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Sent: Friday, February 2, 2024 10:32 AM

Subject: NOAA Fisheries Finalizes a Habitat Area of Particular Concern Offshore of Southern New England

Good morning,

NOAA Fisheries is designating a Habitat Area of Particular Concern (HAPC) in and around offshore wind lease areas in southern New England, including Cox Ledge. The New England Fishery Management Council recommended the HAPC designation due to concerns about the potential adverse impact on Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) from the development of offshore wind energy projects.

The designation focuses on important cod spawning grounds and areas of complex habitat that are known to serve important habitat functions to federally managed species within and adjacent to offshore wind development areas. Complex benthic habitat provides shelter for certain species during their early life history, refuge from predators, and feeding opportunities. There will not be any changes to any commercial or recreational management measures, thus fishing effort/behavior is not expected to substantially change.

HAPCs are subsets of EFH that provide important ecological functions or are especially vulnerable to degradation. The HAPC provides additional conservation focus when NOAA Fisheries reviews and comments on federal and/or state actions, as part of the EFH consultation process, that could impact EFH and HAPCs. EFH consultations provide non-binding conservation recommendations to the implementing (action) agency to avoid, minimize, and mitigate the impacts of actions on EFH. A HAPC designation does not provide any specific habitat management measures, such as restrictions on offshore wind survey and construction activities, or other associated activities in the area.

For more information, read the [final rule](#) as filed in the *Federal Register*.

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