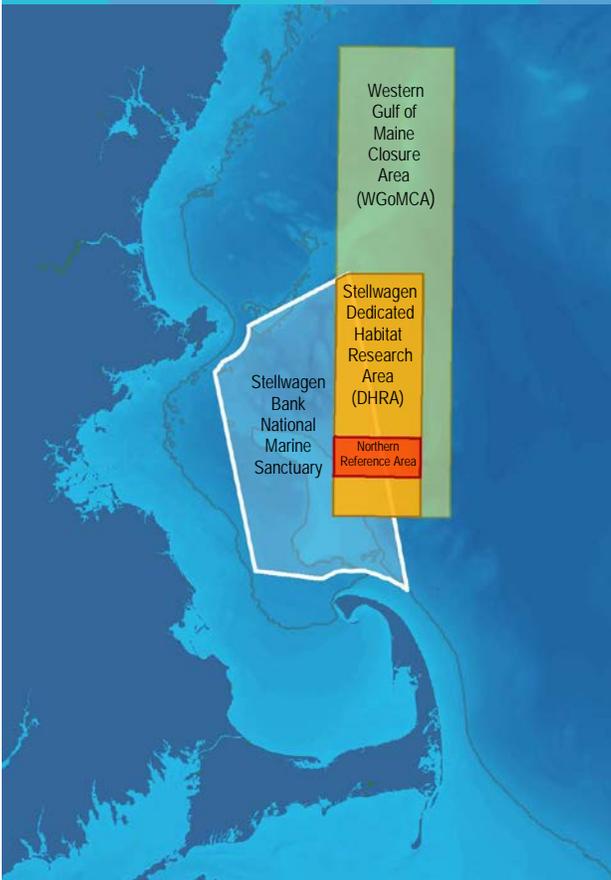
Under the provisions of Option B: Northern Reference Area, recreational fishermen and party/charter boats would continue to be able to fish for non-demersal fishes (pelagic species), including tuna, sharks, etc. Recreational and party/charter fishing for groundfish in all other parts of the DHRA would still be allowed (as per NOAA Fisheries regulations).

The *Federal Register* notice, Vol. 79, No. 197, October 10, 2014, is at:

<http://www.greateratlantic.fisheries.noaa.gov/regs/2014/October/14habo2anoa.pdf>

The full text of Volume 3 of the Omnibus Amendment – *Spatial management alternatives/Environmental impacts of spatial management alternatives* (incl. Stellwagen DHRA) can be found at:

<http://www.greateratlantic.fisheries.noaa.gov/regs/2014/October/14haboa2eisvol3spatialmanagementaltsimpacts.pdf> (pp 124-127)



Western Gulf of Maine Closure Area (light green):
Remains the same as originally established in 1998; excludes all bottom fishing gear capable of catching groundfish (includes DHRA and Reference Area)

DHRA -- Dedicated Habitat Research Area (yellow):
A section of the Western Gulf of Maine Closure Area (WGoMCA); partially located in Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary; same provisions as WGoMCA but allows permitted fishing for research.

Option B: Preferred Alternative–Northern Reference Area (red):
Same provisions as DHRA but excludes party/charter and recreational fishing for groundfish (fishing for tuna and other pelagic fish would be allowed).

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<http://stellwagen.noaa.gov>