Draft SSC Report
February 2026

Balance of SSC Report

SSC Election of Officers

- The SSC ***re-elected*** Sherri Dressel, Jason Gasper and Ian Stewart to be co-chairs for 2026.
- Dr. Dressel will chair the February and December meetings and Dr. Stewart the June and October meetings, with support from Dr. Gasper at all four meetings
- The SSC ***re-elected*** Alison Whitman to serve as vice-chair for 2026.

SSC Administrative Discussion

- The SSC ***received*** a presentation from Diana Evans (NPFMC) on administrative items including:
  - Anna Henry starting as NPFMC deputy director
  - Relevant B report agenda items
  - The upcoming 2026 and 2027 NPFMC meeting schedule

C3 Cook Inlet Salmon Harvest Specifications

General Comments

- The SSC ***reviewed*** the 2026 SAFE Report for the salmon fisheries of the Cook Inlet Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ)
  - Two Tier 1 stocks: Kenai river late run and Kasilof river sockeye
  - Three Tier 3 aggregate stock complexes: “Other” sockeye, chinook, coho, chum, and pink
- The SSC ***highlights*** its appreciation for the extensive efforts of the SAFE team and their responsiveness to the SSC recommendations and comments
- The SSC ***recognizes*** the significant progress made over the last three years and that this is continues to be an iterative process, evolving with new information, methods, and understanding of the scientific process

C3 Cook Inlet Salmon Harvest Specifications

2026 SAFE and Harvest Specifications

- The SSC reviewed preliminary status determination criteria for 2025:
  - Salmon stocks were not subject to overfishing, pending final harvest data.
  - Salmon stocks were not overfished, pending final harvest and escapement data.
    - For coho, chum and pink salmon stocks, an overfished status determination is not possible.
- The SSC recommended 2026 Tier designations and harvest specifications.

Stock	Tier	MFMT	MSST	OFL	OFL_{PRE}	ABC	ABC Buffer
Kenai River Late Run Sockeye	1	0.265	3,030,000	NA	1,284,478	**937,993**	**27.0%**
Kasilof River Sockeye	1	0.538	555,000	NA	617,006	**489,936**	**20.6%**
Aggregate Other Sockeye	3	NA	NA[1]	906,757	181,351	154,149	15%
Aggregate Chinook	3	NA	40,500[2]	2,237	373	261	30%
Aggregate Coho	3	NA	NA[1]	268,053	67,013	**26,805**	**60%**
Aggregate Chum	3	NA	NA	390,030	97,508	78,006	20%
Aggregate Pink	3	NA	NA	282,813	141,406	127,266	10%

[1] Insufficient data that precludes the calculation of MSST [2] Corrected from the 2026 SAFE

C3 Cook Inlet Salmon Harvest Specifications

Tier 1 Stocks - General Comments

- The SSC ***endorses*** the three methodology changes for Tier 1 salmon stocks implemented by the SAFE team.
  - Using a Bayesian AR-1 model to project run size
  - Using 25 years (rather than 10) to calculate the accuracy statistic used for the ABC buffer calculation
  - Modelling the state harvest fraction using a beta distribution
- The SSC again **notes** the challenge of reviewing the SAFE methodology at the same meeting where harvest specifications are set.

C3 Cook Inlet Salmon Harvest Specifications

Tier 1 Stocks - General Comments

- For the 2026 specifications, the SSC continues to ***support*** using S_{MSY} for SDC calculations and the preseason OFL and ABC.
- The SAFE team recommended using the median symmetric accuracy statistic of the OFL forecast error for the ABC buffer.
- This year the SAFE team provided an analysis of the probability of exceeding the OFL for wide range of potential ABC buffers. The SSC ***found*** this analysis to be extremely useful in its deliberations.
- The SAFE team cited research on West Coast salmon stocks indicating that ABC buffers where the probability of exceeding the OFL was in the range of 0.33-0.35 should be considered risk-averse.

C3 Cook Inlet Salmon Harvest Specifications

Tier 1 Stocks - General Comments

- The SSC ***recognizes*** that it is using new analyses of the probability of exceeding the OFL to inform the ABC buffer setting process.
- The SSC ***welcomes*** further guidance from the Council on level of precaution considered appropriate for management of EEZ salmon.
- The SSC notes that the Tier 1 process for salmon management relies on preseason forecasts of run size, which are a major source of uncertainty.
    - Autoregressive forecast models that may work relatively poorly when there is large increase or decrease in run size, as occurred in 2025.

C3 Cook Inlet Salmon Harvest Specifications

Tier 1 Stocks - Kenai River Late Run Sockeye

- The SSC ***concurs*** with the SAFE team's recommendation of a Tier 1 designation for Kenai River late run sockeye in 2026.
- The SSC ***accepts*** the methods used by the SAFE team to forecast the 2026 run size estimate and the estimated harvest rate in state waters.
- The SSC ***recommends*** multiplying median symmetric accuracy by 0.5, yielding an ABC buffer of 27%, which results in a probability of exceeding the OFL of 0.38.
- This approach is broadly consistent with the work on uncertainty buffers for West Coast salmon stocks.

C3 Cook Inlet Salmon Harvest Specifications

Tier 1 Stocks - Kasilof Sockeye

- The SSC ***concurs*** with the SAFE team's recommendation of a Tier 1 designation for Kasilof River sockeye in 2026.
- The SSC ***accepts*** the methods used by the SAFE team to forecast the 2026 run size estimate and the estimated harvest rate in state waters.
- The SSC **recommends** multiplying median symmetric accuracy by 0.5, yielding an ABC buffer of 20.6%, which results in a probability of exceeding the OFL of 0.34.
- This approach is broadly consistent with the work on uncertainty buffers for West Coast salmon stocks.

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Tier 3 Stocks

- The SSC ***supports*** designation of aggregate “other” sockeye, Chinook, coho, chum and pink salmon stock complexes as Tier 3.
- The SSC ***supports*** assessment methods for Tier 3 stocks.
  - New this year: Overfished determination omits indicator stocks with missing or incomplete escapement data
- The SSC ***appreciates*** the defined period for calculating the OFL and pre-season OFL.
  - Includes most recent years of data.
  - May be reconsidered as more data under current management system are accrued.

C3 Cook Inlet Salmon Harvest Specifications

Tier 3 Stocks

- SAFE team recommended ABC buffers for each Tier 3 stock.
- The SSC ***agrees*** with the proposed buffers of 15% for “other” sockeye, 30% for Chinook, 20% for chum, and 10% for pink salmon.

C3 Cook Inlet Salmon Harvest Specifications

Tier 3 Stocks

- The SSC discussed the information available and concerns for the aggregate coho stock complex.
  - Incomplete escapement data for the indicator stocks in recent years
  - Coho are vulnerable to drift gillnets but cannot be selectively avoided
  - Imprecise understanding of trends of UCI coho salmon
  - Draft risk table scores of no increased concerns (1; assessment and population dynamics) and increased concerns (2; ecosystem and fishery informed stock considerations)
  - Coho populations generally more robust than Chinook populations
  - Testimony that some UCI coho stocks are meeting escapement goals

C3 Cook Inlet Salmon Harvest Specifications

Tier 3 Stocks

- The SSC ***recommends*** a 60% buffer for the aggregate coho salmon complex differing from that proposed by the SAFE team (next slide).
- The SSC ***acknowledges*** that a buffer of 60% results in increased risk relative to the SAFE recommendation (75%).

C3 Cook Inlet Salmon Harvest Specifications

General Comments (Tier 1 and 3):

- The SSC ***requests*** that future SAFEs report comparisons of output between the model used in the previous assessment (updated with the most recent data) and output from the new model, as is standard for crab and groundfish assessments.
- A review workshop was held last May to review new assessment methods. The SSC does not see an immediate need for additional workshops.
- If important changes in methods are planned, the SSC ***requests*** the SAFE team coordinate with Council staff ensure that there is an opportunity for technical review before the methods are used for harvest specification.

C3 Cook Inlet Salmon Harvest Specifications

General Comments (Tier 1 and 3 cont.)

- The SSC ***recommends***:
  - risk tables be produced for the two Tier 1 sockeye stocks
  - that the SAFE team explore whether other UCI coho stocks would be appropriate to use as indicator stocks
  - ongoing genetic sampling of EEZ salmon landings
  - an evaluation of correlations among run sizes and state harvest rates for Kenai and Kasilof sockeye for improving projections
  - better documentation of data sources identifying which inputs are considered preliminary or final

C3 Cook Inlet Salmon Harvest Specifications

General Comments (Tier 1 and 3 cont.)

- The SSC ***recommends***:
  - additional contextual information for the Tier 3 stocks including harvest in other fisheries, proportional representation to total harvest, and locations of these other sources of harvest in relation to the EEZ
- Other technical recommendations are included in the report

C3 Cook Inlet Salmon Harvest Specifications

Socioeconomic Appendix

- The SAFE appendix presents initial socioeconomic information for the Cook Inlet salmon fisheries.
- The SSC ***supports*** the continued inclusion and development of community, economic, and fisheries performance information in the SAFE to address NS 2 and 8.
- The SSC ***finds*** this early stage of federal management presents a critical opportunity to establish baseline socio-economic information to support tracking change over time in response to management and environmental variability.

C3 Cook Inlet Salmon Harvest Specifications

Socioeconomic Appendix

- The SSC ***emphasizes*** the importance of developing time series for key socio-economic indicators.
- The SSC ***suggests*** that analysts consider relevant metrics used in Economic and Social Profiles (ESPs) and the Annual Community Engagement and Participation Overview (ACEPO), as appropriate to the CI Salmon FMP.
- The SSC further ***suggests*** early collaboration across sectors and user groups, inclusion of processing-sector data, tracking participation dynamics across all user groups, and engagement with tribal fisheries initiatives.
- The SSC also ***recommends*** clearly distinguishing between revenue and profit and discussing costs within the context of profit.

D1 AFSC Report

ASFC Planning

- Presentation described a planning framework to supporting stable fisheries management over a range of staffing and budget resources constraints under changing conditions.
- Presentation described plans to align surveys, assessments, and ecosystem science
- The SSC ***supports*** the priority planning and efforts to communicate science tradeoffs and management consequences transparently to the Council.
- The SSC ***recommends*** clearer documentation of the prioritization framework, including criteria, weighting, decision rules, with explicit links to management risk and performance.

D1 AFSC Report

Survey Prioritization

- Presentation - described tracking surveys that are completed, partial, and missed and highlights constraints affecting survey execution.
- The SSC ***supports*** continued use of survey portfolio tracking to improve transparency and planning, provided assessment and management implications are clearly articulated.
- The SSC ***recommends*** prioritizing continuity of core surveys and biological sampling to maintain index integrity and the ability to detect rapid stock changes, and clearly documenting why reductions occur and their expected consequences.

D1 AFSC Report

Groundfish Assessment Prioritization

- Presentation described linking stock importance to assessment frequency, tier, and product type to improve efficiency under limited resources.
- The SSC ***supports*** efforts to tailor assessment products to stock priority, provided management performance and scientific defensibility are maintained.
- The SSC ***recommends*** a clear crosswalk from priority category to assessment product, including minimum data requirements and expected impacts on uncertainty and harvest specifications.

D1 AFSC Report

Stock / complex Prioritization

- Presentation described a risk-value framework and associated indices to rank stocks and complexes for prioritization of surveys and assessments. Requested SSC feedback on indices.
- The SSC ***supports*** continued development and refinement of the indices as a decision-support tool, including testing sensitivity, generality, and performance before broader application.
- The SSC ***recommends*** indices be fully reviewable, with clear definitions, data sources, scaling, weighting, uncertainty characterization, and a transparent documentation linking index outcomes to changes in assessment or monitoring.

D1 AFSC Report

Groundfish Prioritization - Results/ Implications

- AFSC identified high-risk/high-value stocks (Pcod, Crab) and flagged potential reductions in assessment frequency (11 stocks) or tier (14 stocks) for lower-priority stocks, with implications for surveys and management performance.
- The SSC ***supports*** focusing limited resources on stocks where survey and assessment information most strongly influence management risk and outcomes.
- The SSC ***recommends*** explicitly evaluating how any proposed reductions affect choke species risk, PSC management, and the ability to track rapid stock changes, and clearly communicating expected impacts on harvest specifications.

D1 AFSC Report

Ecosystem Science Prioritization

- Presentation described prioritizing ecosystem science by linking ecosystem metrics to assessment parameters using data-availability scoring to inform prioritization.
- The SSC ***supports*** a flexible, iterative ecosystem science approach that balances decision-relevant indicators with the ability to explore emerging drivers and uncertainty.
- The SSC ***recommends*** clearly defining data-availability criteria and explicitly linking prioritized ecosystem metrics to decision-relevant assessment and risk products.

D1 AFSC Report

Salmon Science Prioritization

- Presentation described prioritizing salmon science supporting MSA management and Pacific Salmon Treaty obligations, including bycatch monitoring, genetics, AEQ, and forecasting tools.
- The SSC ***supports*** continued coordination with partners and transparent communication of forecast uncertainty to inform appropriate management use.
- The SSC ***recommends*** identifying minimum viable sampling and analysis needed to sustain reliable salmon bycatch and assessment products under constrained resources.
- The SSC ***recommends*** clarifying how salmon products will be prioritized relative to core groundfish assessment obligations when tradeoffs are required

D1 AFSC Report

Marine Mammal Prioritization

- Presentation described how to prioritize marine mammal stocks and assessment topics based on fisheries interactions, ecosystem role, and subsistence importance.
- The SSC ***supports*** integration of marine mammal prioritization results into fisheries risk discussions at scales relevant to management decisions.
- The SSC ***recommends*** transparent documentation of how interaction and prey-consumption importance rankings are calculated and how uncertainty is handled.

D1 AFSC Report

SSC General Comments

- AFSC prioritization is expected to lead to changes in surveys, assessments, and monitoring across multiple programs.
- The SSC ***supports*** continued iterative development of these frameworks with SSC involvement as they are refined and implemented.
- The SSC ***recommends*** that proposed changes be transparent, reproducible, and explicitly tied to expected impacts on stock status determination and harvest specifications.

D3 EFH Five-Year Review Workplan

- EFH team presented their proposed workplan for the next 5-Year EFH review, to be completed in 2028/29.
- The SSC ***supports*** the proposed scope of workplan for the 2028 Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) 5-year review
- The SSC ***supports*** the EFH team's decision to focus their efforts predominately on EFH components 1 and 2 (species distributions and fishing effects, respectively) and on a core subset of species: sablefish, pollock, Pacific cod, Pacific ocean perch, and arrowtooth flounder in the BSAI and GOA Groundfish FMPs, along with all FMP crab species.

D3 EFH Five-Year Review Workplan

- The SSC ***recommends*** the EFH team document the Council related products that contain EFH materials to highlight the value of this review.
- The SSC ***recommends*** exploring the use of alternative data sources for distributional maps (e.g., other fishery independent surveys, fishery dependent data), possibly using case studies
- The SSC ***supports*** the development of spatio-temporal models (STMs)
  - ***recommends*** description of benefits and limitations
  - ***recommends*** description of these will be used for EFH and other uses
  - had additional statistical recommendations

D3 EFH Five-Year Review Workplan

- The SSC ***requests*** an opportunity to review the updated gear parameters and any updates to the Fishing Effects model habitat recovery parameters
- The SSC ***suggests*** collaborating with forage fish authors and NOAA diet program (REEM) in regards to Component 7 (prey species).
- The SSC ***recommends*** authors actively engage in the Council's next Research Priorities process in regards to Component 9 (Research and informations needs).

D4 Harvest Control Rule Development

- The SSC ***received*** updates on development of climate-resilient harvest control rules (HCRs) and the planned June 2026 white paper, building on the June 2025 HCR Workshop and GPT/CPT recommendations.
- The SSC ***supports*** refined HCR set (1, 7, 10), and highlights need to develop a representative status quo (HCR 1) particularly in the context of the federal/state management process for crabs.
- The SSC ***supports*** the use of both retrospective analysis of alternative HCRs and forward closed-loop simulations.

D4 Harvest Control Rule Development

- The SSC ***supports*** case study species: cod, pollock, sablefish, POP, snow crab, and king crab, to describe potential outcomes across stock groupings (guilds/typologies).
- The SSC agreed that transparency, credibility, and operability are essential objectives. Any proposed approach should be clear, explainable to the public, and operationally feasible within existing management processes.
- The SSC ***recommends*** that within the June 2026 paper, the analysts consider options for exploring HCR performance under alternative levels of uncertainty in data inputs to stock assessments (possible changes in the quantity and quality of data available from fisheries resource and ecosystem surveys).

D4 Harvest Control Rule Development

- SSC ***requests*** clearer description of climate perturbations and which demographic processes (recruitment, mortality, growth, maturity) will be linked to environmental change.
- The SSC ***recommends*** clear communication of scientific basis and range of climates scenarios (likely + bracketing)
- For environmentally-linked HCRs (7), the SSC ***suggests*** the importance of evaluating risk from time-varying or uncertain species-environment relationship, and biased or misspecified functional forms.

D4 Harvest Control Rule Development

- The SSC ***suggests*** clearer naming conventions for HCR alternatives and continued use of tools (e.g., RShiny HCR explorer) to improve transparency for Council and public.
- The SSC ***recommends*** the June document describe tradeoffs in when climate-resilient strategies should be applied in assessment models, HCRs, or TAC-setting.

D4 Harvest Control Rule Development

- In closed-loop simulations the SSC ***recommends*** consideration of timeframes relevant to both near-term community impacts (transition costs) and long-term projections.
- The SSC ***highlights*** the need to explicitly articulate the full range of Council objectives and distinguish between high-priority and lower-priority goals when identifying performance metrics.
- The SSC ***suggests*** if a future FMP amendment is considered, allow flexibility for stock-specific HCRs.