

AOOS

Alaska Ocean Observing System
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April 21, 2005

Chris Oliver, Executive Director
Stephanie Madsen, Chair
North Pacific Fisheries Management Council
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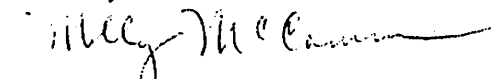
Dear Chris and Stephanie:

As you know, the Alaska Ocean Observing System (AOOS) is beginning Phase II of its developing program – continued discussions with stakeholders interested in ocean observing in Alaska and implementation of the initial components of the program. In most regions of the state, commercial fisheries – including fishermen, processors and managers - represents a large interest group that I believe would benefit tremendously from the information products to be derived from an integrated ocean observing system.

I would like to invite the NPFMC to become a formal member of AOOS. Membership would give the Council a seat at the table in determining priorities for developing the observing system, including funding priorities. As we've discussed previously, I would like to suggest that I give a formal presentation on AOOS at the next Council meeting, scheduled for the first week of June in Girdwood. I'd be happy to work with you to determine a time that works with your schedule.

Please let me know what additional information I can provide to further our discussions.

Sincerely,



Molly McCammon, Director
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What is AOOS?

The Alaska Ocean Observing System is part of a growing national network of integrated ocean observing systems that will improve our ability to rapidly detect changes in marine ecosystems and living resources, and predict future changes and their consequences for the public good. When fully developed, AOOS will

- Serve as the Alaska regional node for a national network of observing systems;
- Systematically deliver both real-time information and long-term trends about Alaska's ocean conditions and marine life;
- Provide to the public Internet access to cost-free data and information on coastal conditions; and
- Supply tailored products to meet the needs of mariners, scientists, industry, resource managers, educators, and other users of marine resources.

What kinds of oceanographic information?

AOOS will provide a centralized location for

- Data from platforms such as buoys, providing wind and current speed and direction, wave height, sea temperature and salinity, and more;
- Enhancements to existing NOAA weather buoy data for specialized local needs;
- Processed satellite data providing Alaska-wide information on sea-surface temperature, ocean color (chlorophyll) and wind;
- Geographically comprehensive surface current data from high frequency radar;
- Data about fish, birds and marine mammals, the environmental effects of human activities, and any other information that can be used with the physical data to predict future changes to the ocean ecosystem.

Why do we need this information?

The goals of the national Integrated Ocean Observing System are to

- Improve the safety and efficiency of marine operations;
- More effectively mitigate the effects of natural hazards;
- Improve predictions of climate change and its effects on coastal populations;
- Improve national security;
- Reduce public health risks;
- More effectively protect and restore healthy coastal marine ecosystems; and
- Enable the sustained use of marine resources.

Alaskans must help prioritize the goals for the Alaska regional system.

Don't we have this capability today?

We do not. Historically, government agencies have had the responsibility of gathering these observations, but the agencies have had neither sufficient funding nor discretion to

mount comprehensive long-term collection efforts or tailor data collection to meet practical local needs. Hence, many observation and information gaps exist in Alaska. As uses of the marine environment increase, the broader, ecosystem-based decisions expected in the future will require more systematic, coordinated databases.

Who will use AOOS?

- Mariners, fishermen and subsistence users who daily must make decisions that affect their livelihood and safety;
- Search and rescue operations planning effective strategies to save lives;
- Scientists studying Alaska's ocean ecosystems;
- Coastal security operations ensuring the safety of Alaska's ports and waters;
- Resource managers seeking ways to use and sustain resources for the future;
- Educators seeking to convey the complexity and connectedness of Alaska's oceans; and
- All those who ply Alaska's oceans for their livelihood, subsistence or recreation.

Who will make this happen?

- Regionally, a partnership has been formed to promote development of a regional program in Alaska. Partners include the State of Alaska; federal agencies, such as the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and the Department of Interior; academic institutions, including the University of Alaska; research organizations, such as the North Pacific Research Board, the Alaska SeaLife Center, the Prince William Sound Science Center, the Arctic Research Commission, and the Barrow Arctic Science Consortium; and industry groups, including fisheries and aquaculture associations.
- Nationally, the effort is being led by the Ocean.US Office under the National Oceanographic Partnership Program. Legislation creating the national system and associated regional systems has passed the U.S. Senate (S. 1400), calling for a \$140 million commitment to ocean observing by 2006, with \$50 million for regional efforts.
- Internationally, a Global Ocean Observing System (GOOS) steering committee is working to link U.S. national efforts to the existing global observation network.

What is being done in Alaska?

- Alaska is developing a functioning program in anticipation of funding for the national effort.
- The partners have committed two years of funding to plan for and develop AOOS. An office has been established in Anchorage and a director hired to facilitate development of the program.
- The partners have developed an interim governance structure, beginning with a Memorandum of Agreement.
- Potential users of AOOS – shippers, fishermen, subsistence harvesters, the oil industry, resource managers, and researchers – will review existing data collection, identify what priority needs are not being met, and develop pilot projects.
- A business plan for implementing AOOS and ensuring its long-term sustainability will be developed with the assistance of the University of Alaska.