



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

November 29, 2024

Agenda B-2: NMFS Tribal Engagement Report

Tribal Consultation Invitations

On October 24, 2024, NOAA Fisheries, Alaska Region (AKR) provided an invitation for Tribal Consultation on upcoming action items at the December 2024 North Pacific Fishery Management Council (NPFMC) Meeting.

1. Also on October 24, 2024, AKR Tribal Relations Coordinator forwarded the tribal consultation invitation to many Alaska Native Tribes, Corporations and Organizations via the NOAA Fisheries Alaska tribal directory to maintain inclusive coverage to tribal partners.
2. AKR did not receive tribal interest and/or a response(s) for Tribal consultation on upcoming December Council actions.

Tribal Newsletter

On November 14, 2024, AKR released the first [Joint Alaska Regional Office and Alaska Fisheries Science Center \(AFSC\) Tribal Engagement Newsletter](#). This Alaska Region Tribal Newsletter is a joint effort between the two offices to provide a comprehensive view of what's happening in NOAA Fisheries Alaska Region. The November/December issue of the Tribal Newsletter highlighted an engagement session on upcoming agenda items at the December Council meeting. It also included the feature article, *Meet the Alaska Fisheries Science Center Director Dr. Robert Foy*, explaining his role as the Science and Research Director of the Alaska Fisheries Science Center.

Tribal Engagement

Cook Inlet Tribal Salmon Fishery Consultation

On November 5, 2024, NOAA Fisheries sent reply letters to all involved tribes. Our letter provided comments on tribal feedback from Cook Inlet Tribes but also included additional questions and a proposed path forward for Cook Inlet Tribes to develop a fishery proposal. We also provided an offer of continued assistance and consultation on their tribal fishery proposal during the process.

Chum Salmon Bycatch EIS and Coordination with Tribal Cooperating Agencies and Tribes

For the development of the preliminary Draft Environmental Impact Statement on Bering Sea Chum Salmon Bycatch Management, which shall be presented to the Council at the February 2025 Council meeting, there are two tribal cooperating agencies, the Kuskokwim River Intertribal Fish Commission (KRITFC) and the Tanana Chiefs Conference (TCC). The role of these qualified cooperating agencies under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) is to provide special expertise to the development of environmental impact statements. Working with NOAA Fisheries

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and Council staff, the KRITFC and TCC are preparing contributions of Indigenous and Tribal knowledge and fisheries management information about chum salmon in the Yukon and Kuskokwim river systems to the development of the preliminary DEIS. Since the April 2024 Council meeting, NMFS and Council staff, and the Alaska Department of Fish & Game (also a NEPA cooperating agency) have been periodically meeting with KRITFC and TCC to discuss roles and timelines. NMFS is grateful to these tribal entities for offering their valuable time, knowledge, and information and helping us improve tribal participation in the NEPA process.

NMFS heard concerns that there may be affected tribes that are not represented by KRITFC or TCC and also interested in contributing knowledge or information. On July 11, 2023, NMFS invited all Tribes, via letter, to submit information and knowledge that would be included in an appendix to the preliminary DEIS. In response to this invitation, on October 4, 2024, NMFS received two documents: 1) a letter from the Yukon River Intertribal Fish Commission (YRITFC) regarding the historical context of commercial fisheries and salmon declines and impacts to salmon users on the Yukon; and 2) a letter from Kawerak, Inc., TCC, Native People's Action, YRITFC, Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association, and the Association of Village Council Presidents regarding concerns with the existing scope of alternatives and the form of and timing of the request for Tribal knowledge and information in NMFS July 11, 2024 letter. On October 18, 2024, NMFS responded to the latter concern, by providing additional context for the request made in the July 11 letter. Both Tribal letters will be attached to the preliminary DEIS that will be presented to the Council at the February 2025 Council meeting.

Upcoming December Council Action Items

On Tuesday, November 18, 2024, AKR hosted a tribal engagement session on upcoming December Council actions that may be of interest to the Tribes: 1) BSAI and GOA Groundfish Final Specifications, annual process; 2) Charter Halibut Annual Management Measures, final action; 3) Pacific halibut and sablefish Individual Fishing Quota (IFQ) Program, review; and 4) Amendment 80 Program Review Report, review.

Technical difficulties with the virtual platform prevented some tribal participants from joining the start of the engagement session. A secondary call-in number was provided to tribal participants who reached-out to our Tribal Relations Coordinator during the virtual engagement session. Several tribal participants were able to join midway through the session. AKR staff were able to repeat the full presentation so that all participants had a chance to hear the information, ask questions and give feedback. We extend gratitude to the participants for their patience and persistence in joining the session.

We received the following Tribal feedback and questions: 1) the Pacific halibut/sablefish IFQ program Equity and Environmental Justice analysis inadequately characterizes the impacts of the IFQ program on Alaska Native communities. A participant offered to assist the Council in characterizing the impacts in future analyses; 2) more time is needed between the time when documents are made available on the Council website and the tribal engagement session so that tribal partners have time to review the documents and have productive pre-Council meeting engagements; and 3) after the session, we received positive feedback on the engagement sessions and the presentations with a suggestion to include highlights on what will be presented to Council

in future staff presentations. A tribal participant also recommended including the topic of crab arbitration for future engagement sessions.

Additional Tribal-Related Events

National Native American Heritage Month: On November 20, 2024, NOAA's American Indian and Alaska Native Employee Resource Group, in collaboration with the Department of Commerce and NOAA's Office of Inclusion and Civil Rights hosted a native panel discussion. The theme was "Affirming Native Voices," highlighting the importance of listening to and valuing Indigenous perspectives, fostering dialogue, and ensuring that Native voices are heard, respected, and represented within the agency.