



**UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE**  
**National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration**  
*National Marine Fisheries Service*  
P.O. Box 21668  
Juneau, Alaska 99802-1668

## Sustainable Fisheries Staffing Update

Prepared by the National Marine Fisheries Service, Sustainable Fisheries Division, Juneau, AK.  
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The Sustainable Fisheries Division (SFD) is experiencing staffing and capacity limitations due to a number of recent staffing changes and workload challenges. Since June 2022, several experienced SFD staff have been temporarily backfilling vacant positions for the SF Assistant Regional Administrator (ARA), Deputy ARA, Ecosystem Branch Chief, and as of September, the Monitoring Branch Chief. We continue to strive to work on new FMP and regulatory amendments in a timely manner; however, as we navigate the coming months, our first priority is to allocate available staff time to work on high priority and “must do” or required actions that continue to keep the fisheries operating and to meet anticipated implementation dates for several major projects that are in development. In recent years, we have strived to complete the Secretarial review and rulemaking phase within a year of Council final action. However, our staffing limitations and upcoming workload considerations mean that some regulatory projects are proceeding slower than may otherwise be expected. Additionally, we have worked hard to collaborate with Council staff during the development of Council analyses to frontload NMFS input on implementation issues. This engagement early in the process has created efficiencies during the rulemaking phase and has helped to minimize the potential for implementation surprises or the need to come back to the Council for clarifications or additional input. Our current staffing limitations may reduce SFD engagement in Council-led actions in the near future.

We are actively working to permanently backfill vacant positions as quickly as possible. Hiring actions are in progress for the SF ARA and Ecosystem Branch Chief positions. In the short term, Josh Keaton is the Acting SF ARA, Jennifer Watson is the Acting Deputy ARA, Doug Duncan continues to serve as the Acting Ecosystem Branch Chief, and Stephanie Warpinski is serving as the acting Monitoring Branch Chief. We recently hired Josh Moffi in the Ecosystem branch and another new employee is planning to start work in the Catch Shares Branch in November. We have several additional hiring actions in progress for two reg writer positions and an administrative assistant. Additionally, we are working on adding staff resources through NOAA’s LANTERN program, which offers in-person and remote opportunities for NOAA staff from other offices and locations to temporarily work with AKR. On the long-term horizon, we are also tracking the potential for additional term (1-2 year) positions that might be filled through funding opportunities related to modernizing fisheries management to be more adaptive to climate change.



Our first priority is to complete activities that are mandatory or necessary to support the day-to-day operation of the fisheries and to prevent overfishing. This includes inseason management, support for our monitoring programs, harvest specifications, halibut management measures, legal mandates (such as a required stock rebuilding plan(s), FOIA, and litigation), and requests for emergency rules.

Work on FMP and regulatory amendments is generally our next priority. We consider several factors when prioritizing SF's work on FMP and regulatory amendment projects. These factors include conservation concerns, legal considerations (e.g. required by MSA), Council priorities, and proximity to a mandatory deadline. The current status of our work on FMP and regulatory amendments is summarized in Attachment 1 to the October 2022 NMFS B2 Management report (See Council [eAgenda](#)). At this time, two recent Council actions do not have SF staff assigned and no progress has been made since Council final action: the RQE Fee Collection Program (Council final action in April 2022) and GOA Amendment 113 to make adjustments to the CGOA Rockfish Program (Council final action June 2022). Other projects that are currently moving through the regulatory process have SF staff assigned; however, progress on these projects could slow down or stop if we need to shift additional staff resources to first priority tasks. Lastly, SF input and engagement into Council actions and analyses that are making their way through the Council process are generally prioritized after work on FMP and regulatory actions where the Council has already taken final action. As a result, the Council could notice a reduction in SF staff engagement in Council analyses.