



### Alaska Marine Policy Forum

Summary of Wednesday, Oct 20, 2021

Host: Sheyna Wisdom, AOOS

Summary notes by Darcy Dugan

***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.***

**Survey Announcement:** AOOS and Sea Grant are currently circulating a survey to make sure future calls are tailored to the information needs of listeners. Please spend 5 minutes filling out this [survey](#).

#### CONGRESSIONAL AND LEGISLATIVE UPDATES

##### **Carina Nichols, Staff to Senator Sullivan**

Senator Sullivan's office has mostly been focused on the reconciliation budget. With respect to fisheries issues, there has been a lot of outreach about fisheries disasters – Bering Sea Crab, Yukon salmon and several others. There are still supply chain issues on a broader scale impacting some fisheries as well. They are working on several pieces of legislation that don't have language ready yet but will share once it's moving.

##### **Representative Garen Tarr, Alaska State Legislature**

The legislature is still in special session. There are no fisheries related items in special session but Rep. Tarr had two topics to share:

- **Bycatch.** Legislators have been contacted by fishermen on this issue and there is interest from Fisheries committee members. There is overlap with federal management so they are sorting out what state role would be. There will be a meeting on this topic after special session ends. Rep Tarr and staff would like to meet with different stakeholders between Nov 2 and Thanksgiving. NPFMC had this as a topic recently.
- **HB 54: Alaska invasive species council.** Rep. Tarr has been working on getting this topic for many years, following Rep. Seaton; the bill started as a rapid response to *Elodea* but that issue has been somewhat resolved because DEC is issuing different types of permits. The bill has not evolved into more comprehensive approach to create a stakeholder council that includes federal, state, industry, citizen and scientists. The council would be housed within ADFD, where Tammy Davis from ADGF has been leading

the work on invasive species recently. They are hoping for a zero fiscal note on the state side. The ADFG commissioner believes there are federal grant dollars that could support the effort and the bill is almost through the House. The goal is to get it through both the House and Senate this year.

The Alaska Invasive Species Partnership workshop will be held November 3-4 virtually this year, register here: <https://alaskainvasives.org/>.

Contact Rep. Tarr: [rep.geran.tarr@akleg.gov](mailto:rep.geran.tarr@akleg.gov)

And Senate Finance Committee information:

<http://www.akleg.gov/basis/Committee/Details/32?code=SFIN>

## INVITED SPEAKERS

### **Salmon Return Summary for 2021**

*Katie Howard, Alaska Dept of Fish & Game Fisheries Biologist*

Katie leads the newly created Salmon Ocean Ecology Program and provided an overview of 2021 salmon runs. 2021 was a story of extremes; in Western Alaska there were record low runs for many species at the same time as record high runs of sockeye salmon in Bristol Bay. There are increasing reports of salmon getting smaller and/or younger as returning adults. This is particularly true in the northern river systems where historically there have tended to be older ages returning for the same species. Even when age remains the same, they are measuring smaller in size. In Norton Sound, the average weight of coho and chum salmon were the lowest ever recorded; similar in the Yukon. The Yukon also had a high prevalence of diseased salmon.

2021 returns by type:

**Chinook:** continued to have poor runs throughout the state, though there were a few stocks in Southeast that have shown consistent improvement in escapements compared to prior years.

**Chum:** generally below average statewide. In Western Alaska chum runs were exceptionally poor with some of the lowest abundance ever recorded. In Southeast and Kodiak, chum runs were below average, though in Southeast the fall stocks did better than summer. Unlike the rest of the state, chum in the southern Alaska Peninsula were above average.

**Coho:** below average to poor throughout much of the state, and particularly poor throughout much of Western Alaska except coho runs in the western Gulf where they were late and above average.

**Pink:** better statewide than for many other species. In Southeast the commercial harvest exceeded the preseason forecast. Escapement indices were 41% above the 10-year average in the southern part of the region, though variable in the northern part of

the region. Prince William sound saw the third largest harvest for odd years stocks in the past decade. Commercials harvests in the western Gulf and the Bering Sea were generally average to above average.

**Sockeye** – overall fared well with average commercial harvest in Southeast, above average harvest and escapements in the central and western Gulf, and above average to record high commercial harvest in Western Alaska. Chignik early runs were an exception which came in weak as forecasted.

In 2021 there were some successes in being able to meet escapement goals despite poor run sizes for many Chinook and coho stocks throughout the state. This is thanks to active management and cooperation with fisheries stakeholders to prioritize escapement when abundances are poor.

### **Bering Sea Crab Declines and Closures**

*Jamie Goen, Alaska Bering Sea Crabbers Association*

The Alaska Bering Sea Crabbers is nonprofit trade association representing harvesters of king, snow and biardi crab in the Bering Sea. There are roughly 60 vessels in the fleet and about 300 fisherman and ABSC represents them on policy and management issues at both the regional and national levels.

The industry has been rocked by the news of the closure of the Bristol Bay red king crab fishery for the first time in 25 years, and a snow crab history that has cut by almost 90%.

This translates to a loss of \$234 million to Alaska fishermen. Most of the crabbing operations are small independent family businesses. There are boats that will not be able to make their payments, vessel repairs will be delayed, and longtime skippers and crew that will lose their jobs. There are also downstream effects to processors communities supply chains and support businesses. Of the 60 vessels in the fleet, roughly five of them could catch the amount of crab available to harvest this year leaving 55 vessels to figure out what to do and how to make ends meet. It's an incredible strain on the industry and on Alaska fishing communities, in particular St. Paul, Unalaska, Akutan, King Cove and Kodiak.

ABSC is looking at everything they can to help the crab stocks rebound and to help the fishermen. On the policy side they're pursuing fishery disaster requests, however these often take 3-4 years and are not fast enough for many businesses. Newer entrants to the fishery are particularly hard hit. They are looking at other resources to help skippers and long time crew, such as trade schools job, retraining, and unemployment. They are looking for ideas or tips for resources for fishermen.

At the October North Pacific Fisheries Management Council (NPFMC) meeting, crabbers sought actions to protect important areas for crab and to reduce bycatch impacts across all fishing sectors, including an emergency action request for closed area. They will be working with the NPFMC and ADFG going forward, including pushing for more dynamic flexible responsive management systems that can adapt to moving crabs stocks and rapidly changing ocean

conditions. Currently, management change often takes years so they're looking for faster alternatives. They've also been looking at voluntary industry actions across all fishing sectors, requesting other industry partners to take actions to reduce their impacts on crab in the Bering Sea. Voluntary industry actions can act much faster than the Federal State management systems and so far there has been good response. ABSC is also looking to the Alaska Legislature to support the shellfish enhancement bill to explore crab enhancement options in the future. Jamie noted that all tools in the management toolbox need to be considered including by-catch reduction by all gear types and updated protected areas and essential fish habitat to build climate ready fisheries and enhancement projects.

ABSC is working at the national level with Congress and NOAA fisheries to explore ways to help the fleet. Jamie noted that crab can be used as an example for how to build a roadmap to climate resilience fisheries in line with the Biden administration's efforts. Some examples include speeding up disaster declaration funds as well as reducing the high interest rate on fisheries loans and buy back loans to the current lower interest rate to reduce the financial burden on fishermen.

### **More on the Crab Crash**

*Scott Goodman, Bering Sea Fisheries Research Program (BSFRP)*

Scott introduced the BSFRP, nonprofit formed in 2003 by the Bering Sea crab industry, and their efforts are focused on improving the science for managing crab by working closely with scientists and industry stakeholders. BSFRP does not take positions on policy and intentionally stays in the science and research realm to do collaborative research to inform management actions and policy choices for others.

Scott noted that there aren't easy answers for the recent declines in crab stocks. Red king crab has continued to decline, even as fishing opportunities and exploitation has been increasingly conservative over the last decade. The closure in 2021 is the first since 1995. Bering Sea snow crab stock will likely be declared 'overfished' by NOAA. The change from last season's quota from 45 million pounds to this year's 5.6 million pounds tracks with the striking decline in abundance. The current scientific understanding for these two stocks — continuing slow decline for one stock and a more sudden big drop for another — is very uncertain. For red king crab, persistent recruitment failures are likely linked to multiple factors. For snow crab the large dynamic swings of a very prolific and abundant stock are most likely linked to ecosystem level and climate related factors that are strongly influencing natural mortality.

BSFRP works closely with federal, state and academic research partners to prioritize research on crab. Their immediate focus is to pursue improved understanding of crab movement that may be related to both normal seasonal patterns and also in response to some of the environmental changes that could be related to the status indicators that they're seeing. Bering Sea crab seasons are generally short and the available information is lacking to better understand their movement and commercially important stock components (the legal males as well as the reproductively mature and juvenile stock components for both sexes at important times of the year).

Currently, these partners are chartering a Bering Sea fishing vessel to place 350 satellite tags on Bristol Bay red king crab which is scheduled to begin sampling and tagging in about 10 days from now. Both NMFS and ADFG scientist will be working together onboard, and the project is intended to provide some of the first up to date information about locations and movement vectors for egg bearing females and mature male red king crab.

Movement research on snow crab is also a high priority following this year's survey and the assessment results, and current plans are underway to complete similar tracking research. For snow crab the immediate research plans are more complicated, as the variety of factors to address the sudden decline is very challenging. Current researchers have addressed up to 20 factors including predator prey relationships, disease prevalence, warming temperatures, ocean chemistry variables and others which are all likely conflated with changes in the marine environment.

Several efforts are underway to quickly focus attention on snow crab climate related research. Federal and State efforts include existing climate research programs and new focus areas. BSFRF is convening a second stakeholder workshop in 2021 that will draw attention to further research needs.

Collectively, the current crab research needs are very high during a time when stakeholder realities are dire. Support and funding of research will likely be lower so BSFRP others are looking for ways to continue momentum and partner in new ways to improve the understanding of crab stocks.

### **Tamamta Program at UAF**

*Courtney Carothers and Jessica Black, University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF)*

Tamamta means “All of Us” and is a program at UAF transforming western and indigenous fisheries and marine sciences together. UAF has put together a large team including project PIs, a growing faculty team and nine fellows. Courtney explained the program was designed to address ongoing erasure of indigenous peoples and values, and that the fisheries of Alaska have always been indigenous and still are. She noted her background in Pittsburg and that her family currently resides on Denaina land. Jessica Black explained her family heritage from Fort Yukon and Nenana, and that she had been a fisherwoman with her family her whole life.

The goal of Tamamta is to train the next generation of indigenous fisheries scientists and managers and transform the ways they teach, do research and govern fisheries. In embracing this goal of ‘All of Us’ they’re hoping to welcome in new partners. To date they have been working with tribal, state and federal partners to expand the reach of this program to grow outside of the university.

Among the current courses available is Indigenous Fisheries of Alaska which covers a broad range of topics. The seminar meets on Fridays at 3:30 pm and the public is welcome. There is also a graduate seminar on fisheries and a special class on professional skills. In an effort to

broaden the types of knowledge that's taught, they invite elders and residents and also visiting indigenous scholars to the classes. Going forward, they will strive for cultural emergence by visiting fish camps and including Indigenous teachers, thought leaders, and Federal and State fishery scientists to come together and discuss challenges and forward thinking solutions. They will also be developing short courses by faculty and agency partners. If anyone sees a need for specific trainings and dialogues related to the work they're doing, the Tamamta team can work with you to develop short courses directly responding to needs.

To get in involved, join our mailing list [tamamta.org](http://tamamta.org). They are going to start recruiting for a second cohort of ~5 students with a January 15, for next fall.

## OTHER UPDATES

### **NPRB Funding Opportunities**

*Danielle Dickson, North Pacific Research Board*

The North Pacific Research Board has up to \$2.2 million available for an Arctic synthesis and an assessment for the Northern Bering Sea. Periodically, NPRB invests in integrated ecosystem research programs where scientists work together spanning topics from ocean physics and plankton to fishes, marine mammals, seabirds and social science. A current Arctic program mostly focused on the Bering Strait and Chukchi since 2016 is just wrapping up so part of this call for proposals provides a synthesis phase for that program.

The NPRB also determined the next big field program will continue research in the Bering and Chukchi with focus centered on the Northern Bering. They are currently funding an assessment phase designed to provide the board with input as they develop the RFP.

There are also two specific subcategories under the assessment aimed at projects that will (1) synthesize research needs with respect to commercial fisheries and fisheries management (2) synthesize research needs specific to marine species of subsistence importance. Each of these are \$100,000. Proposals are due December 15, <https://www.nprb.org/nprb/integrated-ecosystem-research-program>

### **Cook Inlet Lease Sales**

*Liz Mering – Cook Inlet Keeper*

The draft EIS for the Lower Cook Inlet lease sale will come out in November according to BOEM. There is also a call for what information the state should consider.

### **Arctic Yukon Kuskokwim Sustainable Salmon Initiative RFP**

*Karen Gillis - Bering Sea Fishermen's Association*

The Arctic Yukon Kuskokwim Sustainable Salmon Initiative is releasing an RFP next week with specific themes, including research of chinook and chum in the AYK including drivers of freshwater mortality, marine mortality and escapement quality, management for sustainability under uncertainty, and assessing risk to vulnerable populations. \$1.2 is available and proposals are due January 11. More info at [www.ayk.ssi.org](http://www.ayk.ssi.org).

## **New Carbon Policy Podcast**

*Darcy Dugan, Alaska Ocean Observing System/Alaska Ocean Acidification Network*

The Alaska Ocean Acidification Network just launched a new podcast called “The Future Ocean: what can carbon policy do for the ocean and our fisheries?”. The six-part series features local marine scientists, economists, and leaders in Alaska’s clean energy transition as they introduce ocean acidification and discuss different carbon policy options, how they work, what the terms mean, and what action is currently happening regionally and nationally.

The podcast was developed in response to interest from the Alaska fishing industry in becoming more informed on carbon policy and what it can do for the ocean they depend on. It aims to engage more Alaskans in conversation about the changes happening in the marine ecosystem, and potential solutions that are on the table in Congress.

In the first two episodes, guest scientists describe the changes happening in the Bering Sea and Gulf of Alaska. They discuss how ocean acidification works, and why Alaska may be one of the first places impacted by acidification. In episodes 3, 4 and 5, the podcast turns to economists to explore policies that put a price on carbon emissions as a carbon reduction tool. In episode 6, leaders in Alaska’s expansion of clean energy talk about progress being made in the state. This includes renewable energy development in 80 rural villages, larger systems in regional hub communities, and emerging opportunities for clean energy along the Railbelt.

Find more about the podcast at: [www.thefutureoceanpodcast.com](http://www.thefutureoceanpodcast.com) or listen on Spotify and Apple Podcasts.

## **Clean Harbor Surveys for community members**

This survey is being conducted by Alaska Sea Grant and Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation with the goal to understand opinions about current conditions, practices, and concerns about Alaska’s harbors. Results will inform efforts to develop local solutions to pollution.

Survey for community members: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/CommunMembers>

Survey for boat users: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/BoatUsers>

**The next Alaska Marine Policy Forum call will be on December 15, 2021.**