

Development of a Bering Sea Fishery Ecosystem Plan

Public input at the Nome June 2014 Council meeting
June 8, 2014

Rose Fosdick, in the Natural Resources Division at Kawerak

- We are experiencing great change in this part of the state
 - Climate change
 - Increase in interest in Bering Sea food resources
 - Increase in species - new species moving into our region
 - E.g., sea lions on St Laurence Island
 - Other (unusual) species being found in water
 - Diseases being identified. E.g., a couple of ice seal species having difficult time last year with skin lesions, sores
- So a lot of change to the environment, and to the species that we depend on, and people are interested in why
- One way Kawerak addresses this is a new social science program.
 - 1 staff member, with temporary help
 - Kawerak gathers traditional knowledge for various projects
 - Project: recently did ice seal and walrus mapping of habitat and hunting areas
 - Information that will be very useful, especially for protecting the environment, e.g. against contamination, oil spills
 - Pretty clear environment here to date, although some effects from big boats
 - Project: mapping of non-salmon fish
 - Areas, by community, which are important for fish harvest, e.g., tom cod, pike, saffron cod
 - Project: traditional knowledge of Diomedede people on walrus
 - Concerned about Bering Strait – one community on the US side (Diomedede) – 100 people
- Nome is a hub; 16 communities in our region
 - Small communities, but been here for thousands of years
 - All but one are on the coastline, reliant on the water
- Recommendations for the content of the FEP
 - Document and collect information on subsistence, and the species that we rely on here
 - Information on climate change and its impacts, like shipping
 - New species moving into the area
 - The economics of small communities
 - Lots of movement from small communities to Nome or Anchorage, because there are only a few jobs available in the communities (teachers, post office, airport, airline agents, store)
- We can put together more information for a comment letter

Council member questions

Craig Cross – Thank you. What you've talked about are all very important things. I am especially interested in seeing the traditional history with respect to species that have been present for a long time, and new species that are now appearing. This is very interesting, and I hope to hear more about that.

Rose – Yes. Kawerak also works with reindeer herders. Agency staff often ask questions of them, in order to monitor changes in the environment, because they are the ones out there in the field. So I agree that involving the people in these projects is critical.

John Henderschedt – Thank you. You’ve described many different kinds of change in your testimony. Is Kawerak maintaining a catalogue of these observations?

Rose – At Kawerak we keep information within the Eskimo Heritage program. But we have a very small staff. So we rely on others to take the data and work with it. I don’t think anyone has done a catalogue.

Bill Tweit – the questions the Council asked for public input on the FEP were focused on how the Council would use an FEP. But there is also the question of how an FEP could benefit Kawerak. I would hope the FEP could be something that would have broad use to a variety of stakeholders. We would find it useful to hear back from you about how an FEP could be useful to you? Also, do you suggest any additional people or groups from which we should solicit input about the FEP?

Rose – Will think that through, and talk to people in our organization. We share an interest in fishery resources, harvest rates, and what’s impacting them.

Bill – Things you brought up about changing human uses, and the changing environment (e.g., disease in ice seals). Hopefully the FEP can put our values and your values together. Emphasis on the “ecosystem” part of the FEP.

Duncan Fields – I am involved, on behalf of the Council, in the Alaska Ocean Observing System (AOOS), which includes a traditional and ecological knowledge component in their observing system. I suggest it may be useful for Kawerak to get in touch with AOOS.