



**Alaska Marine Policy Forum
Summary from Wednesday, Aug 18, 2021**

Host: Ginny Eckert, Alaska Sea Grant

Notes by Darcy Dugan

The Alaska Marine Policy Forum is a bimonthly teleconference for Alaskans to network and share information about marine policy, budgets, and legislation at state, national, and international levels, sponsored by Alaska Sea Grant and the Alaska Ocean Observing System (AOOS). Contact dawn.montano@alaska.edu to receive email reminders and agendas for upcoming calls, and summary notes following each call. Visit the AOOS website to listen to an audio recording of this call.

Alaska Congressional Delegation Update

Carina Nichols, Senator Sullivan's Office

- The infrastructure package has kept Senators and staff very busy; Emily Patroliia (up next) will provide ocean related details.
- The Save our Seas 2.0 legislation passed, and Senator Sullivan's office has been working on implementation and funding.
- Senator Sullivan has been following the terrible salmon returns in western Alaska and staff have been talking to communities about what they're experiencing.
- Congress is a quarter of the way through its 2-year cycle and the Senator's office is assessing time frames for different bills and what might be feasible to pass.
- Reach out with questions or concerns: Carina_Nichols@sullivan.senate.gov.

Bi-Partisan Infrastructure Bill

Emily Patroliia, ESP Advisors

Emily provided a breakdown of ocean related elements in the bi-partisan infrastructure bill passed by the Senate in August.

- \$200M for NOAA marine debris program
- \$275M for post-consumer grants – reducing plastics going into environment on the consumer side.
- \$150M for the Integrated Ocean Observing System (IOOS) which includes funding for the Alaska Ocean Observing System
- \$56M for Regional Ocean Partnerships
- Over \$170M for Pacific Coastal Salmon Recovery Fund
- \$130M for National Estuary Program at EPA
- \$77M for National Estuarine Research Reserve at NOAA

- \$500M for the STORM Act which helps states establish revolving funds for loans to do mitigation projects for natural disasters

Next steps for the Congressional budget:

- The House will likely amend the infrastructure bill and then send it to a conference committee, after which it will need another vote.
- Democrats have decided to pass what they're calling the "Social aspects of infrastructure" bill which will be \$3.5 trillion. The Senate has already passed the framework for building the bill – no policy is included yet but there are assignments for senate committees to complete by Sept 15. It's around \$3 billion headed to Senate commerce committee (which is in charge of NOAA, the Coast Guard, NSF, etc). Senator Cantwell is the chairwoman.
- The House won't take up the bipartisan infrastructure package until they have the Democratic-only budget reconciliation package. There's been some pushback from more moderate members of the party. The House was called back into session on Aug 23 where they'll be voting on the framework of the budget resolution bill. It's possible they could also vote on the bi-partisan infrastructure package too.
- Sept 30 is the end of the fiscal year; if Congress can't pass appropriations bills or a continuing resolution, funding will expire. A continuing resolution is most likely.
- There is also a budget cap issue looming. If Congress fails to pass an increase in the budget cap, U.S. loans will go into default. Democrats declined to include the budget cap in the budget reconciliation package so it will need to be passed by both parties. Minority leader McConnell has said he will not support raising the budget cap.

Summary of the Recent IPCC Report

Danielle Meeker, Alaska Center for Climate Assessment and Policy, UAF

- The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) is a body of the United Nations established in 1988 and publishes assessments every 6-7 years. This is the 6th assessment report.
- Each assessment is made up of 3 reports, each by a different working group. The recently released report is the first of the series and focuses on the physical science basis for climate change. The second report is due in February will examine human dimensions, and the third report due in March will look at mitigation strategies for reducing greenhouse gas emissions.
- Each of these reports will feed into the "global stock take" in 2023 where the UN will examine each country's progress in meeting the pledges under the Paris Agreement.
- The assessment reports summarize the state of the science; no new research was conducted solely for this report.
- In the assessment process, the IPCC identifies where there is scientific agreement in different areas (consensus or near consensus), where there is uncertainty, and what additional research is needed.
- The report is high level and is almost 4,000 pages. Alaska is mentioned several times; the Arctic is mentioned more often.

Main take homes from the recent report:

- The IPCC concludes unequivocally that human influence has warmed the atmosphere, ocean and land. This is the strongest language it has used to discuss human influence. The report concludes human activity is responsible for 1 degree C warming since industrial revolution in the late 1800s.
- Under every possible emissions scenario, the average global temperature is expected to increase by 1.5 C above preindustrial levels in the next 20 years.
- Models show that under the two scenarios of greatest emissions reductions, global temperature increase would stay under 2 degrees C.
- Under these scenarios, Alaska will continue to see declines in sea ice, thawing permafrost, increased flooding and erosion, and other impacts.
- Human induced climate change is responsible for weather and climate extremes around the globe such as heat waves, drought, heavy precipitation, etc. The field of “attribution science” has advanced since the last assessment and provided a look at whether these phenomena would have happened in the absence of climate change.
- The changes described are irreversible and will get bigger over time. We can expect loss of sea ice, snow cover, and permafrost as well as heat waves, and extreme storms.
- The Arctic will experience a complete loss of sea ice by mid-century under most scenarios, and the ice-free season will extend until September. Arctic warming will continue to increase at twice the rate of the rest of the world, and warm days are expected to warm three times faster than global average.
- There is not enough evidence to say if a tipping point like the disintegration of the Antarctic ice sheet or loss of the Amazon or boreal forests will be reached, but those also cannot be ruled out.
- The report stresses the need to reduce methane emissions. Methane does not persist in atmosphere as long as CO2 but it’s warming capacity is 84% times more than CO2 and it accounts for 25% of the emissions we’ve seen so far. Report suggest reducing methane from agriculture and oil and gas would produce benefits for both climate and air quality.

There are many national and international Arctic climate assessments and their summaries for policy makers are still usually very long. Danielle is working on pulling out the Alaska-specific messages from each of those reports to create something digestible for Alaska policy makers.

Danielle is also a liaison to US Global Change Research Program (USGCRP). USGCRP and the National Climate Assessment will be joining Alaska forums in spring 2022 to listen to discussion and needs.

OTHER UPDATES

Ginny Eckert, Alaska Sea Grant

Alaska Sea Grant has open position in Dillingham which closes at the end of August.

<https://careers.alaska.edu/en-us/job/517326/alaska-sea-grant-marine-advisory-program-faculty>

Bob Foy, NOAA Alaska Fisheries Science Center (AFSC)

- NOAA AFSC is preparing multiple scenarios for the FY22 budget relating to climate. Particular areas of focus are habitat and survey infrastructure.
- This summer, benthic, acoustic and ecosystem surveys covered 600,000 nautical square miles. Early data assessment shows temperatures are still warm on the bottom but there is a slow return to average distributions of species. In the Gulf there is some return to normal after gadid crashes from the heat wave a few years ago. They are also starting to see more recruitment but there is still extreme variability across stocks.
- NOAA is also watching the salmon situation on the Yukon, as there are big potential ramifications for bycatch in large offshore fisheries.
- AFSC has hired a tribal research coordinator Mabel Baldwin Schafer.

The next Alaska Marine Policy Forum call will be on Wednesday, October 20 at 1pm AK time.