



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

October 2, 2026

Agenda B-2: NMFS Management Report

Progress on Rulemaking

Highlights on progress since the June 2026 meeting include:

- On **June 18, 2026**, NMFS published the final 2026 Cook Inlet salmon harvest specifications in the *Federal Register* ([91 FR 36761](#)). The final specifications contain the acceptable biological catches and overfishing limits recommended by the North Pacific Fishery Management Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee and total allowable catches (TACs) recommended by the Council.
- On **June 25, 2026**, NMFS published the final rule to standardize the time limit in which trawl catcher/processors participating in the Alaska groundfish fisheries must assign each haul to a management program ([91 FR 38309](#)).
- On **July 17, 2026**, NMFS published a Notice of Availability for Amendment 129 to the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands (BSAI) groundfish FMP and Amendment 58 to the Crab FMP that would remove requirements for fishery participants to submit Economic Data Reports (EDRs) each year, reducing cost recovery fees and eliminating redundant reporting requirements ([91 FR 44797](#)). Public comments were accepted through **September 15, 2026**. NMFS must approve, disapprove, or partially approve the FMP amendments by October 15, 2026.
 - Under review: A proposed rule to implement Amendments 129 and 58 to remove requirements for fishery participants to submit EDRs each year.
- **Cost Recovery Fee Notices:**
 - **Crab Rationalization Program Fee Notice:** On **July 28, 2026** NMFS published the Crab Rationalization Program fee notice ([91 FR 47223](#)), prior to the start of the crab fishing year on August 1. The fee percentage is used by crab processors to collect fee liabilities from harvesters at the time of landing, and then self-collect, throughout the fishing year. The fee percentage is projected forward before management costs are finalized, so any overpayment or underpayment is accounted for in the next year's fee percentage. AKR calculated a fee percentage of 0.67 percent. This is below last year's 1.2 percent and well below the 5 year average fee percentage. The fishery value increased by approximately 37.5 percent from the prior year and overall direct program costs decreased by approximately 10 percent, resulting in a reduced fee percentage.
 - **Pacific Cod Trawl Cooperative:** On **August 5, 2026** NMFS published the fee percentage for cost recovery for the Pacific Cod Trawl Cooperative Program on ([91 FR 50519](#)). The 2026 fee percentage of 2.09 percent is lower than the 2025 fee percentage of 3.00 percent. Net fishery management costs for 2026 decreased by approximately 17 percent when compared to 2025 and total fishery value increased by approximately 42 percent.
- On **September 3, 2026**, NMFS published the proposed rule to modify the Area 4 halibut vessel use caps ([91 FR 56606](#)). Public comments are invited through **October 5, 2026**.



- Additional proposed rules under review:
 - A proposed rule package to simplify and update the pelagic trawl gear definition to clearly allow the use of common components in codends and bycatch reduction devices. This action is expected to provide additional flexibility and promote innovations in gear design to reduce environmental impacts while maintaining efficient fishing operations.
 - A proposed rule package to modify the season timing regulations to allow NMFS to open the sablefish fishery at the same time as the halibut fishery and add flexibility to close the groundfish fisheries at the appropriate time to maximize catch under the total allowable catch.
- **The Status of Actions Report** provides additional detail.

Additional NMFS Documents

In addition to this B2 NMFS Management Report, NMFS also posted the following documents under this agenda item:

- 2014 proposed and final rules to implement the Steller Sea Lion Protection Measures
- 2024 Stock Assessment Report for Steller sea lions
- NMFS Inseason Management Report
- Exempted Fishing Permit application
- Alaska Fisheries Science Center Chum Salmon Genetics Report
- Status of Actions Report

NMFS Sustainable Fisheries Division (SFD) Priorities

To provide context for the Council's priority-setting discussion at this meeting, the four major drivers of SFD's workload are—

1. **Manage and Must do:** Complete activities that are mandatory or necessary to support the day-to-day operation of the fisheries and to prevent overfishing.
 - inseason management (maximize harvest opportunities below Total Allowable Catch levels by monitoring catch, opening/closing fisheries, and allocating harvest limits among fisheries)
 - support for our monitoring programs that collect data from fisheries
 - fishery data management and quality control for catch estimation and management
 - harvest specifications
 - halibut annual management measures and International Pacific Halibut Commission (IPHC) support
 - legal mandates (such as litigation and FOIA)
 - implementing existing programs (such as Recreational Quota Entity, catch share programs, fees)
 - requests for emergency rules or exempted fishing permits
2. **Regulate:** Develop FMP and regulatory amendments recommended by the Council.

Factors considered when prioritizing SF's regulatory work:

 - Administration priorities
 - legal considerations (e.g. required by MSA or other statutes)
 - Council priorities
 - proximity to a mandatory deadline

3. **Analysis:** 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 (including essential fish habitat 5-year review).
4. **Engage:** SF interacts daily with resource users as part of fisheries management, mandatory activities, and implementation of new actions. SF also has engagement with the public, press, and resource users through activities such as responding to data requests and informing the public about Alaska fisheries.

Rulemaking Priorities for FY 27 are based on the following must do actions, EO 14276 actions in the Council workplan, and actions in the NMFS Assistant Administrator Eugenio Piñeiro Soler's July 2 letter to the Council:

- Proposed and final BSAI and Gulf of Alaska (GOA) groundfish harvest specifications
- Halibut Annual Management Measures
- Proposed and final Cook Inlet salmon harvest specifications
- Mandatory notices in the *Federal Register*, including inseason actions, fee notices, exempted fishing permit notices, etc.
- Small sablefish voluntary release (*significant*)
- Modify Maximum Retainable Amount (MRA) Calculations (*significant*)
- Final rule to modify the Area 4 halibut vessel use caps (*not significant*)
- Three proposed rules under review (*significant*: EDR removal, pelagic trawl gear. *not significant*: season timing)
- Measures to minimize chum salmon bycatch in the Bering Sea pollock fishery (*significant*)
- Crab Rationalization Program modifications to the arbitration system, crew quota share transfer eligibility requirements, and information submissions (*significant*)
- Omnibus recordkeeping, reporting, and monitoring rulemaking recommended by the Council as part of their EO 14276 workplan

National Priorities

On September 2, 2026, NMFS Assistant Administrator Eugenio Piñeiro Soler announced prioritized agency actions in support of the Executive Order on Restoring American Seafood Competitiveness ([EO 14276](#)). NMFS' priorities for agency-level actions in support of the EO 14276 serve as NMFS' operational roadmap for regulatory, scientific, and administrative reform. Informed by the 787 public comments submitted to NMFS, these priorities focus strictly on the policy levers directly within the agency's authority. For more information, visit: <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/leadership-message/advancing-agency-level-reforms-restore-american-seafood-competitiveness>.

New Recreational EO

The White House recently announced a new executive order in September, [EO 14430: Restoring American Saltwater Angling and Recreation](#), with the stated purpose to ensure America's recreational fishing remains strong. The order focuses on modernizing data collection infrastructure for recreational catch-and-effort estimates, restoring integrity to fisheries science and data, rescission of regulations that restrict marine infrastructure and access, fast tracking artificial reefs and habitat creation, managing predators, and projects for increasing fish abundance.

Cook Inlet Salmon Season update

The 2026 salmon fishery for the Cook Inlet exclusive economic zone (EEZ) Area opened on June 22 and NMFS closed the fishery on August 5 in response to the coho salmon TAC being reached (published in the [Federal Register](#) and announced by [NOAA Information Bulletin](#)). The preliminary percentage of TAC and number of fish harvested for each salmon species are:

- sockeye salmon - 41%; 608,508
- Chinook salmon - 25%; 60
- coho salmon - 232%; 38,591
- chum salmon - 80%; 54,970
- pink salmon - 13%; 16,308

In 2026, NMFS issued a total of 347 Salmon Federal Fishery Permits with 30 to 244 vessels actively fishing during individual fishing periods (compared to 248 permits and 218 vessels in 2025). Peak fishing effort occurred on July 9th and 16th (200 and 244 vessels, respectively) and quickly dropped off as sockeye salmon abundance declined. Harvest in the Cook Inlet EEZ fishery accounted for approximately 75% of the total drift gillnet harvest (Federal + State) of sockeye salmon in Upper Cook Inlet (compared to ~11% of drift gillnet harvest during 2025). The coho salmon TAC and ABC were exceeded due to an unexpectedly large harvest on July 30 of 19,676 fish (180 vessels). We were unable to close the EEZ fishery quickly enough to avoid the scheduled August 3 opener, but the OFL (67,013) was not exceeded. NMFS closed the EEZ fishery as soon as possible after it became evident that the 2026 TAC had been reached. Vessel Monitoring Systems continue to be an effective tool for inseason management, aiding in both the reconciliation of harvest data and for understanding fleet dynamics throughout the season.

Information about Federal management of salmon in the Cook Inlet EEZ can be found at: <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/alaska/commercial-fishing/salmon-management-federal-waters-cook-inlet-cook-inlet-eez>.

Fishery Resource Disaster Funding

On June 17, 2026 NOAA [announced](#) the Fishery Resource Disaster Allocation of \$123.6 million appropriated by Congress in the 2025 American Relief Act (Public Law 118-158) for Alaska, Oregon, California, and the Squaxin Island Tribe. For Alaska, the appropriation included funding for the 2023/2024 Bering Sea snow crab fishery (\$75.2 million), 2022 Chignik salmon fishery (\$18.5 million), and the 2023 Upper Cook Inlet East Side Setnet salmon fishery (\$5.7 million). The Notification of Funding Opportunity has yet to be released.

Regulations governing when a vessel must retain or discard catch

As part of NMFS's review of regulations governing when a vessel must retain or discard fish to implement the Council's [October 2025 motion](#) on MRAs, NMFS has identified additional regulation changes necessary to fully implement the Council's recommendation and have a consistent regulatory approach. The changes NMFS intends to propose would modify regulations that implement sections 3.2.4.3 and 3.6.3 of both the BSAI and GOA FMPs. Section 3.2.4.3 in both FMPs describes NMFS inseason management measures necessary to prevent catch from exceeding the total allowable catch (TAC), including the process to establish incidental catch allowance (ICA), directed fishing closures, and MRAs to manage the rate of catch and avoid TAC overages. Section 3.6.3 of the FMPs establishes retention and utilization requirements for pollock

to prohibit roe stripping, the IR/IU program, and full retention of rockfish by catcher vessels using hook-and-line, pot, or jig gear.

In addition to the proposed changes to implement the Council's motion on MRAs, NMFS proposes adding the data used to calculate the MRA, a definition of ICA and prohibiting directed fishing for an ICA, making technical edits to recordkeeping and reporting regulations, and removing conflicting regulations. In response to the Council's [June 2026 motion](#) that requests NMFS identify specific updates to the regulations to improve requirements for the allowable retention of pollock roe, NMFS plans to include proposed changes to simplify and strengthen the regulations implementing the Magnuson-Stevens Act prohibition on pollock roe stripping. All of these changes will be detailed in the preamble to the proposed rule for Council leadership review and, if the Chair and Executive Director concur that these additions are consistent with the Council's intent, will be available for public comment once published.

Federal Fisheries Permit renewal reminder

The 2027 fishing year marks a new three-year cycle for Federal Fisheries Permits (FFPs). If a vessel intends to fish in 2027, the vessel owner/operator must renew the FFP prior to fishing in 2027. More information on the renewal process will be sent to permit holders later this year. Once an FFP is renewed, the FFP will be valid through December 31, 2029.

Federal regulations at 50 CFR 679.4 limit amending and/or re-issuing FFPs that have certain endorsements. The renewal cycle allows for some modifications of endorsements. NMFS recommends that vessel owners and operators confirm they have the appropriate endorsements. If you wish to amend your FFP, you will need to complete and submit a new application. FFP applications may be downloaded from our website: <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/permit/alaska-federal-fisheries-permit-and-federal-processor-permit-applications>.

Recreational Quota Entity (RQE) Fee Collection Process

NMFS implemented the RQE fee collection program in 2026. Charter halibut permit (CHP) holders are required to purchase charter halibut stamps through [eFISH](#) and record the use of the stamps in their Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) saltwater charter logbook. This fall, NMFS will be sending a letter to each CHP holder identifying the number of halibut stamps purchased and number that have been validated (used) in their logbooks. NMFS encourages CHP holders to review their records and ensure they have purchased enough stamps to cover the number reported as used in their logbooks. **Any outstanding balance must be resolved before NMFS can issue the holder a CHP for 2027.** CHP holders are ultimately responsible for purchasing enough stamps to cover the number used during the calendar year, even if their CHP was leased or otherwise used by another person. For assistance please contact Amy Hadfield at amy.hadfield@noaa.gov.

New Exempted Fishing Permit (EFP)

On August 21, 2026, NMFS received an application for an EFP from SeaShare, Inc & Glacier Fish Co. The applicants propose to test an alternative processing workflow on a single trawl catcher/processor to allow a limited amount of Pacific halibut that remain in the catch, after halibut deck sorting and after sampling by a fisheries observer, to be retained and donated through the Prohibited Species Donation Program, instead of being discarded at sea as required by regulation.

The AFSC has completed a review of the EFP application. On October 1, 2026, NMFS published the notice of the EFP application in the *Federal Register* with a 15 day public comment period that closes on October 15, 2026 ([91 FR 62500](#)).

IPHC Commissioner Vacancy

NOAA solicited nominations for a resident of Alaska to serve as a United States Commissioner to the IPHC. This action is necessary to fill a vacancy and ensure that the interests of the United States and all of its stakeholders in the Pacific halibut fishery are adequately represented. The application period closed on September 14, 2026. Nominations are currently under review with the intent of selecting a new commissioner and seating them by the December 1, 2026 IPHC Interim Meeting.

American Fisheries Act (AFA) Inshore Processor Permit Authorization Framework

In response to a recent inquiry from a company interested in inshore processing, NMFS provided an overview of the process, requirements, and constraints for the Council to recommend, and NMFS to issue a new AFA inshore processor permit. We provide a brief summary here in case the Council is interested in pursuing this matter.

The regulatory framework governing the authorization of an additional AFA inshore processor is set forth at 50 CFR 679.4(l)(5)(v). Under these regulations, the Council may recommend that NMFS issue an additional AFA inshore processing permit (or permits) under two specific conditions:

- The Council recommends, and NMFS approves, a combined BSAI pollock TAC exceeding 1,274,900 metric tons (mt) for any fishing year; or
- An existing AFA inshore processor experiences an actual total loss or constructive loss.

Upon receiving a formal recommendation from the Council to authorize additional AFA inshore processors, NMFS may issue a permit specifying the processor type and duration as recommended by the Council. Issuance is contingent upon the Council fulfilling the preliminary requirements detailed in paragraphs § 679.4(l)(5)(v)(B)(1) through (4), as well as the owner(s) of the identified processor submitting a completed permit application that is subsequently approved by NMFS.

Public Comments regarding Council Annual Cooperative Reports

The Department of Commerce recently submitted the Council Cooperative Annual Reports information collection (0648-0678) to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) for review and clearance in accordance with the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 (PRA) ([91 FR 48374](#), July 31, 2026). This is a routine step in the periodic review and request for public comments on continuing information collections which assesses the impact of our information collection requirements and works to minimize the public's reporting burden. In this renewal cycle, the collection is being revised to remove the Amendment 80 Halibut Prohibited Species Catch (PSC) Management Plan from this collection as it is no longer provided to the Council. The Council receives only one report annually. All voluntary information has been consolidated into the Amendment 80 Bycatch Report to the Council. Below is a summary of relevant comments received on the information collection revision regarding Council Cooperative Annual Reports.

The cooperative annual reports currently covered by this collection are part of the following fishery programs: BSAI Crab Rationalization Program, the Central GOA Rockfish Program, the Amendment 80 Program, the American Fisheries Act and the Pacific Cod Trawl Cooperative Program. Three of these reports are required to be submitted to NMFS in regulation: the annual Amendment 80 cooperative report (50 CFR 679.5(s)(6)), the American fisheries act cooperative annual report (679.61(f)), and the Pacific cod trawl cooperative annual report (679.131(j)(3)(xviii)). The Council has requested and receives the following voluntary cooperative reports: Alaska Crab Rationalization Program Cooperative Annual Report, Rockfish Program Cooperative Annual Report, Amendment 80 Bycatch Avoidance Report, American Fisheries Act (AFA) Catcher Vessel Inter-cooperative Agreement. The purpose of the annual cooperative reports is to provide information to the Council and the public about the operations and performance of the cooperatives. This information is used by the Council to inform the public, to evaluate the performance of the cooperatives, and to identify problems or issues that may need to be addressed by the cooperatives or the Council in the future.

NMFS received three comment letters from stakeholders. Each comment letter opposed the collection requirements for cooperative annual reports, specifically regarding the Rockfish Program Cooperative Annual Report, Amendment 80 Cooperative Annual Report, and the AK Crab Rationalization Cooperative Annual Report, stating that these reports are duplicative, redundant, and lack practical utility. One commenter also noted that, given the stability of the Amendment 80 program and the availability of over 18 years of cooperative reports for reference, the annual report submission no longer provides meaningful additional value. Regarding the voluntary AK Crab Rationalization Cooperative report to the Council, the commenter requested the elimination of the voluntary report to the Council, citing a lack of regulatory utility and direct duplication with existing EDR data streams, as well as a lack of funding to continue the report. Note that in October 2025, the Council recommended removal of the Crab EDRs and NMFS is currently preparing a proposed rule to remove EDR requirements. The commenter also noted that NMFS' burden estimate is incorrect since it does not account for the hundreds of hours required by cooperative members to provide the information or in managing the website. NMFS's burden estimates are based on information provided by the ICE cooperative in 2019, including estimated time for cooperative members to submit information to the cooperative manager, and the commenter did not provide updated burden estimates. Therefore, NMFS did not modify the current burden estimates for the Alaska Crab Rationalization Program Cooperative annual report.

Freezer Longline Cooperative electronic monitoring (EM) update

In September 2026, NMFS awarded a contract to an EM vendor to test the efficacy of EM systems aboard Freezer Longline Coalition vessels in the Bering Sea. This project intends to test the ability of EM systems to capture management data and whether that EM data can be successfully transmitted via satellite at a frequency and quality that meets management needs. The EM systems are likely to be installed in the coming months and initial testing should begin shortly thereafter. This pilot project will run through September 2027 and has the option to be extended if funding is available. In the first phase, five vessels will be included in the pilot project, with expansion possible based on what is learned. This project is not an EFP and will not alter observer sampling requirements.

Annual Herring Biomass Estimation

NMFS staff are exploring an alternative approach for estimating the biomass of Pacific herring in the eastern Bering Sea to inform the prohibited species catch limit of herring in the Bering Sea pollock fishery. The existing annual estimate of herring biomass relies on surveys by ADF&G, which have become less frequent in recent years. NMFS staff aim to provide the Council with an update on progress towards a new approach at the February 2027 Council meeting.

Bled Sablefish Product Recovery Rate (PRR) Implementation Considerations

To assist the Council in the action planning process for this item from the NMFS Assistant Administrator Eugenio Piñeiro Soler's July 2 letter to the Council, NMFS provides the following background information.

Council's Motion and NMFS Response

- In June 2025, the Council tasked staff with providing recommendations, a workplan, and timelines pursuant to Section 4(a)(i) of E.O. 14276. The motion identified eliminating the Individual Fishing Quota (IFQ) weight deduction for bled sablefish (*Anoplopoma fimbria*) at the time of delivery as a proposed change to be included in the Council's response to E.O. 14276. Some stakeholders identified this proposed change because the bled-weight deduction discourages vessels from bleeding sablefish at sea and has a negative impact on product quality.
- In June 2026, the Council included the bled sablefish action in its E.O. 14276 workplan ([NPFMC Workplan of Recommended Actions in response to E.O. 14276](#)). The workplan indicated that the Council and NMFS intend to prepare an initial review analysis on this issue once NMFS' capacity allows, noting it would require input and coordination with the IPHC and ADF&G staff.
- On July 2, 2026, NMFS sent a [letter](#) to the Council indicating that initiating analysis for the sablefish weight deduction is an agency priority.

Background

- NMFS established the regulation creating a PRR for bled sablefish of 0.98 in the mid-1980s. This PRR is applied to sablefish harvested in the BSAI and GOA, and in the following fisheries; IFQ and CDQ fixed-gear fisheries, federally managed trawl fisheries, State managed fisheries.
- The issue was revisited in 2006:
 - NMFS published a Proposed Rule in 2006 related to bled sablefish: ([71 FR 64218, November 1, 2006](#)) to change the PRR for bled sablefish from 0.98 to 1.00, based on Council action. NMFS noted serious concerns that the proposal may not be based on sufficient scientific evidence.
 - NMFS published the Final Rule in 2007 ([72 FR 44795, August 9, 2007](#)) where the Secretary of Commerce disapproved the bled sablefish portion of the proposed rule because it would violate National Standard 2 of the MSA that requires conservation and management measures to be based upon the best scientific information available ([16 U.S.C. 1851](#) (a)(2)), which includes science-based PRRs (see <https://repository.library.noaa.gov/view/noaa/22886/>).
- NMFS recommends the Council consider analysing an alternative that would remove the 2% deduction from IFQ permits and Community Development Quota (CDQ) fixed-gear

harvests when bled sablefish is landed, while retaining the bled sablefish weight correction for accounting of total catch against the TAC, acceptable biological catch (ABC), and overfishing limit (OFL) to remain consistent with National Standard 1.

- This action will only affect sablefish, noting other species such as Pacific cod, also have bled PRRs.

Regulatory and Accounting Issues

- Section 305(i)(1)(B)(iv) of the Magnuson-Stevens Act requires that the harvest of CDQ allocations for fisheries with individual quotas or fishing cooperatives shall be regulated no more restrictively than fisheries with individual quotas or fishing cooperatives (see [77 FR 6492, March 9, 2012](#) for more information). NMFS recommends the Council consider applying the same approach regarding bled sablefish to CDQ vessels fishing for sablefish using fixed gear as IFQ vessels.
- Total sablefish accounting should still accrue toward the TAC/ABC/OFL, and the two percent PRR would therefore be applied in CAS postings to calculate total catch, as required under the National Standard 2 guidelines. The analysis would need to describe this process in more detail.
- Therefore, the action could specify that the PRR would not be deducted from IFQ permits or CDQ quota harvest when using fixed gear.
- Revisions to the sablefish PRR would require changing the main programming logic for ALDERS (vessel logbook data and daily catch reports), eFISH (tracking quota and permit management by fishermen), and the application of the PRR in the catch accounting system (CAS) to ensure total round weight of bled sablefish is properly accounted for against the sablefish TAC but does not deduct against IFQ permits or CDQ quota when using fixed gear. A complication in relation to eFISH and eLandings is that the analysis would need to consider different management regimes for state managed sablefish fisheries (PRR applied), Federal trawl landings (PRR applied), Federal IFQ and CDQ fixed gear landings (no PRR).
- This programming has the potential to be more complicated due to the age of the IFQ system. Implementation will require currently limited programming resources to change eLandings-related applications and account posting logic in CAS.
- The analysis would need to further explore total accounting issues associated with accruing whole weight against the TAC/ABC/OFL, while only accruing bled weight against CDQ/IFQ.

Impacts to Other Programs

- The primary quality control (QC) checks done during cost recovery processes is comparing landed catch as reported in the CAS and/or eLandings to the IFQ weight deducted from IFQ permits. Allowing bled sablefish to be treated as round weight in the IFQ system would break this important cost recovery QC check. New cost recovery QC processes will need to be developed to accommodate this change and prevent impacts to cost recovery.
- Section 679.45(b)(3)(iii) requires the Regional Administrator to publish IFQ standard prices during the last quarter of each calendar year. These standard prices are used in the calculation of observer fees and cost recovery for IFQ and CDQ. The standard prices are described in U.S. dollars per IFQ equivalent pound. According to § 679.2, IFQ equivalent pound(s) means the weight amount, recorded in pounds, and calculated as round weight for

sablefish. The proposed change for bled sablefish could require modifications to internal programming systems to calculate standard prices, observer fees, and IFQ cost recovery fees.

- NMFS notes the weights for other sablefish PRRs would be converted to round weight. Issues associated with this would need to be explored further in the analysis.
- As mentioned above, each of the database and electronic reporting systems that are affected would require programming resources that are currently constrained with other priorities.

Tribal Engagement

On August 28, 2026, NMFS released an [invitation for Tribal Consultation](#) on upcoming October 2026 Council meeting agenda items. We did not receive any responses. On September 4, 2026, NMFS released [the 2026 September/October Tribal Newsletter](#) to Alaska Native Tribes, corporations, and regional native consortia featuring updates on upcoming tribal engagements, Council actions, September and October calendars of events, and more.

In recent years, NMFS has hosted a virtual tribal engagement session prior to each Council meeting to preview topics of interest and answer questions. When NMFS Alaska Region staff capacity dropped substantially in 2025, we sought to continue these important engagement sessions. However, for the time being, due to continued limited staff capacity, we are unable to support a tribal engagement session before every Council meeting. NMFS will endeavor to host a virtual tribal engagement session for particular Council issues of high importance to Alaska Tribes. NMFS will continue to invite tribal consultation prior to each Council meeting. If consultation is desired please contact AKRO.SFD.tribal.team@noaa.gov or use the online [tribal consultation request form](#).

In July, NMFS met with the Central Council Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes (CCTHITA) on the draft Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement for Alaska Aquaculture Opportunity Areas (AOA PEIS). CCTHITA requested to be added as a cooperating agency for the development of the PEIS. With the addition of CCTHITA, seven cooperating agencies representing state and federal agencies and Tribal governments are developing the AOA PEIS.

ESA Section 7 Consultation on the BSAI FMP Complete

The NMFS Protected Resources Division (PRD) completed a Biological Opinion on the effects of all groundfish fisheries managed under the BSAI FMP, including State of Alaska parallel groundfish fisheries, on species listed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) and designated critical habitat, on July 24, 2026. In accordance with [NMFS Policy Directive 01-117: Integration of Endangered Species Act Section 7 with Magnuson-Stevens Act Processes](#), the Regional Administrator provided a draft of the BSAI groundfish FMP Biological Opinion to the Council Executive Director and Chair for review as discussed at the October 2025 Council meeting. NMFS concluded that the BSAI groundfish fisheries analyzed in that opinion are likely to adversely affect some, but not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of any threatened or endangered species or critical habitats under our jurisdiction. The biological and conference opinion for the BSAI groundfish fisheries is available on our website at: <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/resource/document/biological-opinion-nmfs-sustainable-fisheries-division-fishery-management-plan>.

Gray whale listing petition

On August 24, 2025, NMFS received a petition to list the eastern North Pacific gray population as an endangered or threatened species under the ESA. [Link to petition](#).

Pursuant to Section 4 of the ESA, NMFS must determine whether the petition presents substantial scientific or commercial information indicating that the petitioned action may be warranted. To the maximum extent practicable, this decision must be made within 90 days of receiving the petition. If the 90-day finding is that the petition presents substantial information, NMFS will commence a review of the status of the species concerned and will determine whether the petitioned action is warranted. If the 90-day finding concludes the petition does not present substantial information indicating the petitioned action may be warranted, then the petition will be denied and no further action will be taken. In either case, NMFS will announce the decision and how we intend to proceed in the *Federal Register*.

On August 25, 2026, NMFS received a Notice of Intent to sue from Center for Biological Diversity, International Marine Mammal Project, and Oasis Earth asserting NMFS's failure to publish a timely 90-day finding for this action.

Sunflower Sea Star Update

On August 18, 2021, the Center for Biological Diversity petitioned NMFS to list the sunflower sea star (*Pycnopodia helianthoides*) under the ESA. NMFS determined that the proposed action may be warranted (86 FR 73230, December 27, 2021) and conducted a status review to evaluate overall extinction risk for the species. NMFS determined that the sunflower sea star is likely to become an endangered species within the foreseeable future throughout its range and published a proposed rule to list the sunflower sea star as a threatened species (88 FR 16212, March 16, 2023). NMFS did not propose to designate critical habitat at that time. The agency is working on a final listing decision.

Center for Biological Diversity filed a suit dated June 24, 2026, arguing that NMFS violated provisions of the ESA by failing to finalize a proposed rule to list the sunflower sea star as threatened within 12 months of publishing the proposed rule.

Proposed rule for subsistence use of northern fur seals in Alaska

In 2022 and 2023, the Aleut Community of St. Paul Island, Traditional Council of St. George Island, and the Aleut Marine Mammal Commission petitioned NMFS to revise regulations governing the subsistence use of northern fur seals in Alaska (50 CFR 216.71-72). In response, NMFS is considering regulatory changes to improve traditional Unangan food security and subsistence opportunities. A Notice of Receipt of Petition for Rulemaking was published on November 9, 2023 ([88 FR 77245](#)) soliciting public comment. We are preparing a proposed rule for publication in the *Federal Register* later this year.

Alaska Marine Mammal Stranding Network

The NMFS Alaska Region Marine Mammal Stranding Network was established to respond to dead or live marine mammals, including distressed, entangled, injured, or sick sea lions, seals, and whales across Alaska. Through collaborative efforts with our stranding partners, various government and local entities, Stranding Agreement partners, and dedicated volunteers, we gather critical information on these stranded animals. Implementing local reporting and response

mechanisms, such as necropsies and sampling, significantly enhances our understanding of individual, population, and overall ocean health.

Find An Animal? To report injured, entangled, or dead sea lions, seals or whales observed in the water or on the beach, please contact the NMFS Stranding Hotline. Essential information to relay includes your name, phone number, the species, and the stranding location. Photographs from various angles are highly valuable. The Stranding Team will return your call for additional information required. Please do not move or touch the animal. **NMFS Alaska Statewide 24-hour Stranding Hotline: (877) 925-7773.**

Alaska Region hiring

NMFS Alaska Region participated in a national recruitment for one position in SFD and three positions in PRD over the summer. These hiring actions remain in process.

Personnel Updates

The Alaska Region continues to recalibrate positions and align staff to ensure mission critical activities are accomplished in response to the significant changes in our workforce over the past year. We have two reassignment announcements:

Since mid-August, 2026, Jamal Moss, Deputy Regional Administrator, has been performing the duties of Alaska Fisheries Science Center Director. Brandee Gerke, Chief of Staff, is serving as Acting Deputy Regional Administrator during Dr. Moss' temporary reassignment.

New Hires:

Jon Rendulic started on September 21, 2026 as the new Supervisory Branch Chief with the infrastructure and support team within the Alaska Region's Information Services Division (ISD). Jon's most recent experience includes working for the Municipality of Anchorage as their Chief Information Security Officer and Infrastructure Manager. He has held other technical positions across military, government, and private sectors that will bolster our ability to deliver effective IT infrastructure and assist in migration to the cloud. Jon holds a B.S. in Computer Science and is pursuing his M.S. in Information and Cybersecurity with the University of California, Berkeley. Jon will be located in our Anchorage office.

Tyler Dickson started on September 21, 2026 as an IT Specialist with the infrastructure and support team within the Alaska Region's ISD. He will provide much needed technical user support and system administration to our staff across the region. Tyler joins us from the Alaska Railroad where he worked as a Systems Engineer, and he gained additional technical support experience while working with the Hawaii Medical Service Association, FAA, and in the Navy aboard a submarine. Tyler holds an M.S. in Cybersecurity and Information Assurance in addition to multiple technical certifications. Tyler will also be located in our Anchorage office.

Departures:

Amberly Mielke After 26 years of dedicated Federal service as a Permit Assistant with the Alaska Region's Restricted Access Management (RAM) Division, Amberly Mielke retired on August 31, 2026. Amberly spent her entire Federal career with RAM and was best known for her deep expertise in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands crab fishery, as well as her commitment to exceptional customer service. She will be greatly missed by her colleagues across the Alaska Region and the many stakeholders she supported throughout her career.

Caroline Cummings has been a great asset to PRD for four years. Caroline came to NMFS from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Marine Mammals Program in Anchorage, where she was a biologist working on sea otters and walrus. Prior to that, she researched Hawaiian monk seals. Caroline also worked with the Navy as a diver and dolphin / sea lion trainer, with USGS Western Ecological Research Center as an otter researcher, and as a Marine Mammal Observer. She went to school at UC Santa Barbara and at St. Andrew in Scotland. While at NMFS, Caroline brought a can-do attitude and worked on ESA recovery actions, listing actions, and section 7 consultations.