



## **Alaska Marine Policy Forum**

Summary from Wednesday, July 17, 2019

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 be added to the list serve to receive a reminder and agenda for the next call, and summary notes following each call.*

### **Amy Kirkham, Sen. Murkowski's office**

- Amy is the Sea Grant Fellow working with Ann Robertson, the legislative assistant covering fisheries, oceans, and other environmental issues.
- Senator Murkowski will be in Alaska during the month of August. Amy and the USCG fellow in Senator Murkowski's office will be in Nome to see the US Healy off and Ann Robertson will be traveling to Utqiagvik at the end of July for the Alaska Eskimo Whaling Commission meeting.
- Pink Salmon Disaster funds have been released.
- The Senator has been working closely with Senator Sullivan's office on the Save Our Seas 2.0 act co-sponsored by Senators Murkowski and Sullivan.

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

- Pink Salmon Disaster funds were released from NOAA fisheries and ADF&G is working with Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission (PSMFC) to get funds distributed. Contact the PSMFC or Rachel for more information.

### **Senator Jesse Kiehl**

Negotiations are ongoing with respect to the budget. Reversing the sweep is a key issue for them, including those that impact the ADF&G budget.

### **Darcy Dugan, Alaska Ocean Observing System**

- The Alaska Harmful Algal Bloom Network's (AHABN) workshop, The Algal Toxin Public Outreach Conference, held in Nome this week was co-organized by AOOS and Alaska Sea Grant with additional funding support by the US Arctic Research Commission and NOAA.
- The workshop included a presentation by UAF Meteorologist Rick Thoman on the unprecedented changes in the Bering Sea.
- The conference was well attended, especially by regional health providers, with many experts from several agencies including Joe McLaughlin, the Alaska State Epidemiologist, speaking on the health effects from ingesting these toxins.
- Poisoning from these toxins is not currently a problem in the area, but knowing what the symptoms and treatment are is important for public health.
- There are some efforts to monitor toxins in the area and some research on ecosystem impacts.
- AOOS will soon provide a workshop report. Copies of the presentations are on the AOOS and AHABN websites.

### **Barbara Mahoney, Acting Stranding Coordinator, NOAA**

- Barbara gave an update on the Unusual Mortality Events (UME) declared for ice seals and gray whales in the Bering Sea Region.
- A UME was declared for gray whales in the Pacific that started early this year. There have been 185 dead gray whales reported along the coast of North America with 37 from California, 31 from Washington, 6 from Oregon, 25 from Alaska, 78 from Mexico, and 8 from Canada.
- Most have been very thin and emaciated, so the deaths are thought to be food related.
- Reports from Mexico where the whales overwinter noted that the whales appeared very thin when they arrived and then when they started their migration north.
- The whales were delisted from endangered status in 1994, so there are more whales and at the same time the productivity of their feeding grounds here in the north has declined.
- A UME starts with reports of dead animals received by NOAA that are then provided to a working group of experts who make a recommendation to NOAA on declaration of a UME.
- There have been many reports of dead ice seals in Alaska over the last two years. An average number of dead seals for Alaska in June is about 40 and in June 2018 there were 124, and June 2019 there were 120.
- NOAA has just submitted a package to the working group for determination of an UME for ice seals, which should be decided in the next week.
- The dead seals appear very thin with few stomach contents and somewhat younger in age.

### **Announcements**

- Molly McCammon noted that she will be attending a meeting in Tokyo looking at Pacific wide preparations for the UN Decade of the Oceans to set goals for international activities in the next decade.
- Molly also noted that there is the decadal Oceans Observations '19 Conference happening in September looking at ocean observations around the globe to share priorities for the future and best practices. Many Alaskans will be in attendance at this conference. Please contact Molly at [mccammon@aoos.org](mailto:mccammon@aoos.org) for more information.
- Danielle Dickson from the North Pacific Research Board (NPRB) notes that their Arctic Integrated Ecosystem Research Program will be participating in a NOAA research cruise onboard the Ocean Starr from August 1-October 3 leaving from Dutch Harbor to survey the entire Chukchi Sea shelf. You can follow the cruise on the NPRB blog at <https://blog.arctic.nprb.org/>.
- AOOS has begun discussions with NOAA regarding a workshop on Marine Debris to develop a statewide strategic action plan for marine debris.
- Betsy Baker at NPRB noted that the Arctic Futures 2050 conference will be in DC this September with lots of Alaska participation. For more info visit <https://www.searcharcticsscience.org/arctic-2050/conference-2019>.

**Next Alaska Marine Policy Forum call: September 25, 2019, 1 pm Alaska time.**