

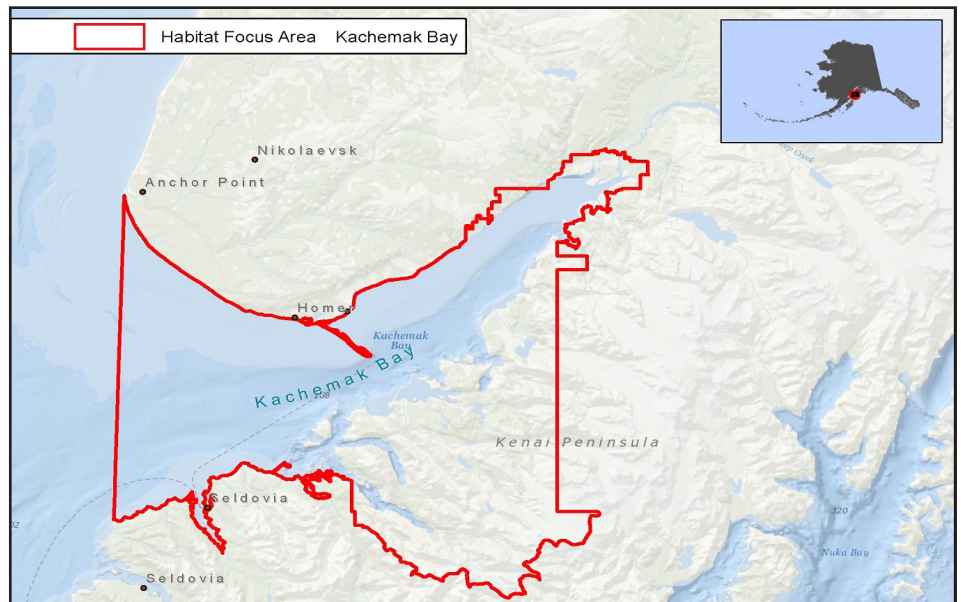
NOAA Selects Alaska's Kachemak Bay as New Habitat Focus Area

Kachemak Bay, located in southern Cook Inlet, has been selected as the next Habitat Focus Area under NOAA's Habitat Blueprint.

A Marine Researcher's Paradise

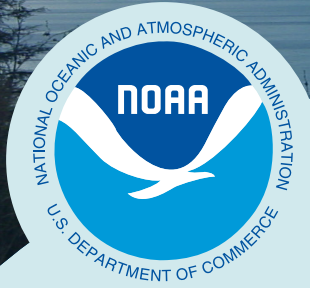
The value of Kachemak Bay habitats has been recognized by the bay's designation as a State of Alaska Critical Habitat Area, and as a National Estuarine Research Reserve. In fact, Kachemak Bay is the largest reserve in the National Estuarine Research Reserve System, and provides unique opportunities for long-term monitoring and research activities, habitat mapping, watershed studies related to salmon habitat, and training and education programs in the area.

Because of its water circulation patterns, the bay provides a remarkably fertile environment for both fish and shellfish. The abundance of marine life draws waterfowl and shorebirds, as well as land mammals such as moose and bears. Marine mammals—some of which are threatened or endangered—live in the bay year round, including otters, seals, porpoise, and various species of whales. Kachemak Bay supports important recreational, subsistence, and commercial fishing, marine transportation, tourism.



A Habitat in Need

Although Kachemak Bay has amazing marine resources, the region has experienced significant declines in shrimp and crab that have not recovered despite fisheries closures. The ecological richness is vulnerable to impacts from development activities in Cook Inlet and to changes in ocean acidity and hydrodynamics due to retreating glaciers. While there is an extensive scientific body of knowledge of the ecological and hydrodynamic processes, NOAA and its partners have yet to synthesize that knowledge and integrate it into resource management for the express purpose of restoring these fisheries.



NOAA

Habitat Blueprint



An eagle at sunset on Kachemak Bay.



Kachemak Bay, Alaska



Opalescent Nudibranch
Photo courtesy of Dominic Hondolero

A Habitat in Need (continued)

Alaska is also on the front lines of ecological changes that include the melting of the polar ice cap and glaciers and the spread of invasive species. These changes could have profound impacts on the economy and on the ecological diversity of the marine and coastal ecosystems.

Partners

State of Alaska
 University of Alaska
 Center for Alaskan Coastal Studies
 Seldovia Village Tribe
 Port Graham Village Tribe
 Nanwalek Tribal Council
 Bureau of Ocean Energy Management
 Cook Inlet Regional Citizens Advisory Council
 City of Homer
 City of Seldovia
 Kenai Peninsula Borough

Focus Area Objectives At a Glance

3-5 years

- Develop new resource assessment and management tools customized for local, state, and federal level use
- Monitor and plan for marine invasive species
- Develop habitat visualization and assessment tool
- Develop a user-friendly trajectory tool based on NOS ocean circulation model for spill response planning and larval transport
- Develop a risk assessment tool for harmful algal bloom
- Develop ocean acidification risk assessment tool for marine animals and plants

Long-term

- Sustainable and abundant fish populations
- Recovered threatened and endangered species
- Protected coastal and marine areas and habitats at risk
- Resilient coastal communities
- Increased coastal/marine tourism, access, and recreation