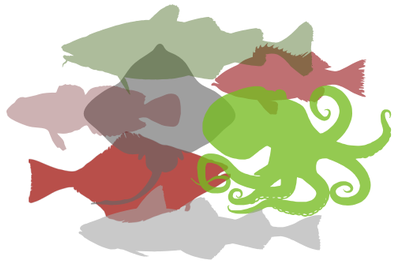
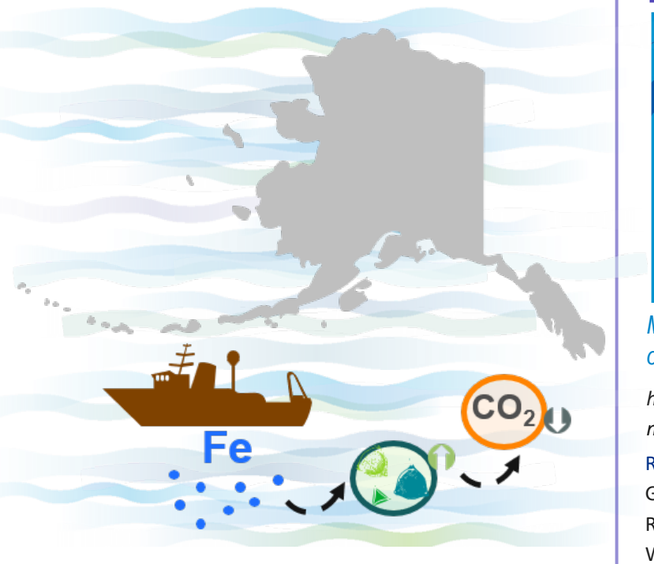
Noteworthy



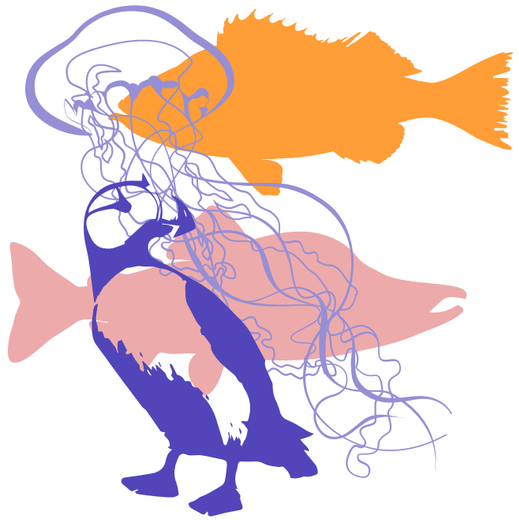
Ocean fertilization trials proposed for offshore Gulf of Alaska.

Large-scale fertilization trials are being proposed for the central GOA gyre (off the shelf) to reduce greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. The proposed trials involve adding iron to the nutrient-rich (but depleted in iron) surface waters in a 30km by 30km area to promote a large phytoplankton bloom. Through photosynthesis, the phytoplankton will draw down carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and convert it into organic carbon that will sink and be stored at depth in the ocean.



Management Uses

This section will be completed following the December 2026 North Pacific Fishery Management Council meeting.





More information on these and other topics can be found on the Ecosystem Status Report website.

https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/alaska/ecosystems/ecosystem-status-reports-gulf-alaska-bering-sea-and-aleutian-islands

Reference: Ferriss, B.E. 2026. Ecosystem Status Report 2026: Gulf of Alaska, Stock Assessment and Fishery Evaluation Report. North Pacific Fishery Management Council, 1007 West Third, Suite 400, Anchorage, AK 99501.

Contact: bridget.ferriss@noaa.gov

Howard Lutnick
U.S. Secretary of Commerce

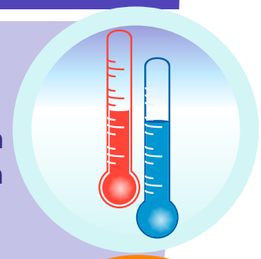
Neil Jacobs
Under Secretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere

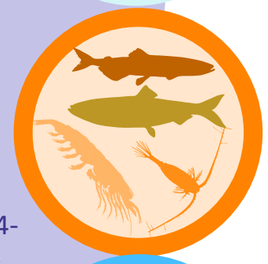
Eugenio Piñeiro Soler
Assistant Administrator for Fisheries

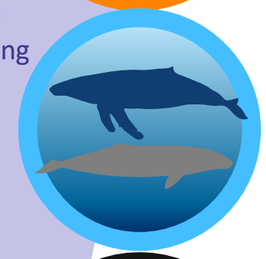
National Marine Fisheries Service
Alaska Fisheries Science Center
7600 Sand Point Way N.E., Seattle, WA 98115-6349
www.fisheries.noaa.gov

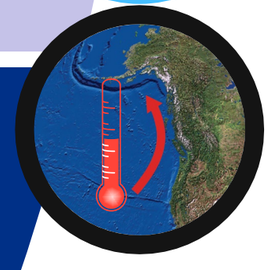
2026 Gulf of Alaska Ecosystem Status Report: IN BRIEF

Overview









- Ocean temperatures on the GOA shelf returned to cool/average in 2026 (relative to the 1991-2020 average), with some areas of warmer water in the central GOA (depth) and Southeast AK (surface), after a warmer than average 2025.
- Feeding conditions were good for groundfish, seabirds, and marine mammals in 2026, including above-average biomass of energy-rich euphausiids and relatively abundant capelin and herring.
- Seabirds had good to very good reproductive success and no mortality events.
- Gray whales experienced increased reported strandings in AK in the 2024-2026 period; Prince William Sound recorded its highest humpback whale numbers since 2014; Gulf of Alaska harbor seal populations had decreasing abundance estimates from 2016-2023 except Glacier Bay/Icy Strait.
- Surface waters across the GOA shelf are forecast to be 0.5 °C to 2 °C warmer in Jan. - March 2027. Temperatures near the shelf bottom are forecast to start warming in January and increase through the spring.

El Niño in the Gulf of Alaska 2026/2027

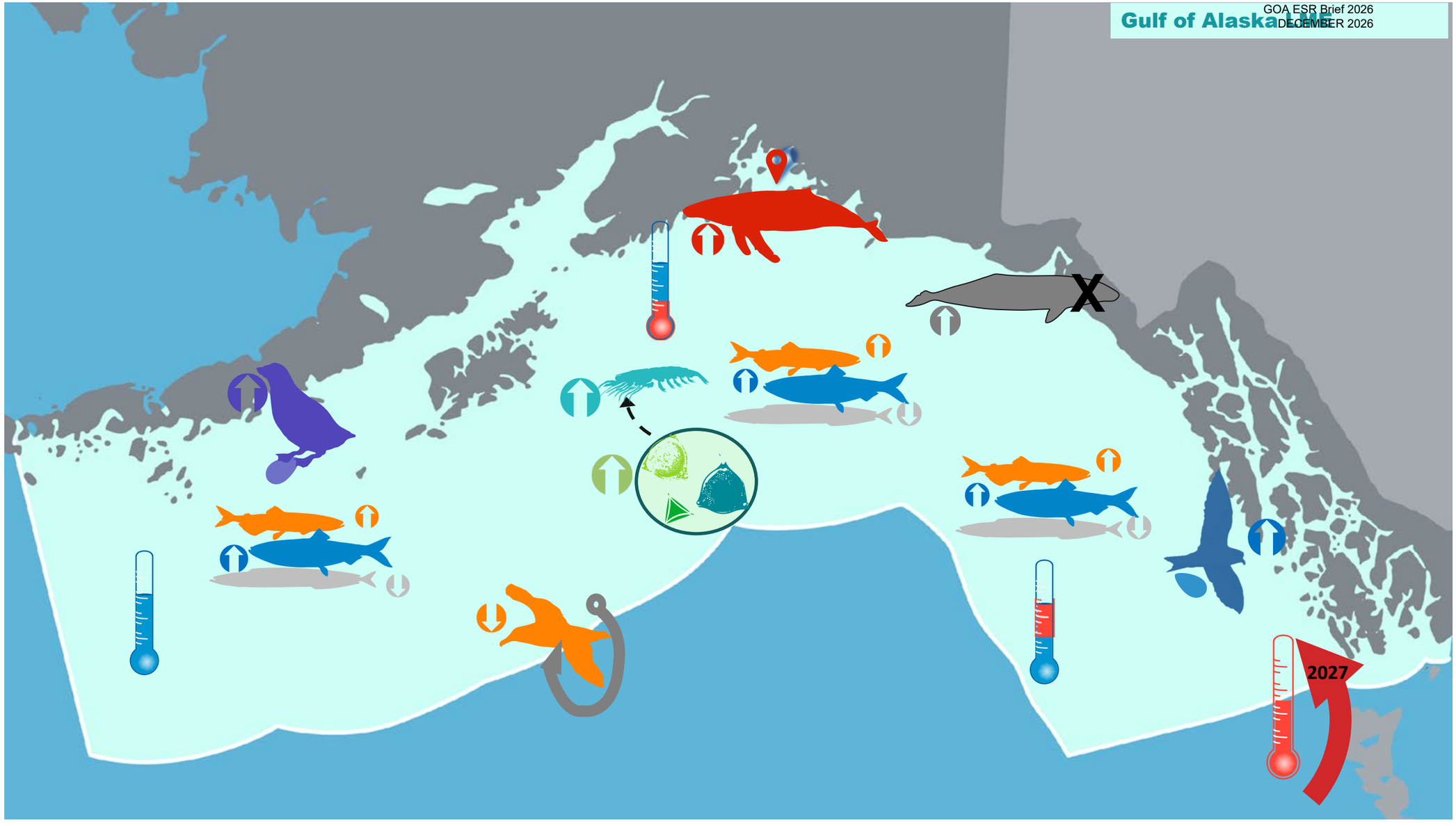
The current strong El Niño is expected to warm Gulf of Alaska waters in 2027, likely causing one-year of reduced in food web productivity. This could stress zooplankton, forage fish, seabirds, and young groundfish. Warm ocean temperatures will be challenging for survival of eggs and larvae of early spring shelf spawners (Pacific cod, walleye pollock, northern rock sole), negatively impacting the 2027 year-classes of these species. Warm surface waters in spring and summer can be favorable for rockfish and sablefish larval survival. Adult groundfish might be skinnier in 2027 due to reduce prey and the distribution of cod, pollock and arrowtooth may shift deeper. The 2026-2027 strong El Niño is not expected to produce a multi-year marine heatwave.

NOAA FISHERIES
Alaska Fisheries Science Center

Ecosystem Assessment

Ocean temperatures were cool/average with a west-to-east gradient across the GOA shelf. **Temperatures** were cooler than survey average at the surface (March, 2.2 ºC) and depth (March: 3.3 ºC, summer: 5.8 ºC) in the western GOA winter and summer, cooler than average temperatures in the northern GOA at the surface (May: 7 ºC) but warmer at depth (May: 5.7 ºC), and warmer at the surface in southeast Alaska. The late winter and early spring surface temperatures were within the range of known optimal temperatures for egg and larval success of early spring spawners (e.g., walleye pollock, Pacific cod, northern rock sole), while the warmer temperatures in southeast AK may have favored survival and growth of late spring/early summer spawners including rockfish.

Above-average spring zooplankton biomass provided good prey resources for zooplankton-eating adult groundfish walleye pollock, Pacific Ocean perch, dusky and northern rockfish), and larval/juvenile groundfish. Indicators supporting this higher zooplankton productivity include an **increase in diatoms**, large phytoplankton that help transfer more energy up from the base of the food web. The biomass of **euphausiids**, an energy rich zooplankton species, was above average in the central GOA**.** Also, zooplankton-eating **seabirds** had above-average numbers of chicks fledged in colonies across the GOA in 2026, reflecting good prey availability for zooplankton predators.



The GOA forage fish populations provided good prey resources for fish-eating groundfish (Pacific cod, walleye pollock, sablefish, arrowtooth flounder, some rockfish and flatfish) in 2026. Age-1 **capelin** and **herring,** high-energy forage fish, were above-average or average in seabird diets. Sitka and Craig herring populations in southeast Alaska remain elevated, supported by strong 2020 and 2022 year-classes. Forage species that have relatively mixed trends, or lower in abundance, include eulachon and **sand lance**. The reproductive success of fish-eating seabirds was average to above average, reflecting adequate prey availability for forage fish predators.

Other ecosystem components monitored around the GOA reflect ongoing ecological changes but are no cause for concern for 2026. The number of **humpback whales** observed in Prince William Sound increased to levels not seen since the 2014 marine heatwave. **Gray whale** strandings have increased in AK from 5 in 2022, and 2023, to 67 in the 2024-2026 period. GOA harbor seal populations have largely declined between 2016-2023, except the Glacier Bay/Icy Strait population. **Black-footed albatross bycatch** by commercial fisheries in the GOA declined from 2024 to 2025, potentially due to a combination of changes in wind patterns, fishing behavior, and bycatch reporting.

El Niño is expected to cause a one-year warming event in the GOA in 2027. The GOA shelf is forecast to be warmer at the surface and depth from winter 2026 through at least spring of 2027. Warming is associated with less nutritious and abundant zooplankton and forage fish. As a result, seabirds may have reduced reproductive success and increased mortality events. Survival of groundfish larvae may be stressed or enhanced, depending on their spawning season and temperature thresholds. Adult groundfish may be skinnier and shift their distributions deeper (arrowtooth flounder, Pacific cod, walleye pollock).