



B1 Executive Director's Report

December 2021

Action Memo

Lauren Smoker retiring

Ms. Lauren Smoker is retiring from NOAA General Counsel at the end of the year after a 30-plus year career with the Alaska Region. Lauren has so many accomplishments that it is impossible to list everything, but it is worth noting that she assisted in the development of the Crab Rationalization Program, Community Development Quota Program, Amendment 85 BSAI Pacific cod allocations, Amendment 80 Program, advising NMFS during the inshore/offshore debates and American Fisheries Act implementation, and development of the Steller sea lion mitigation measures. She has also been the NOAA GC expert on national and Alaska recusal processes and issues; NEPA issues (including the programmatic EIS for the Alaska groundfish fisheries); FOIA issues, and federal and state salmon management and related litigation. She also assisted in the defense of many lawsuits over the years, including defending the Council's and agency's actions on the Salmon FMP.

On behalf of the Council, I want to thank you Lauren, for your long service on NOAA GC and helping to develop programs and solve implementation issues for the conservation and management of North Pacific fisheries. You have always been helpful and responsive to my requests for help and those from Council staff. We wish you the best in your retirement!

Hollowed and Reimer to retire from SSC

Dr. Anne Hollowed is retiring from the SSC after serving 19 years, the last four as SSC Co-Chair. While she first joined the SSC in 2003, her participation in the Council process goes back much farther, to the start of her career with NMFS in the 1980s, when the Alaska and Northwest Fisheries Science Centers were still a single entity. Anne began as a groundfish stock assessment author; her work expanded quickly to research on ecosystem-based fishery management, the impacts of fishing on marine ecosystems, and more recently the effects of climate change and identification of sustainable management strategies under changing environmental conditions. Both off and on the SSC, Anne has been instrumental in developing the AFSC stock assessment program and its support for the Council process, has contributed to our fundamental groundfish management structures such as the Council's overfishing definitions, tier system, and the Programmatic Groundfish SEIS, and spearheaded innovative research that has prioritized the link back to scientific advice that is actionable in a management context. Anne's contributions to fisheries science have been nationally and internationally recognized, and we will greatly miss her diverse experience and institutional knowledge on the SSC. While Anne will also retire from NMFS in 2022, she has agreed to stay on the planning committee for the national SSC workshop that the NPFMC is hosting next year, which was delayed due to COVID.

Dr. Matt Reimer is also retiring from the SSC after serving 8 years. When Matt joined the SSC in 2014, he was on faculty at the University of Alaska, Anchorage where he was a member of the Institute of Social & Economic Research and the Department of Economics & Public Policy. In 2020, he moved to join the faculty at UC Davis, which is also where he earned his agricultural and resource economics PhD. Matt's research has focused on the management of marine resources and how institutions influence the interaction between human and natural systems. We will miss his insight on the SSC, evaluating the economic analyses supporting the Council's decision making.

Thank you both for your long service on the SSC, and we wish you the best in your future endeavors!

SSC and AP appointments

The Council will review nominations for SSC and AP during Executive Session and the Chair will announce these appointments at the end of the meeting. Note that Advisory Panel members Craig Lowenberg and Joel Peterson have served three full 3-years terms, and are thus not eligible for re-appointment. Additionally, John Gruver has not put in for reappointment after serving 9 years, including 2 full terms followed by three 1-year special appointments. John Scoblic, Erik Velsko, and Marissa Wilson have also announced that they are also stepping down from the AP at the end of the year. Thank you, Craig, Joel, John, John, Marissa, and Erik for your service and contributions to the AP. Best wishes to you and I hope you stay involved in the Council process!

NOAA Requesting Comments on the St. George Unangan Heritage National Marine Sanctuary

NOAA's Office of National Marine Sanctuaries is [initiating a review](#) of the St. George Unangan Heritage National Marine Sanctuary nomination, set to expire on January 27, 2022. Because NOAA has not initiated a designation process for the site, the regulations require us to evaluate the site prior to reaching the five-year mark. The purpose of the [five-year review](#) is to determine if the nomination remains accurate, relevant and responsive to the 11 criteria (4 on national significance and 7 on management considerations). The criteria are listed in [15 CFR part 922](#), subpart B as follows:

National significance criteria. The Director will consider the following in determining if a nominated area is of special national significance:

- (1) The area's natural resources and ecological qualities are of special significance and contribute to: Biological productivity or diversity; maintenance or enhancement of ecosystem structure and function; maintenance of ecologically or commercially important species or species assemblages; maintenance or enhancement of critical habitat, representative biogeographic assemblages, or both; or maintenance or enhancement of connectivity to other ecologically significant resources.
- (2) The area contains submerged maritime heritage resources of special historical, cultural, or archaeological significance, that: Individually or collectively are consistent with the criteria of eligibility or listing on the National Register of Historic Places; have met or which would meet the criteria for designation as a National Historic Landmark; or have special or sacred meaning to the indigenous people of the region or nation.
- (3) The area supports present and potential economic uses, such as: Tourism; commercial and recreational fishing; subsistence and traditional uses; diving; and other recreational uses that depend on conservation and management of the area's resources.
- (4) The publicly-derived benefits of the area, such as aesthetic value, public recreation, and access to places depend on conservation and management of the area's resources.

Management considerations. The Director will consider the following in determining the manageability of a nominated area:

- (1) The area provides or enhances opportunities for research in marine science, including marine archaeology.
- (2) The area provides or enhances opportunities for education, including the understanding and appreciation of the marine and Great Lakes environments.
- (3) Adverse impacts from current or future uses and activities threaten the area's significance, values, qualities, and resources.
- (4) A national marine sanctuary would provide unique conservation and management value for this area that also have beneficial values for adjacent areas.

- (5) The existing regulatory and management authorities for the area could be supplemented or complemented to meet the conservation and management goals for the area.
- (6) There are commitments or possible commitments for partnerships opportunities such as cost sharing, office space or exhibit space, vessel time, or other collaborations to aid conservation or management programs for the area.
- (7) There is community-based support for the nomination expressed by a broad range of interests, such as: Individuals or locally-based groups (e.g., friends of group, chamber of commerce); local, tribal, state, or national agencies; elected officials; or topic-based stakeholder groups, at the local, regional or national level (e.g., a local chapter of an environmental organization, a regionally-based fishing group, a national-level recreation or tourism organization, academia or science-based group, or an industry association).

NOAA has consulted with the nominating party and is now seeking public comments to gather new or updated information. [Comments are due on or before December 17, 2021.](#) The Office of National Marine Sanctuaries will then determine if the St. George Unangan Heritage National Marine Sanctuary nomination will remain in the inventory for an additional five years. A summary of the nomination is here: <https://nmsnominate.blob.core.windows.net/nominate-prod/media/documents/2021-st-george-unangan-heritage-nms-nomination.pdf>. The nomination documents for this sanctuary, NOAA's response, and the 5-year review response from the nominator can be found here: <https://nominate.noaa.gov/nominations/>

For more information about the nomination or five-year review process for St. George, visit nominate.noaa.gov/5-year-review.html. The [Federal Register link](#) explains the different methods to provide comments. The Council's 2016 letter on the nomination for the St. George Unangan Heritage National Marine Sanctuary can be found here: https://www.npfmc.org/wp-content/PDFdocuments/CM/2016/102016/10Oct_Durosltr_StGeorgeSanctuaryNomination.pdf

NOAA Requesting Comments on the 30 by 30 Initiative

On January 27, President Biden issued Executive Order 14008 on *Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad*. Section 216(a) directed “the Secretary of the Interior, in consultation with the Secretary of Agriculture, the Secretary of Commerce, the Chair of the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ), and the heads of other relevant agencies to produce a report to the National Climate Task Force that recommends steps for conserving at least 30% of U.S. lands and waters by 2030.” It also directs NOAA, among other federal agencies, to “solicit input from state, local, Tribal, and territorial officials, agricultural and forest landowners, fishermen, and other key stakeholders in identifying strategies that will encourage broad participation in [this] goal.”

On October 29, NOAA announced an opportunity for the public to share input on ways NOAA can [advance the goals and recommendations in the report on “Conserving and Restoring America the Beautiful”](#). The public comment period will be open for 60 days, through [December 28, 2021](#). Instructions on how to submit a comment, as well as the specific topics on which NOAA is seeking input, [are available here](#). For additional information, visit <https://www.noaa.gov/america-the-beautiful>.

The Council may want to provide comments and attach the conservation areas table that was posted to E-1 in October (OECM Update). I have provided some notes under each of the specific topics that could serve as a starting point for the Council comments (see [attached draft](#)).

The Council's previous comment letter is here: https://www.npfmc.org/wp-content/PDFdocuments/CM/2021/032421/032421_NPFMCcomment_EO14008Section216.pdf

Council Written Comment Policy

At every meeting, staff reports publicly to the Council on any comments removed from the commenting system, and the rationale for removal, so that we can monitor and revise the process as needed to address unanticipated events. The December meeting comment period was open for 16 days, from November 15 to November 30.

No submitted comments were removed.

Recent Staff and Council member activities

- On October 19, Kenny Downs participated in the AOOS Board of Directors meeting and reported on Council issues of overlap with AOOS, including climate-related declines and potential climate resilience approaches, and how these solutions and approaches may drive Council agenda and priorities in the future.
- Sara Cleaver, Kate Haapala, and Anna Henry participated in NMFS NEPA training classes October 26-28.
- Sara Cleaver, Anna Henry, and Jon McCracken attended a webinar “Achieving 30x30 for Our Coasts, Oceans, and Communities Conference” hosted by Coastal Quest on November 9-10. You can watch the conference here: <https://www.coastal-quest.org/conferences/30x30conference/>
- On November 15, I gave a presentation on bycatch management to the Alaska House Fisheries Committee. Mr. Vincent-Lang and Mr. Merrill also provided presentations, available here: http://www.akleg.gov/basis/Meeting/Detail?Meeting=HFSH%202021-11-15%2010:00:00#tab4_4

Cultural Awareness Training

Council staff participated in a virtual, two-day cultural awareness training, “Alaska Native Governance & Protocols,” hosted by First Alaskans Institute (FAI) on November 4 and 5, 2021. The training covered Alaska Native cultural worldviews, governance structures, Tribal sovereignty, and other laws affecting everyday life for Alaska Native Tribes and their members. The training was a mix of a lecture setting, breakout sessions, and FAI provided an anonymous survey portal for staff to ask questions throughout our time together. Staff had a very positive experience and recommends the Council also participate in this training from FAI. Dr. Haapala is currently coordinating with FAI staff to understand their availability to host the Council in a training early in 2022.

Committee Meetings

- The Halibut Charter Committee met on October 26-27 and again on Monday, December 6 to review and recommend management measures for the 2022 charter fisheries in area 2C and 3A. The committee report will be provided under Agenda Item C-1.

Meetings this Week

The Council will meet in Executive Session on Wednesday, December 8 at 3 pm to discuss SSC and AP appointments, other committee appointments, receive a report on the biennial financial audit, and discuss other administrative matters.

Young Fishermen's Summit

The Alaska Sea Grant is hosting a virtual Young Fishermen's Summit on December 6-9. Ms. Evans will be providing presentation on how to participate in the Council process on the evening of December 8. Additional details on the Summit are available here: <https://alaskaseagrant.org/event/2021-alaska-young-fishermens-summit/>

AYK Sustainable Salmon Initiative

In October, the Arctic-Yukon-Kuskokwim Sustainable Salmon Initiative (AYK SSI) released its 2022 Invitation to Submit Research Proposals (See attached announcement). Up to \$1.2M is available for funding of research projects addressing declined Chinook and chum salmon populations. Projects will be selected for funding in spring 2022. The AYK SSI research themes are as follows:

THEME 1 – Drivers of Freshwater Mortality:

Have changes in the suitability or productivity of freshwater habitat used for spawning, rearing, and migration contributed to declines in AYK Chinook and chum salmon stocks?

THEME 2 – Drivers of Marine Mortality:

Have changing ocean conditions (physical and biological) in the Bering Sea increased mortality of Chinook and chum salmon and contributed to the decline of AYK stocks?

THEME 3 – Escapement Quality:

Has selective fishing or other environmental factors altered the size, sex ratio, and composition of life history types in ways that have contributed to recent declines of AYK Chinook and chum salmon?

THEME 4 – Management for Sustainability Under Uncertainty:

What management approaches are likely to be most robust to uncertainties of our mechanistic understanding of AYK Chinook and chum salmon?

THEME 5 – Assessing Risks to Vulnerable Chinook and Chum Salmon Stocks

The Future Ocean Podcast

The Alaska Ocean Acidification Network has produced a 6-episode podcast called [The Future Ocean: What Can Carbon Policy do for the Ocean and Our Fisheries?](#) It includes well-known Alaska scientists working on ocean acidification and ocean warming as well as an array of renewable energy and carbon policy experts from Alaska and across the country. I have attached a letter from Darcy Dugan, Director of the Alaska Ocean Acidification Network, explaining more about the project, as well as an op-ed published in this month's edition of Pacific Fishing.

Amendment 80 Report on Halibut Avoidance

Since 2015, the Amendment 80 cooperatives have voluntarily provided a report on halibut PSC avoidance plans and their performance under those plans, at each December meeting. Similar to last year, representatives from the cooperatives will provide a written summary of their halibut avoidance plans and performance, and will be available to answer questions.