



## Alaska Marine Policy Forum

Summary from Wednesday, August 17, 2022

Host: Ginny Eckert

Notes by Dawn Montano

*The Alaska Marine Policy Forum, a bimonthly teleconference for Alaskans to network and share information about marine policy, budgets, and legislation at state, national, and international levels, is co-sponsored by Alaska Sea Grant and the Alaska Ocean Observing System (AOOS). Contact [dawn.montano@alaska.edu](mailto:dawn.montano@alaska.edu) to receive email reminders and agendas for upcoming calls, and summary notes following each meeting.*

### *Alaska Congressional Delegation Update*

#### ***Carina Nichols, Senator Sullivan's Office***

- Senator Sullivan's office has been planning and preparing for [Under Secretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere and NOAA Administrator Dr. Richard Spinrad](#) and [NOAA administrator Janet Coit](#) visits to Alaska. Both are traveling to different Alaskan communities.
- August recess, no active legislation happening.
- NOAA Fisheries is calling for applications for the new [American Fisheries Advisory Committee](#). The Committee was established by the American Fisheries Advisory Committee Act in Spring 2022 to make recommendations for Saltonstall-Kennedy priorities and grant award funding.

#### ***Liz Harpold, Office of Representative Ortiz***

- [HB41](#) was signed into law on July 8. This bill gives Alaska Department of Fish and Game authority to review and approve applications for shellfish enhancement and is modeled after the salmon enhancement program.

(Comment: AK Dept of Fish and Game is currently working on writing the regulations to create this process.)

### *Invited Speaker*

#### ***Presentation by Stephen White, Executive Director, Marine Exchange of Alaska***

Topic: [Marine Exchange of Alaska](#)

- The Marine Exchange of Alaska (MXAK) is a nonprofit organization that supports the maritime community and serves to promote safe, secure, efficient and environmentally responsible maritime operations.
- MXAK maintains a great deal of infrastructure throughout Alaska. MXAK is responsible for installing and maintaining over 60 [weather stations](#), as well as developing Alaska's

most comprehensive vessel tracking system with over 150 Automatic Identification System (AIS) receivers positioned across the state.

- MXAK is developing a more robust system called Digital Selective Calling (DSC) at 54 sites. This system helps with the VHF outages and gaps that are out in the maritime environment to help crews call in for safety reasons.
- At three sites they have recently built voiceover IP, which receives a VHF signal from the MXAK site to a vessel then over the internet back to MXAK Watch Center. Again, this system helps with VHF gaps or outages or if MXAK wants to talk to someone many miles away. For example, they can talk to a ship from their Juneau Watch Center to the coast of Los Angeles, CA.
- MXAK has a 24/7 manned Watch Center by maritime experts—called Sea Traffic Management. They can identify or respond to problems and make sure rules and regulations are followed. In the future, they will help agencies such as US Fish and Wildlife Service monitor boat traffic.
- MXAK will help communicate different environmental issues and manage traffic out of their watch center for Arctic Watch. Arctic Watch will be a collaboration of different government agencies, communities, and organizations that can come together to bring their concerns, input, questions, and activities to a central location.

***Presentation by Nicole Kimball, Council Member, North Pacific Fisheries Management Council***

Topic: [North Pacific Fisheries Management Council](#) June 2022 Meeting

- In June 2022, the Council met in person in Sitka, AK and broadcasted the meeting with capability for people to testify remotely. They will continue with this format for future meetings.
- The NPFMC is supported by an Advisory Panel and a Science and Statistical Committee. These groups meet every time the Council meets to provide recommendations on relevant issues being considered by the Council. The Council is accepting nominations for its Scientific and Statistical Committee and its Advisory Panel. For more information, see the [call for nominations](#). Nominations, letters of interest, and a resume should be submitted by **November 15, at 5 pm Alaska time**.
- The Council has been working from a [Bering Sea Fisheries Ecosystem Plan](#) for several years (established in 2017). The plan is to set goals and objectives by which the Council can manage fisheries, monitor the ecosystem, and prioritize new research. (Note that the Council is not a research body. They try to highlight what research would be most important to federal fisheries management.)
- The Council created a Climate Change Task Force, with the goal to evaluate the vulnerability of key species and fisheries that the Council manages and then try to provide and promote resilience in regional fisheries management.
- Local Knowledge, Traditional Knowledge (LTK) and Subsistence Task Force.
  - The goal of this task force is to develop protocols for using local knowledge and traditional knowledge in management and to understand the impacts of Council decisions on subsistence resources, users, and practices.
  - The LTK Task Force has publically released a [searchable database](#) of local and traditional knowledge and subsistence information.
- Modifications were presented for the Central Gulf of Alaska Rockfish Program, including adjusting the season start date and addressing changes in the fishery which would increase flexibility and efficiency, improve functionality, and better ensure the total allowable catch for the primary rockfish species is fully harvested and landed in the Port

of Kodiak as intended. You can read about more modifications in [the Council's June newsletter](#).

- The Council also started a rebuilding plan for Eastern Bering Sea snow crab (*Chionoecetes opilio*).
  - The Council and the Scientific and Statistical Committee reviewed the stock assessment in the previous year. This showed that the estimate of mature male biomass of snow crab wasn't enough to meet the minimum stock size threshold. Under the Magnuson-Stevens Act, if this happens, for whatever reason, the stock status changes to “overfished”, even if overfishing did not occur.
    - The Magnuson-Stevens Act requires that a rebuilding plan be developed and put into place within two years. An analysis will look at stock conditions, environmental conditions, and all sources of mortality for snow crab.
    - The rebuilding plan will establish a time period for rebuilding the fishery that is as short as possible and meets the requirements of the Magnuson-Stevens Act.
    - Final action from the Council needs to happen in December to be consistent with the Magnuson-Stevens Act timelines.
- There has been a demand in implementing electronic monitoring programs in Alaska, with primary focus on fixed gear fleets. About 200 boats in the fixed gear fleet are in a pilot program with NOAA. They felt there needs to be better options for getting a level of accountability and monitoring on smaller boats that can't take a federal observer.
  - The Council is working through a voluntary program to test cameras on Pelagic Trawl Pollock Catcher vessels in the Bering Sea and Gulf of Alaska. They are at the stage to take action on regulations to set the boundaries for the program.
  - The cameras are only in place to ensure nothing is being discarded. All the catch stays onboard and is brought to the processing plant shoreside. Then all the sampling by the observers is happening at the plant off the boat. This is an efficient way to sample more of the catch.
- The Council received reports on salmon and salmon bycatch.
  - ADFG presented the status of Western Alaska salmon stocks and the research being conducted to determine the cause of decline in Chinook salmon for the past decade and the recent decline in chum salmon.
  - Alaska Fisheries Science Center presented on their salmon research and how they are working with international survey partners for the International Year of the Salmon and what they are seeing in the northern and southern Bering Sea juvenile salmon surveys.
    - The focus of the research:
      - what are they seeing in the juvenile Chinook salmon surveys
      - what are they seeing in the ecosystem surveys
      - what are they seeing in the loss of seasonal sea ice and the impacts of warming in the ocean on the food web, fish distribution, fitness and survival of juvenile salmon
- The Council received an annual genetic report showing the stock of origin of salmon bycatch in the pollock fisheries. The reason is to ensure they understand where those salmon are destined to and to see if the stock of origin distributions have changed over time.
- The Council requested and received an impact report on Chinook salmon bycatch. This is a complete analysis to show the percentage of coastal Western Alaska Chinook and

Upper Yukon Chinook salmon that would have returned had there not been any bycatch. This takes into account the run sizes of the entire region (from the Bering Strait to Bristol Bay), the stock origin, the ages of the bycatch and natural mortality.

- The Council received testimony from people in Western Alaska on the dire situation on Chinook and chum salmon stocks, the impact on the culture and food security.
  - The Council did pass a motion:
    - to continue commitment to improvement and bycatch management for all groundfish fisheries
    - focused on immediate measures that can happen in this season
    - requested an analysis of chum bycatch management measures to see what can be improved
    - prioritizing further research on Bering Sea salmon.
- The Council initiated a Salmon Bycatch Committee, comprised of tribal members, scientists, fishing industry experts, and Council staff. This workgroup will focus on further bycatch avoidance measures.
  - Nominations were open until September 30 . See [nominations for the new Salmon Bycatch Committee](#) for more information.
- The [Council's next meeting](#) will be held at the Hilton in Anchorage or remotely on Zoom, October 3–11, 2022.
  - At the October meeting it is required to cover overfishing limits and allowable biological catch limits for crab fisheries, preliminary groundfish harvest specifications, trying to take final action on the trawl electronic monitoring program, climate readiness report, request from Bristol Bay red King crab to get information from all sectors, and snow crab rebuilding plan.

### *Other announcements*

#### ***Ginny Eckert, Alaska Sea Grant Director, Juneau***

- Alaska Sea Grant welcomes input for the 2024–2028 Strategic Plan. Please email comments to [sea.grant@alaska.edu](mailto:sea.grant@alaska.edu).
- Several new [Alaska Sea Grant State Fellows](#) on the AMPF introduced themselves.

#### ***Julie Decker, Executive Director, Alaska Fisheries and Development Foundation (AFDF)***

- AFDF is hosting Alaska Sea Grant State Fellow, Ben Americus. He serves as a science policy coordinator and works on the Alaskan salmon hatchery research project. He will co-lead the research information known to date and contextualize it in order to provide it for the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) certification team in December.
- AFDF is working with the Advanced Research Projects Agency–Energy on a mariculture project to learn how to grow and harvest sugar kelp more efficiently. Their goal is to be able to use seaweed as a biofuel feedstock in the future. Rough numbers look like this is feasible with current technologies. Another project they are interested in is biomining rare earth elements with seaweed. It can physically be done but they do not yet know if it's economically viable. They are looking into having a small scoping project in the near future.

***Keith Criddle, Professor of Marine Policy, University of Alaska Fairbanks, College of Fisheries and Ocean Sciences, Juneau***

- The Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities has approved the addition of the joint UAF College of Fisheries and Ocean Sciences-UAS School of Arts and Sciences Master of Marine Policy (MMP) program. This is a 30-credit course-only program with an internship requirement. Required and elective courses are available in person in Juneau or by videoconference.

*The next Alaska Marine Policy Forum call will be October 19, 2022 at 1 pm Alaska time.*