



## Alaska Marine Policy Forum

Summary from Wednesday, November 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](mailto: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***

- Their office is working to bring S.496, the Young fisherman's Development Act to a vote in the Senate.
- There are ongoing discussions on a new COVID package.
- They mostly are working on ongoing and pending legislation going into the holidays.

#### ***Jim DelBene, Senator Murkowski's Office***

- Appropriations bills and report language came out last week.
  - IOOS program received \$40M, an increase of \$1M
  - National Sea Grant program received \$76M with a \$2M increase
  - Pacific Salmon Treaty received \$39.5M, a \$4M increase
  - Fisheries Surveys received \$176M, a \$2.5M increase
  - Pacific Observers program received \$7.5M with a \$500,000 increase
  - The Saltonstall-Kennedy grant program received \$12M
- The Digital Coast act, H.R. 2189, moved through the House and is back in the Senate.
- The National Sea Grant reauthorization has moved through the House and is back in the Senate.
- The Save Our Seas 2.0 Act, S.1982, has passed the House.
- The Senator's office is working to get the Blue Globe Act, S.933, hotlined.

#### ***Jesse von Stein, Congressman Young's Office***

- Their office is working to get the ICOOS act taken up by the House and working through some technical issues regarding the water bill portion.
- Congressman Young is recovering from COVID and looking forward to getting back to work.

#### ***Rachel Baker, Alaska Department of Fish & Game***

- ADF&G has been working on the spend plan for the Section 12005 Cares Act program for fisheries participants and has just completed a second round of public comments and is hoping to finalize the plan in the next two weeks. They are hoping to start the application process before the end of the year.

#### ***Thatcher Brouwer, Representative Tarr's Office***

- The House Fisheries Committee met September 3 to consider the Governor's Board of Fish appointments.

## **Marine Debris Event in the Bering Strait**

### ***Peter Murphy, NOAA Marine Debris Program***

- The event started in the last few days of July when communities in the eastern Bering region began reporting notable increases in marine Debris.
- Debris was well outside the baseline of types and amounts of debris.
- Items were of predominantly foreign manufacture with Russian and Korean labeling and included household items and those associated with the fishing industry, including orange colored deck boots. Debris appeared to not be weathered and some things had manufacture dates of 2020.
- Items were reported on St. Lawrence Island and in Nome.
- Reports of debris are continuing to date but in diminishing concentrations
- The assessment concluded that this event was consistent with a point source release indicating either an accidental loss or intentional dumping.
- In response to this event a task force was assembled including state and federal agencies and local groups. Their goal is to share information, build awareness, and identify needs and opportunities for direct actions. They are using models to determine the source location appearing to have come from the west and south of St. Lawrence Island. This group has developed a reporting system for community members.
- There is a potential for direct funding support for removal of debris.
- NOAA has also been working on international engagement going through formal channels.
- There will be a report forthcoming maybe in the next couple of months..
- Gay Sheffield added that the hazmat and pollution items are concerning to the local communities.

## **Upcoming Polarstar Operations in the Arctic**

### ***Dr. Phillip McGillivray and LCDR Andy Denelly, USCG***

- The Polar Star will be deploying to the Arctic this week, the first time since 1986 that the US has had a heavy icebreaker in the region and will be there from December 2 to February 22.
- The cruise will transit from Dutch Harbor to the Southern Chukchi Sea three times during this mission.
- The crew is observing quarantine and testing protocols regarding COVID-19 and will head up to the Arctic in early December.
- The ship will operate in mostly first-year ice in the southern Chukchi Sea and south.
- The focus is to perform Coast Guard statutory missions, project a US presence along the maritime boundaries, and support the Coast Guard Arctic strategic outlook.
- The Coast Guard Arctic strategic outlook includes three lines of effort, enhancing the capability to operate in the Arctic, strengthening rules-based order, and to innovate and adapt.
- The innovate and adapt effort is dedicated to the science community as they work to improve communications.
- They will be trying out three different communications systems. Some are military.
- The National Ice Center will be ground truthing some of the new satellite data as they work towards developing a new product informing mariners of ice conditions.
- The Office of Naval Research will be testing an iridium surface antenna on board the ship.
- The University of Washington's Applied Physics Lab will be sending buoys as part of the International Arctic Buoy program.
- Oceanographer Bob Pickart has requested that they deploy expendable CTD instruments twice per day during three transits to deliver a physical oceanographic profile of the transit from Dutch Harbor to the Southern Chukchi Sea.
- They are also working to get an unmanned aircraft aboard to train ice navigators.

- Gay Sheffield asked about any opportunities for local outreach in the Bering Strait Region and Phillip will contact her regarding this.

### **Seafood Trade Relief Program**

#### ***Jeff Curry, USDA***

- This farm service agency is handling the payment program for Seafood Trade Relief from Covid-19 due to how the program was initiated through a notice of funds availability instead of as a farm bill.
- The program started as relief to the east coast lobster industry and then morphed into its current form to include 16 different types of seafood commodities, 13 of which are fished for in Alaska.
- There is \$527M set aside for this program but it has no limit and is being administered through the Commodity Credit Corporation, the funding source for the Farm Service agency.
- The program provides payment to eligible fishermen based on eligible species caught in 2019.
- The program has experienced some problems due to unique situations in Alaska but those problems have now been worked through.
- They currently have over 3,000 applications and have issued about 600 payments so far.
- The Farm Service Agency in Alaska is fairly small so their staffing is being taxed.
- Contact Jeff for more information at [jeff.curry@usda.gov](mailto:jeff.curry@usda.gov).

### **Announcements**

- [Dawn Montano](#) – Alaska Sea Grant is now accepting applications from municipal, state, or federal agencies for hosting an Alaska Sea Grant Fellow for 2021. The closing date for this is December 4, 2020. Please visit their [website](#) for more information.
- [Danielle Verna](#) – There is a public comment period open from the EPA for discharges incidental to the normal operation of vessels pursuant to the [Vessel Incidental Discharge Act](#). Please contact Danielle directly for more information.
- [Karen Gillis](#) – The Bering Sea Fishermen’s Association has an invitation to submit research proposals open until December 16 and they are also seeking nominations to fill a vacancy on their Scientific Technical committee to be held by someone from academia or the private sector. [More information](#).
- Ginny Eckert – Wanted to thank Molly for her leadership for many years as this will be her last opportunity to host the forum. Molly will be stepping down to Senior Advisor for AOS in January when newly selected Executive Director Sheyna Wisdom takes the reins at AOS.

**Next Alaska Marine Policy Forum call: January 20, 2021, 1 pm Alaska time.**