



Alaska Marine Policy Forum

Summary from Wednesday, March 18, 2020

Host: Molly McCammon, Alaska Ocean Observing System

Notes by Holly Kent

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. 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

There were no updates on this call. (Note: Amy Kirkham from Senator Murkowski's office was on the call, but had problems with her audio.)

Current Management Policies for the Northern Bering Sea

Steve MacLean, North Pacific Fisheries Management Council (Council) Staff

- Commercial Fisheries in the Northern Bering Sea are governed by the [Groundfish of the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands Fishery Management Plan](#).
- The Northern Bering Sea Research Area (NBSRA), from just north of St. Matthews Island north to Diomedes, is prohibited to non-pelagic trawl gear. There are also a number of habitat conservation areas within this area.
- Vessels spotted in the NBSRA are fishing without non-pelagic trawl gear. Long-line, pelagic trawl, and pot gear fishing activities are permitted in this area. People may have also seen large freezer long-liner vessels which will continue to follow the fish as long as they are able to operate in the area.
- In the last couple years (2017-2019) there has been a northerly expansion of Pacific cod being caught in the NBSRA, probably due to the waters getting warmer.
- The Council believes that these are all fish within the same fishery but just moving north.
- North of the Bering Strait consists of the Arctic Fishery Management area which currently is under a moratorium for federally managed commercial fishing.
- There have been no changes in policy with regards to the NBSRA, but there has been a change in fish distribution and fishing efforts.
- Gay Sheffield, Alaska Sea Grant, indicated that when local communities began seeing more fishing near their communities, they went to look for those vessels on Automatic Identification System (AIS) but they were not found. Local residents would like to know where large vessels are within the Bering Strait region for safety reasons. According to Steve, fishing vessels are using the VMS (Vessel Monitoring System) required by NOAA Fisheries to track fishing effort. The USCG also has access to the VMS, but otherwise it is not publicly available. The USCG also has access to the VMS.
- Steve says that all vessels are monitoring channel 16 on VHF and can be hailed that way.
- A discussion ensued regarding the functionality of AIS versus the proprietary nature of fishing sites among fishermen and what the requirements are for keeping AIS on at sea.

- Tom Gemmell, Marine Exchange of Alaska, offered a [website](#) that can be accessed to locate vessels in an area.
- Some fishing companies have individual private agreements to avoid conflicts with certain communities which are outside the Council's purview.
- Austin Ahmasuk from Kawerak says that his community is seeing signs of ecosystem collapse, and wonders if the Council is aware of these changes? He feels that they have very little opportunity to communicate directly with the Council.
- Steve says that the Council is science driven and NOAA regularly surveys the area. They are aware of many of the changes that are occurring. The Council also now has a [Community Engagement Committee](#) working to devise ways to better engage with small communities.
- Julie Raymond-Yakoubian with Kawerak says that there are two main issues with respect to increased fishing efforts in the Northern Bering Sea: one is communication and information exchange and the other is concern regarding changes in the fishing efforts and their impacts on subsistence activities.
- Steve indicates that the Council has developed a Local knowledge/Traditional Knowledge/Subsistence Task Force as part of the Bering Sea Fishery Ecosystem Plan designed to make recommendations to the Council on incorporating traditional and local information. [Kate Haapala](#) is the Council staff contact for the Local Knowledge/Traditional Knowledge/Subsistence Task Force.
- Gay Sheffield also noted that small boat mariners in the Bering Strait region are not used to dealing with the increase of vessels in the region, and could benefit from some education and training about how to deal with a formerly offshore fleet that is now more like a nearshore fleet in the Bering Strait region. She asked for 3 things: 1) Who to contact in NPFMC about these issues; 2) Information on what is happening on the Russian side, which is apparently establishing a pollock fishery on that side in the southern Chukchi; and 3) how fishing vessels interact with local communities and ports if they are experiencing a Corona Virus issue onboard.
- Molly reminded everyone that there is another issue here being safety concerns given the limited Coast Guard presence in the area.

Announcements

- Molly McCammon: Most research cruises planned for April have been postponed or cancelled due to the Corona Virus. Although not certain yet, it is likely that cruises planned for May will also be cancelled.

Next Alaska Marine Policy Forum call: May 20, 2020, 1 pm Alaska time.