



September 20, 2024

Agenda B-2: NMFS Tribal Engagement Report

Tribal Consultation Invitations

On August 20, 2024, NOAA Fisheries, Alaska Region (AKR) provided an invitation for Tribal Consultation on upcoming action items at the October 2024 North Pacific Fishery Management Council (NPFMC) Meeting.

1. Also on August 20, 2024, AKR Tribal Relations Coordinator forwarded the tribal consultation invitation to several 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 response(s) for Tribal consultation on upcoming October Council actions.

Tribal Newsletter

On August 30, 2024, AKR released the [August/September Issue](#) of our Tribal Newsletter. The newsletter is an information source for upcoming Council meetings as well as agency contacts, job postings, grants and educational opportunities. The August/September issue of the Tribal Newsletter highlighted an invitation for tribal consultation and an upcoming tribal engagement session on action items scheduled for the upcoming October Council meeting. In addition, the August newsletter included a new look with the feature article, *Meet our Regional Administrator: Jon Kurland's Role at AKR National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS)*, explaining his role as the Alaska Regional Administrator & NPFMC voting member as well as the article on, *Get to Know Our 2024 Hollings Preparation Program Intern*, that highlighted Rina Basaliso's experience working with NOAA Fisheries and National Weather Service staff to explore ecological and climatological factors affecting observed concentrations of paralytic shellfish toxin in Alaskan subsistence fisheries. This project involved meeting with experts to learn about the Southeast Alaska Tribal Ocean Research shellfish and harmful algal bloom data portal as well as the Alaska Community Subsistence Information System.

Tribal Engagement

Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS) Planning

All AKR tribal engagement sessions on PEIS planning have been paused at this time in order to allow staff to turn their focus to the draft chum salmon bycatch EIS. Once the Council re-engages on this issue in 2025, we'll provide additional tribal engagement opportunities.

On September 16, 2024, Kawerak Inc. staff inquired about recent and/or future PEIS planning sessions with a request for early notice of future planning sessions and discussion on the PEIS. NOAA Fisheries shared the information above and stated that we are open to having conversations

Agenda B-2: NMFS Tribal Engagement Report, September 2024



on PEIS planning at any time. NOAA Fisheries will keep Alaska Native Tribes and organizations up to date on future PEIS planning sessions when the NPFMC is ready to revisit this topic.

Cook Inlet Federal Salmon Fishery

NOAA and NMFS headquarters and regional offices received seven letters from the following Cook Inlet Tribes requesting a tribal salmon fishery set-aside in the Cook Inlet EEZ Area: Ninilchik Traditional Council, Kenaitze Indian Tribe, Native Village of Eklutna, Knik Tribe, Chickaloon Village Traditional Council, Salamatof Tribe, and Seldovia Village Tribe. AKR sent an initial response to all interested tribes on July 8, 2024 offering tribal consultation, and taking feedback on the desired meeting format and content of a tribal salmon fishery proposal. AKR received written replies from the Kenaitze Indian Tribe, the Salamatof Tribe and the Ninilchik Traditional Council providing additional input. We are currently reviewing responses and information provided by the tribes and are preparing written responses, as requested in this consultation. AKR appreciates the input received from tribes so far, and is looking forward to additional consultation and input from all Cook Inlet Tribes to assist the tribes in developing their proposal.

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 special meeting, there are two tribal cooperating agencies, the Kuskokwim River Intertribal Fish Commission (Fish Commission) 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 and Council staff, the Fish Commission 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, AKR, Council staff, and the Alaska Department of Fish & Game (also a NEPA cooperating agency) have been periodically meeting with the Fish Commission and TCC to discuss roles and timelines. AKR is grateful to these tribal entities for offering their valuable time, knowledge, and information and helping us improve tribal participation in the NEPA process.

AKR heard concerns that there may be affected tribes that are not represented by the Fish Commission or TCC and also interested in contributing knowledge or information. On July 11, 2024, AKR notified, by email, all affected tribes in Western and Interior Alaska that any such knowledge or information that we receive by October 4, 2024, will be incorporated into a tribal appendix to the preliminary DEIS.

Upcoming October Council Action Items

On Monday, September 16, AKR hosted a tribal engagement session on upcoming October Council actions that may be of interest to the Tribes: 1) C2 Acceptable Biological Catch and Overfishing Limit specifications for Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands (BSAI) crab stocks, annual process (Andrew Olson); C3 Proposed Groundfish harvest specifications for the BSAI/Gulf of Alaska, annual process (Abby Jahn); C4 Observer 2025 Annual Deployment Plan, annual process (Jennifer Mondragon); and C6 Pelagic Trawl Gear Definition, initial review (Alicia M. Miller). Tribal feedback and questions received were regarding, 1) Chinook salmon bycatch in high seas

international fisheries, 2) concerns about the definition of pelagic trawling and how it will be addressed, 3) timely chum salmon bycatch updates, plans for outreach, and appropriate AKR point of contact to share information; and 4) the need for timely updates on future PEIS planning. NOAA Fisheries is appreciative of the tribal participation in and feedback received during our engagement sessions for upcoming Council actions in order to increase transparency and communications on fisheries management with our tribal communities.

Additional Tribal-Related Events & Interactions

- 1. Tribal consultation on the Gulf of Alaska Chinook salmon petition and 90-day Finding with Southeast Alaska (SEAK) Tribes:** On September 3, 2024, NOAA Fisheries consulted with SEAK Tribes to discuss the Chinook status review process, hear testimony, and consider nominations of Tribal representatives to the Status Review Team. Tribal members and staff from the Yakutat Tlingit Tribe, Hoonah Indian Association, Craig Tribal Association, Organized Village of Kake, Metlakatla Indian Community, and Central Council of Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes were present at the consultation. The agency offered a tribal seat on the Status Review Team and heard concerns about effects of a listing to subsistence and commercial fishing rights. Through testimony, several species threats were identified including mining, inadequate enforcement of sport fishing regulations, and trawl bycatch.
- 2. National Tribal and Indigenous Climate Conference:** On September 9-12, 2024, Alaska Habitat Conservation Division staff attended the National Tribal and Indigenous Climate Conference. Relevant talks focused on Indigenous Climate Resilience, improved collaborations on key resource management issues, co-stewardship agreements, and sharing perspectives on Indigenous knowledge in Federal decision making.
- 3. Tribal engagement with the Village of Solomon on the IPOP LLC project:** On September 12, 2024, NOAA Fisheries met with the Village of Solomon to discuss the Army Corps of Engineers mining application with IPOP LLC. We received tribal feedback on concerns regarding potential negative impacts to subsistence foods such as salmon (i.e., coho) and marine mammals (i.e, ice seals), the mining application appeals process, lack of communication from the lead action agency (i.e., U.S. Army Corps of Engineers) to NOAA on the appeal, and final approval of the mining application from the Pacific Ocean Division vs. Alaska Division. The Village of Solomon stated that any recreational mining conducted by the project will have detrimental effects to the Tribe and their native community and requested two letters documenting NOAA Fisheries concerns be sent to the lead action agency and the Alaska Department of Fish & Game. AKR is considering the Village of Solomon's request.