

# Pacific Habitat Protection

## Region

U.S. West Coast

## Timeframe

2003-2006, 2011-2020

## Fishery Affected

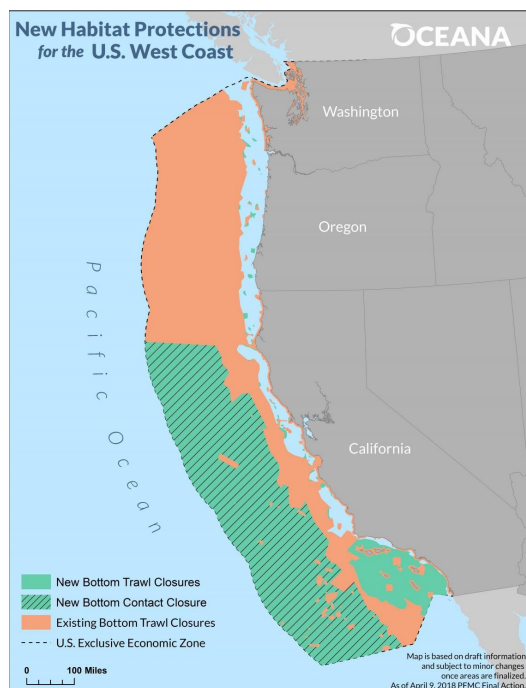
West Coast groundfish

## Target Species

Pacific coast groundfish including numerous rockfish species, sablefish, lingcod, and flatfishes like arrowtooth flounder, Dover, and petrale sole.

## Gear Type

Bottom trawl



“Existing bottom trawl closures” – implemented in 2006

“New bottom trawl closures” – Oceana victory implemented in 2020

Over the course of 2003-2006 and 2011-2020, Oceana designed and championed proposals at the Pacific Fishery Management Council to “freeze the footprint” of bottom trawling and protect ecologically important habitats along the West Coast of the United States. Fishermen from Washington, Oregon, and California target West Coast groundfish year round using a variety of gear types. The bottom trawl has long been part of the West Coast groundfish fishery and historically is one of the dominant gear types. Bottom trawls drag across the seafloor, damaging sensitive and ecologically important habitats like offshore reefs, coral, and sponge ecosystems. Bottom trawls reduce the complexity, diversity, and productivity of seafloor habitats. Many of these habitats are essential to fish populations that were overfished at the time. Today, all but one West Coast groundfish species have recovered. Yelloweye rockfish are still rebuilding.

The bottom trawl sector has evolved significantly since the 1980s, which was a period of rampant overfishing and overcapitalization. At one point there were over 300 West Coast bottom trawl vessels and now, after a buy-back program, individual fishing quotas, and consolidation of permits, there are only about 60 active trawlers. Significant changes were made to end overfishing, rebuild depleted populations, reduce bycatch, and protect habitat. Today the bottom trawl sector has 100% monitoring, bycatch caps for certain species, and a series of coastwide habitat protection measures to protect essential fish habitats.

Oceana met with tribes, fishers, fishing representatives, and other stakeholders coastwide, as well as members of the Pacific Fishery Management Council and its advisory committees, National Marine Fisheries Service managers and scientists, West Coast National Marine Sanctuary managers, and state fish and wildlife agencies to inform the conservation proposal. Oceana used publicly available spatial data compiled for the fishery council’s Essential Fish Habitat review to identify areas that warrant protection from bottom trawling. Today, 90% of the U.S. West Coast Exclusive Economic Zone is now closed to bottom trawling.