

## EASTERN BERING SEA ECOSYSTEM STATUS REPORT

Elizabeth Siddon and Stephani Zador NOAA Alaska Fisheries Science Center November 2018

#### With contributions from:

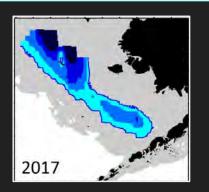
Brandon Ahmasuk, Alex Andrews, Kerim Aydin, John Bengtson, Jennifer Boldt, Nick Bond, Gregory Buck, Hillary Burgess, Kristin Cieciel, Curry Cunningham, Elizabeth Dawson, Alison Deary, Sherri Dressel, Anne Marie Eich, Lisa Eisner, Ed Farley, Nissa Ferm, Benjamin Fissel, Shannon Fitzgerald, Robert Foy, Corey Fugate, Sarah Gaichas, Sabrina Garcia, Andrew Gray, Kristen Gruenthal, Chuck Guthrie, Jeffrey Guyon, Colleen Harpold, Lorenz Hauser, Jordan Head, Ron Heintz, Jerry Hoff, Anne Hollowed, Kirstin Holsman, Kathrine Howard, Jim Ianelli, Tayler Jarvis, Timothy Jones, Robb Kaler, Steve Kasperski, David Kimmel, Christine Kondzela, Kathy Kuletz, Liz Labunski, Carol Ladd, Jesse Lamb, Christie Lang, Geoff Lang, Robert Lauth, Anna Lavoie, Jean Lee, Daniel Lew, Michael Litzow, Todd Miller, Jennifer Mondragon, Franz Mueter, Jim Murphy, Hanhvan Nguyen, John Olson, Jim Overland, Julia Parish, Steve Porter, Rolf Ream, Heather Renner, Patrick Ressler, Jon Richar, Lauren Rogers, Marc Romano, Chris Rooper, Sarah Schoen, Katie Sechrist, Gay Sheffield, Elizabeth Siddon, Kim Sparks, Ingrid Spies, Phyllis Stabeno, Jeremy Sterling, Duane Stevenson, Marysia Szymkowiak, Carolyn Tarpey, Grant Thompson, Rod Towell, Caroline Van Hemert, Muyin Wang, Jordan Watson, George Whitehouse, Alex Whiting, Jacqueline Whittle, Tom Wilderbuer, Sharon Wildes, Michael Williams, Sarah Wise, Ellen Yasumiishi, and Stephani Zador.

With contributions from (in alphabetical order): Steve Barbeaux, Peter Boveng, Lyle Britt, Catie Bursch, Lauren Divine, Martin Dorn, Janet Duffy-Anderson, Lisa Eisner, Anne Hollowed, Kirstin Holsman, Jim Ianelli, Chad Jay, Dave Kimmel, Sasha Kitaysky, Bob Lauth, Kathi Lefebvre, Paul Lehman, Maggie Mooney-Seus, Carina Nichols, Emily Osborne, Jim Overland, Heather Renner, Patrick Ressler, Gay Sheffield, Phyllis Stabeno, Jeremy Sterling, Grant Thompson, Jim Thorson, and Andy Whitehouse.

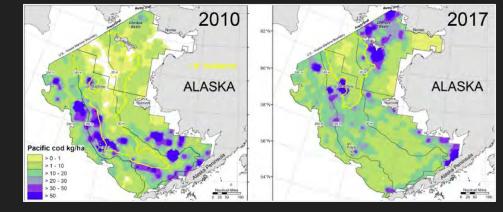
Extensive, but narrow cold pool.

Middle domain = cold

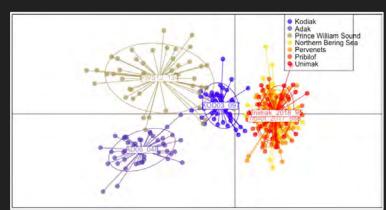
Inner domain = warm corridor



Cod and Pollock in NBS



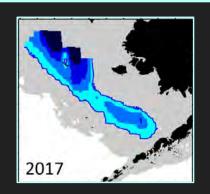
Genetic work shows population coherence with EBS.



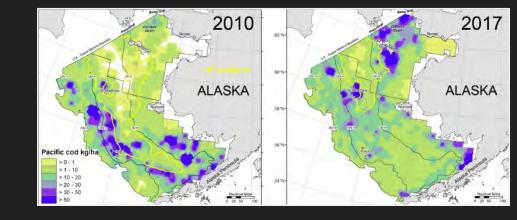
Extensive, but narrow cold pool.

Middle domain = cold

Inner domain = warm corridor



Cod and Pollock in NBS



Productivity increased with latitude

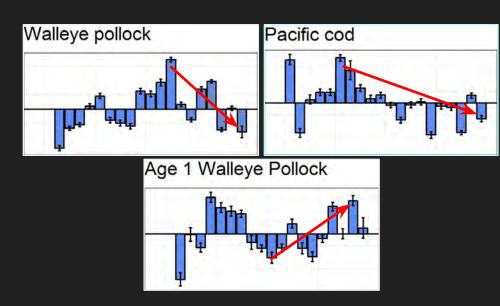


Extensive, but narrow cold pool
Middle domain = cold
Inner domain = warm corridor



Fish condition negative for adults; increasing trend for juveniles.

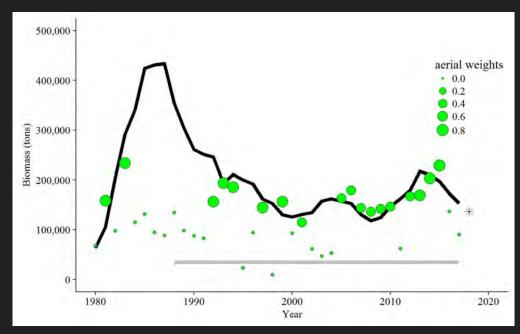
Poor seabird reproductive success at the Pribilof Islands for murres and kittiwakes.

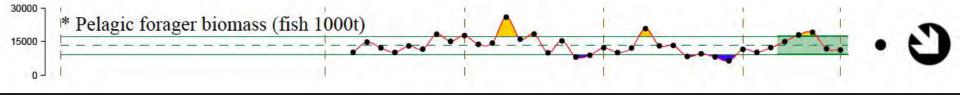


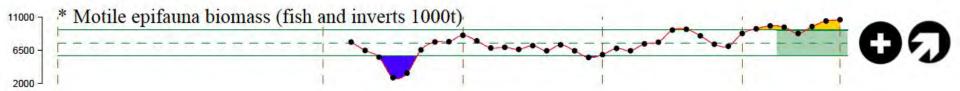
Extensive, but narrow cold pool

Middle domain = cold Inner domain = warm corridor

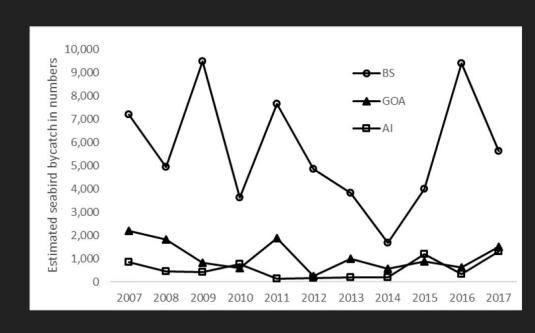
2017 Togiak herring 'healthy and sustainable'.







Seabird bycatch rates back down to historical average.



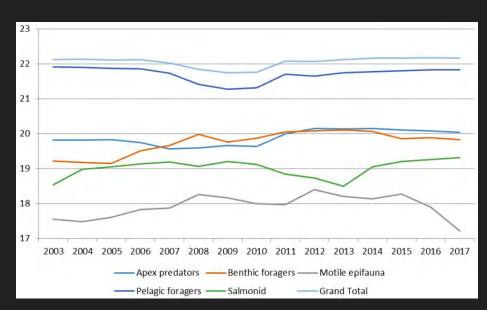
Landings: most functional groups stable; decrease in crab landings in 2017.

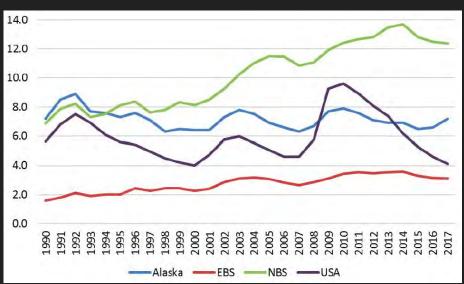
Ex-vessel value generally tracks landings.

Unemployment dropping in US, but rising slightly in AK; EBS lower than state/US and NBS higher.

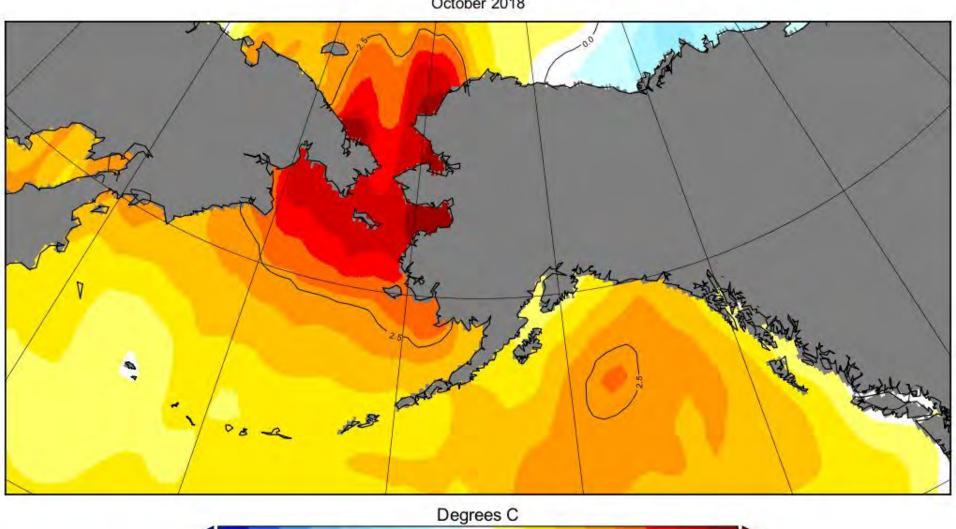
Population stable (SEBS) or increasing (NBS).

School enrollment decreasing (SEBS) and increasing (NBS).





Sea Surface Temperature Departure from Normal
October 2018



0.0

2.5

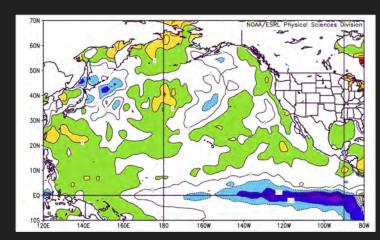
5.0

-2.5

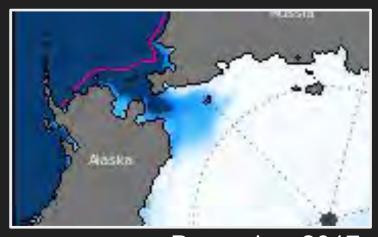
-5.0

## Unprecedented lack of sea ice: what caused it?

Residual heat in the system - delayed onset of sea ice



Autumn 2017

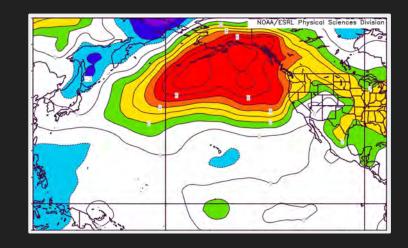


December 2017

## Unprecedented lack of sea ice: what caused it?

Residual heat in the system

Persistent high pressure system - pushed ALPS over Siberia

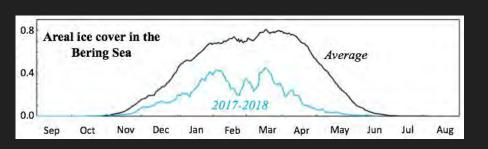


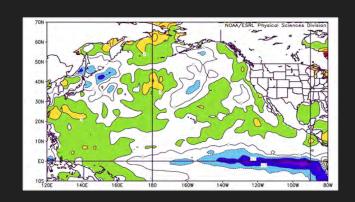
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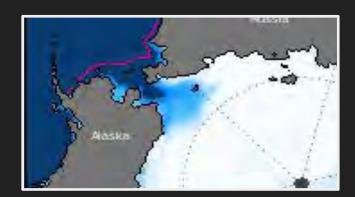
Residual heat in the system

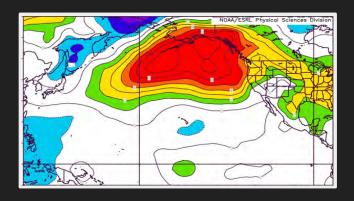
Persistent high pressure system

#### Anomalous winds from the south









## Consequences of no sea ice



No freshwater lens after ice melt.

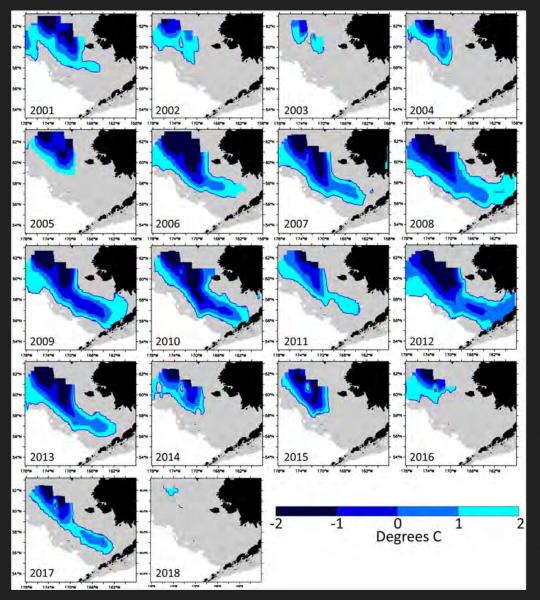
No salinity stratification.

Well-mixed water column.

Water column will cool more rapidly.

No cold pool.

## Cold pool dynamics



Low ice years = 'warm'

High ice years = 'cold'

2002-2005 = warm stanza

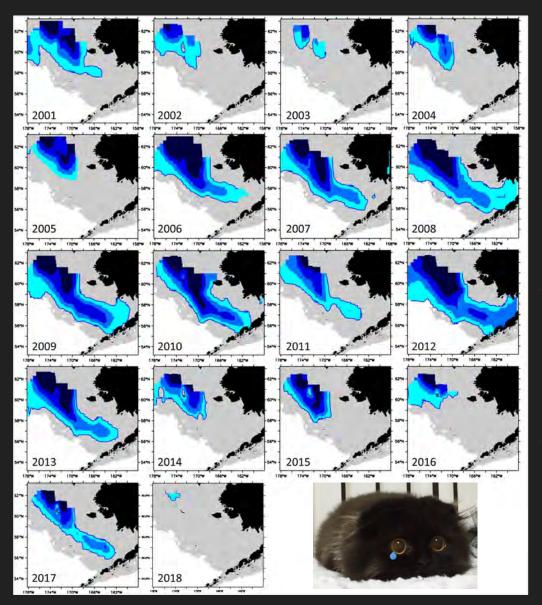
2007-2012 = cold stanza

2014-2016 = warm stanza

2017 = narrow, but extensive

2018 = cold pool 'teardrop'

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2002-2005 = warm stanza

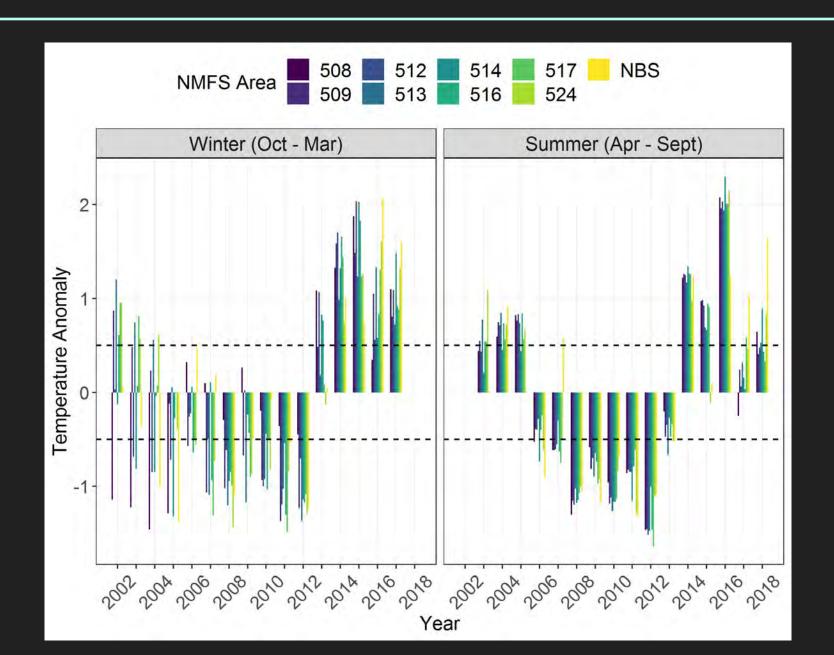
2007-2012 = cold stanza

2014-2016 = warm stanza

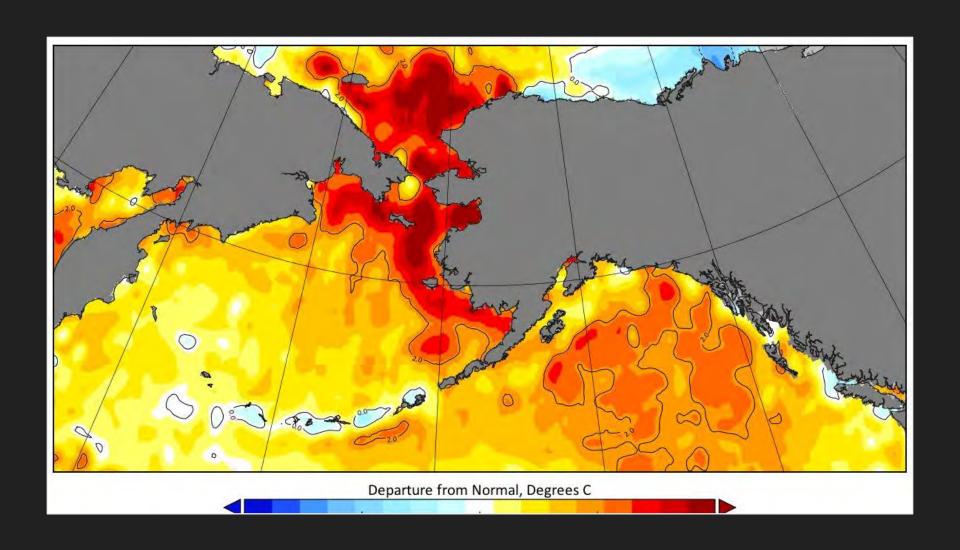
2017 = narrow, but extensive

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## **SST Anomalies**

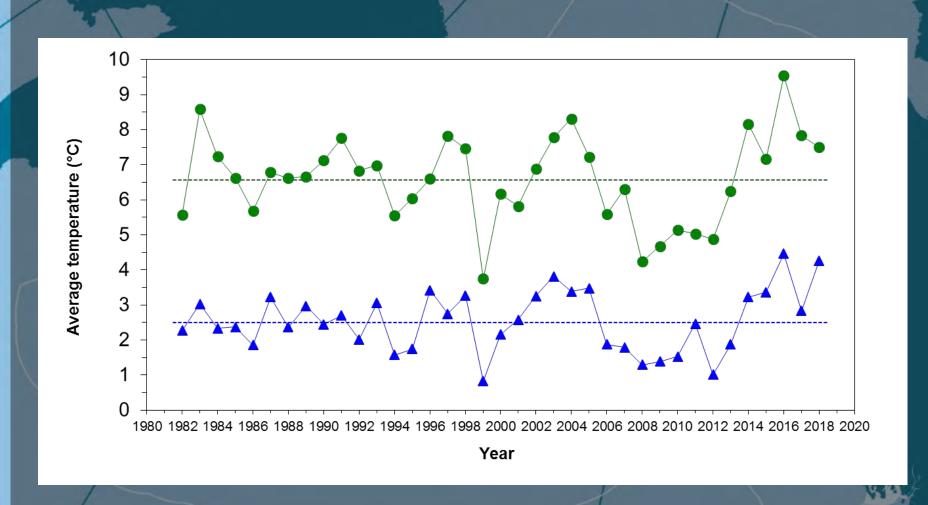


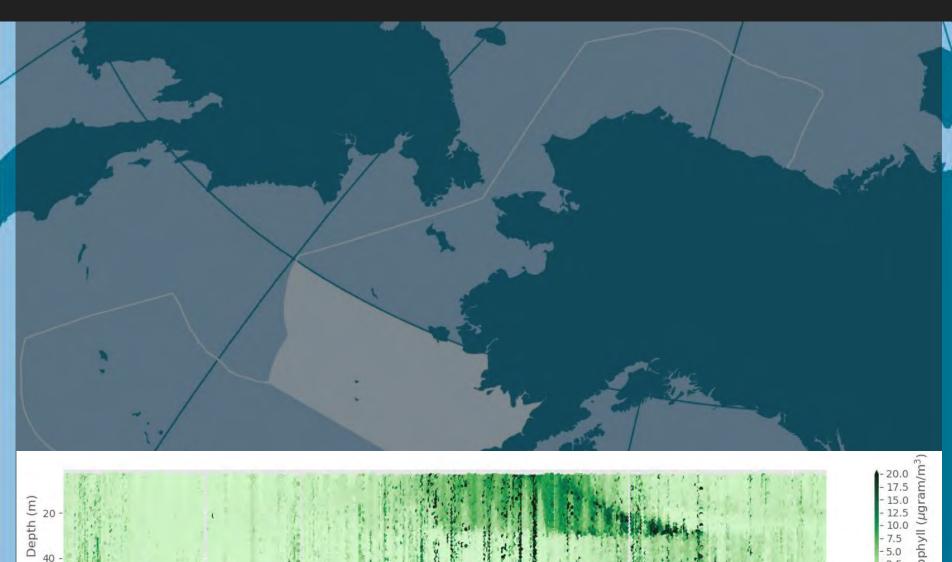
## How did the ecosystem respond?



## Southeastern Bering Sea

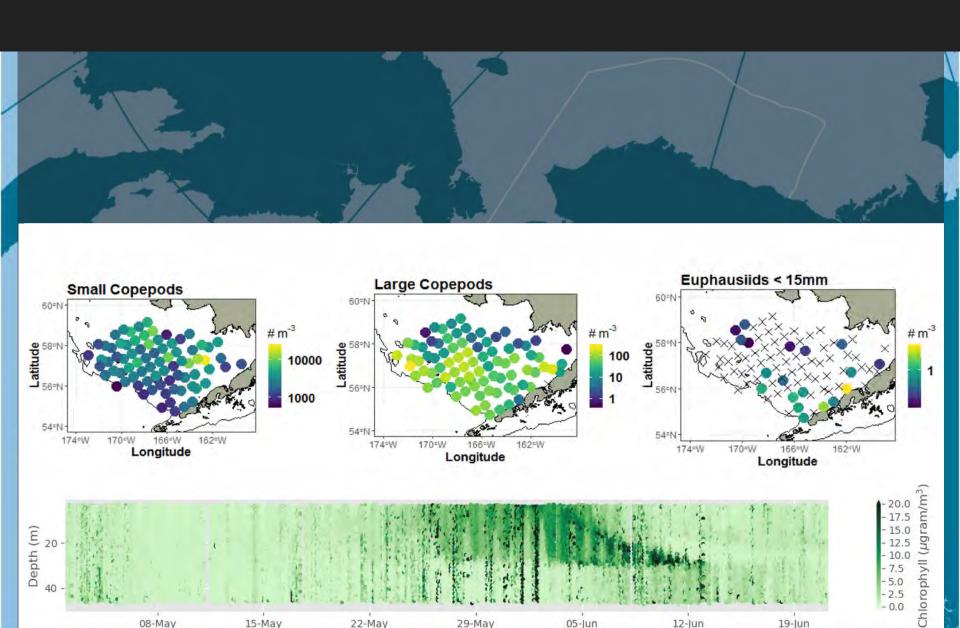


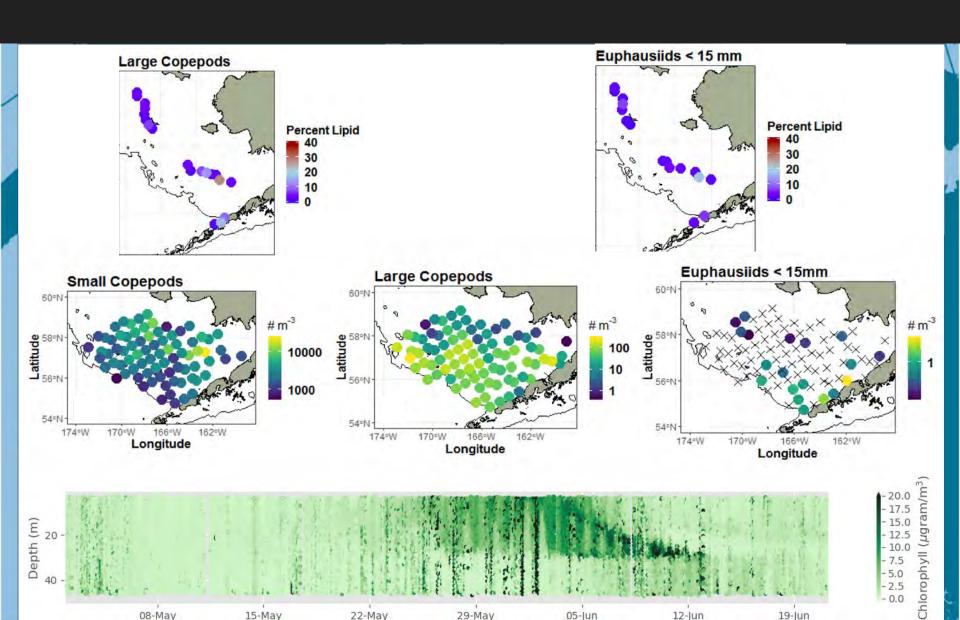


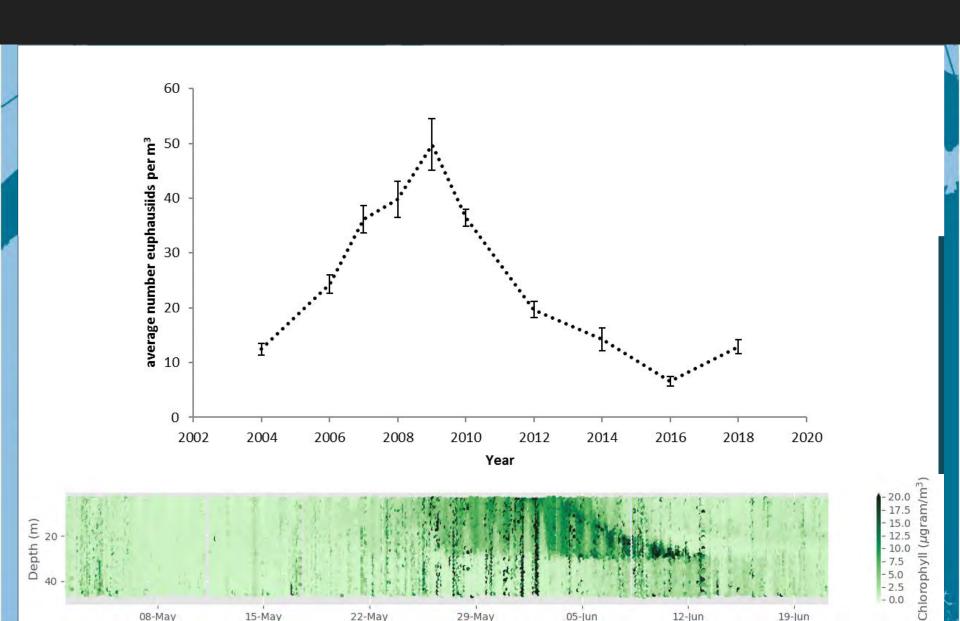


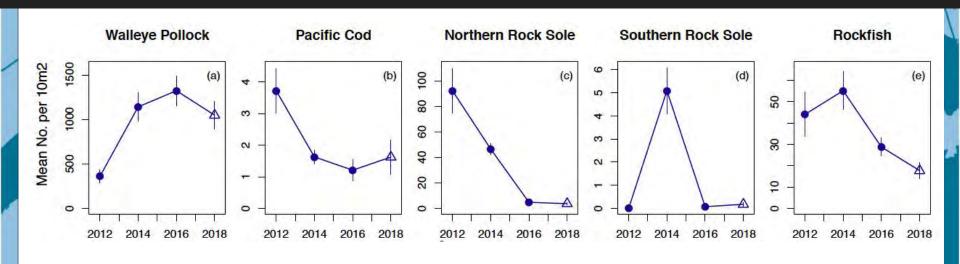
15-May

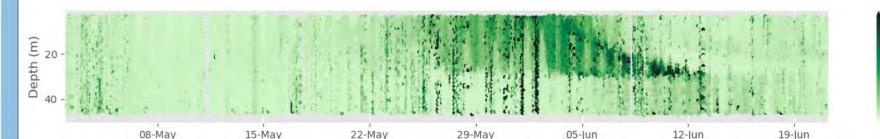




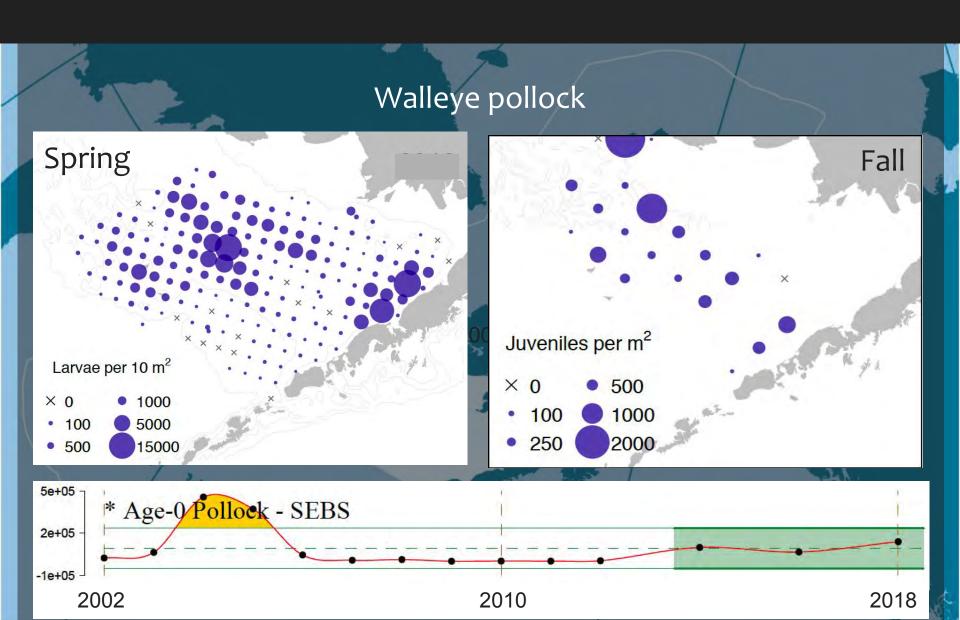


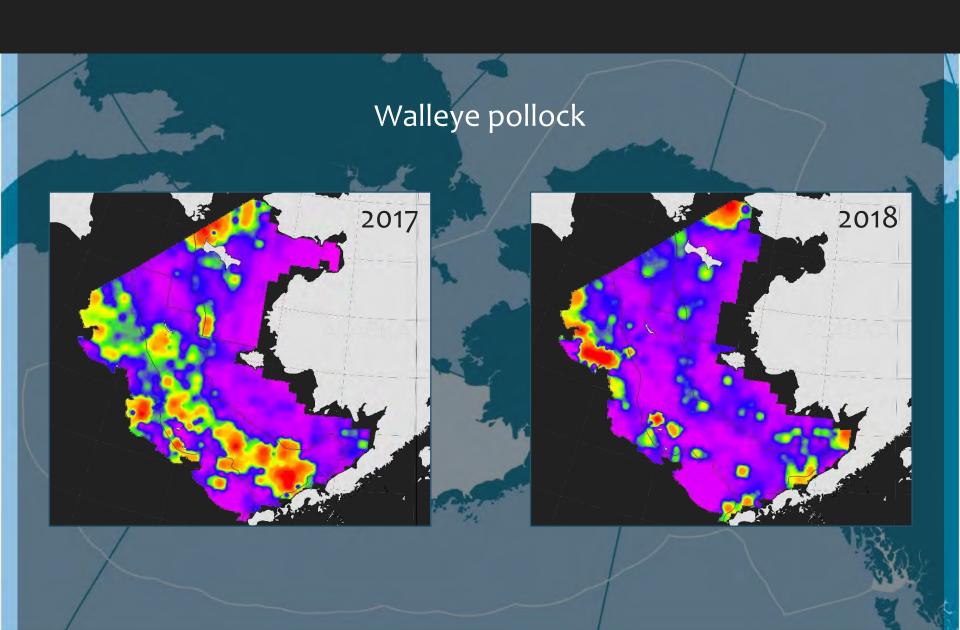






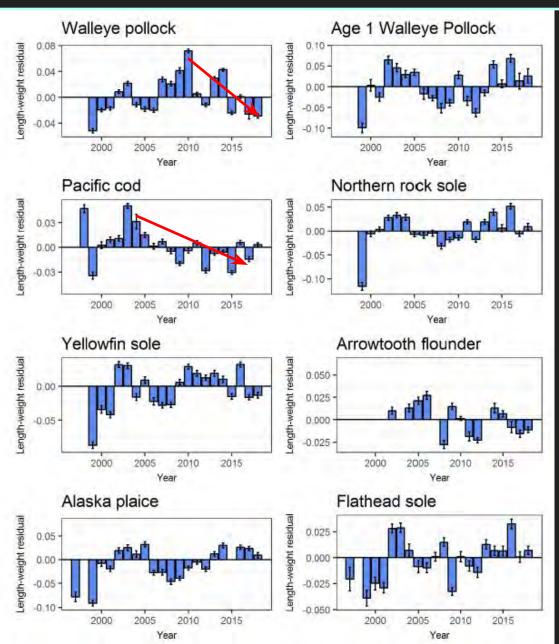
- 20.0 (20.0 - 17.5 - 15.0 - 12.5 - 10.0 - 7.5 - 5.0 - 2.5 - 5.0 - 2.5 - 0.0 (Chlorophyll)





#### Boldt et al.

## Southeastern Bering Sea

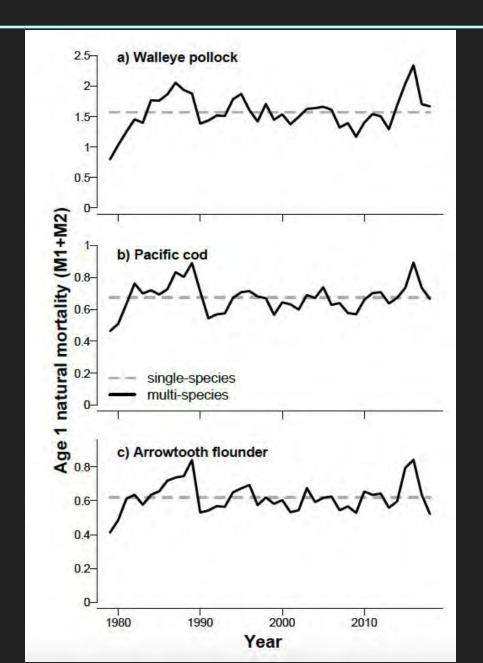


Adult pollock was the 2<sup>nd</sup> lowest on record and continued a decreasing trend.

Negative trend in Pacific cod since 2003.

Length-weight residuals for most species were the same or increased from 2017 to 2018.

The exceptions were adult pollock and Alaska plaice, which had lower condition in 2018 relative to 2017.

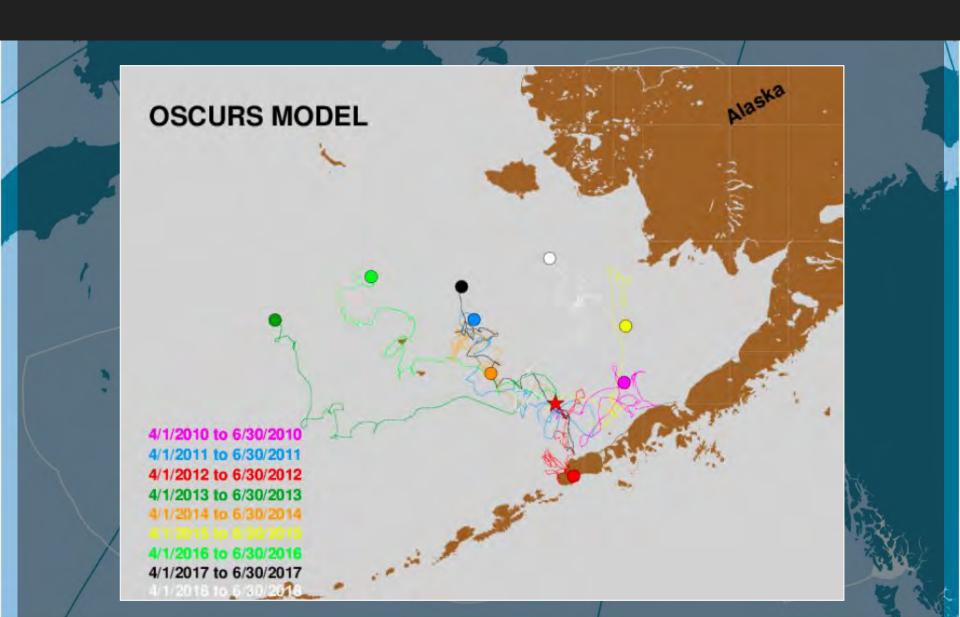


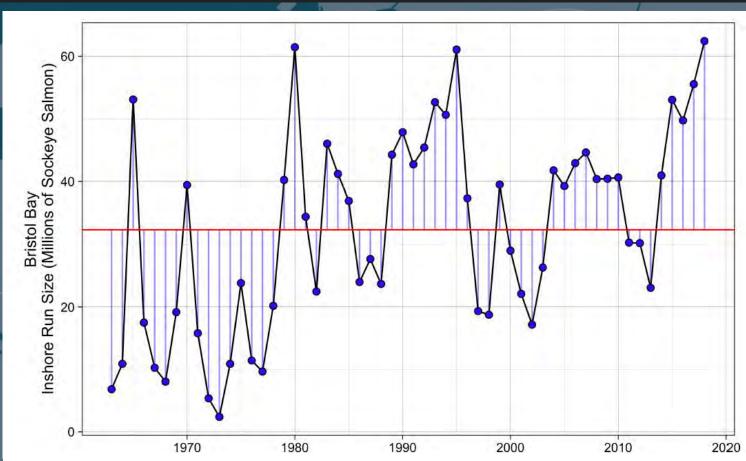
Estimated age-1 natural mortality for Pollock, Pacific cod, and Arrowtooth flounder peaked in 2016.

In 2018, Pollock natural mortality remained above the long-term mean (4<sup>th</sup> consecutive year).

Pacific cod and Arrowtooth flounder mortality were at and below the long-term mean, respectively.

May reflect higher metabolic demand of predators under warm conditions, combined with maturing 2010-2012 age classes of Pollock and Pacific cod.





- 2018 Bristol Bay inshore run of sockeye was largest on record since 1963, especially to Nushagak District.
- ◆ Indicates positive ocean conditions in summer 2015/16 and winter 2016/17.

"Traditionally, it is unusual to see Pollock in the salmon season in Bristol Bay." Catie Bursch

# Bristol Bay Pollock Catie Bursch Naturalist/Commercial fisherman

5/27/18

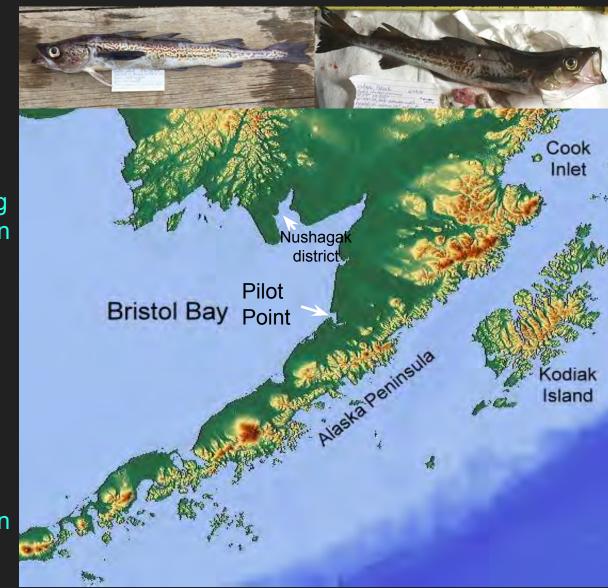
Just south of Pilot Point Over past 3 years, seen Pollock dead on beach in late May. In 2018 observed many, many more than other springs.

Tyler Sterling Seasonal salmon fisherman

6/30/18

North of Ugashik River mouth. Pollock floating belly up, dying. Saw Pollock multiple days in a row, 2-3 pollock at a time.

Chris Osbekoff Seasonal salmon fisherman



#### July 6

Ugashik river mouth Belly up, but alive Floating at the surface

#### July 16

James Wheeler aboard the F/V Bad Whiskey
Nushagak district
½ swimming, ½ floating
"Odd"

#### July 19

Set net near Pilot Point Seeing pollock since early June On beaches dead and in nets. Been fishing for 40 years "Unusual"

#### July 19

Sherry O'Connor
Comm. set net fisherman
3 pollock caught

#### July 25 (email)

Carina Nichols, Comm. fisher Coast between Ugashik and Egegik "...dead pollock dried up everywhere along the beach."

## Bristol Bay Pollock Calls from fishermen



#### Sample processing:

#### Length/weight

- "Definitely skinny!" compared to average weights by year/size from the BT survey (B. Lauth)

#### Stomach content IDs

- Caridea shrimp, gammarid amphipods, other fish
- "Diet seems pretty typical for Bristol Bay" (K. Aydin)

#### Toxin/HABs (Kathi Lefebvre - NWFSC)

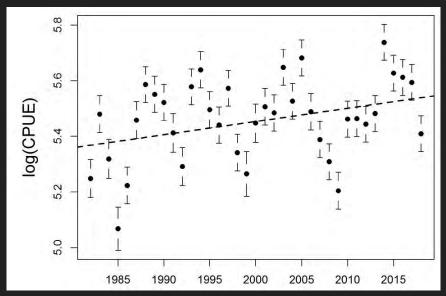
- Low but detectable levels of PSP, exposure risk was present in the food web.
- Toxins could have role in unusual behaviors & mortalities
- Levels were well below seafood safety reg. limit

#### Isotope & condition samples

- Processing not yet completed

#### Otoliths collected

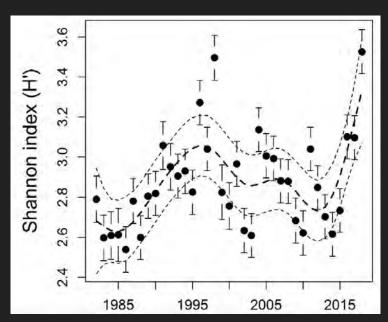
## Southeastern Bering Sea

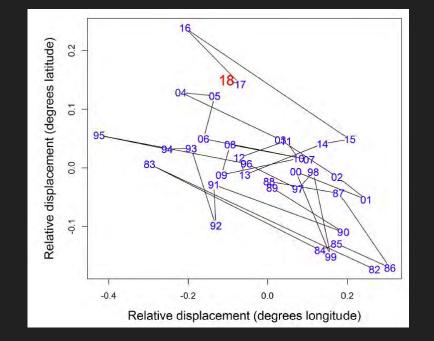


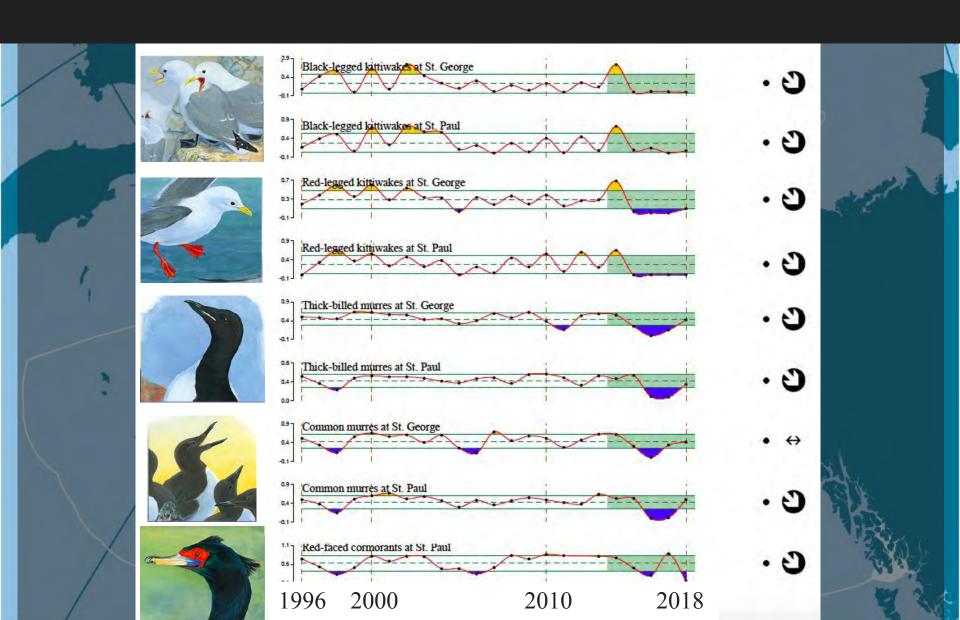


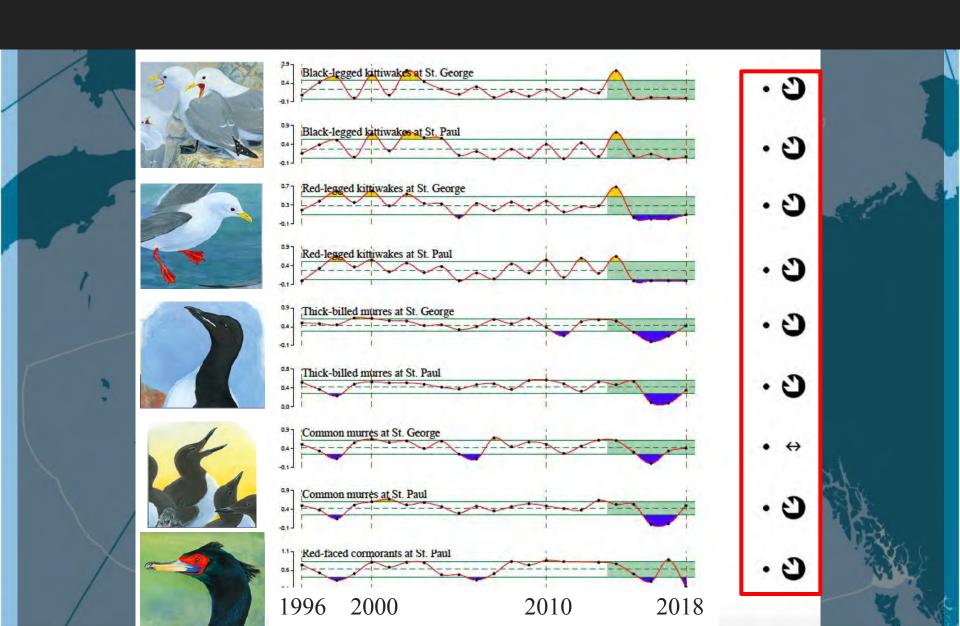
Species diversity has increased since 2014, with a particularly large increase in 2018.

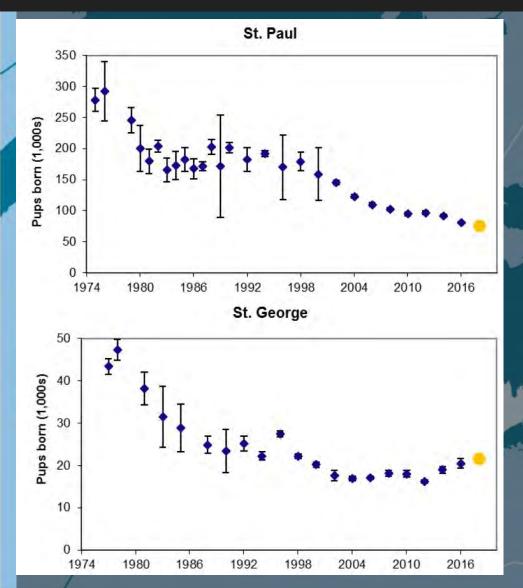
Center of gravity shifted northwest in 2016 then back south in 2017 and 2018; remains farther north than any year besides 2016.











2018 estimated fur seal pup production for St. Paul is ~6% less than 2016. The St. George estimate is ~5% greater than 2016.

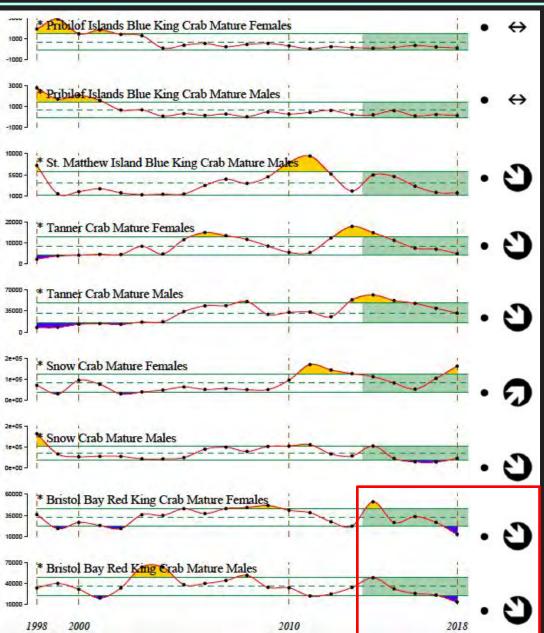
This indicates a continued decline in pup production on St. Paul and a leveling / slightly increasing trend on St. George.

Using estimates for 2018, pup production has been declining since 1998 at an approximate annual rate of 4.0% on St. Paul.

No significant trend on St. George over the same time period.

#### Foy et al.

# Southeastern Bering Sea



Decrease in biomass and abundance in blue king crab, Tanner crab, and red king crab stocks in 2018.

Bristol Bay red king crab at 35and 22-year lows (M and F, respectively).

St. Matthew BKC at all-time low.

Snow crab biomass (60% increase in both M/F). The stock had declined to all-time low in 2016. Increased recruitment means trend is expected to continue.

# **Better Off Dead**

The Pribilof Islands support a significant concentration of breeding seabirds; a rat prevention program safeguards against potentially catastrophic impacts.



A rat was detected on St. Paul Island in August 2018 and seen again in September. A USFWS strike team was deployed. As of Nov. 12, the rat has remained elusive to trapping attempts...they've brought in dead rats to lure it.





# Southeastern Bering Sea

#### **SUMMARY**

No cold pool over the southeastern shelf.

Reduced stratification.

Weak, delayed bloom.

Low abundance and quality of zooplankton.

Larval fish production high; juv. survival predicted low due to poor prey quantity/quality.

Adult pollock biomass decreased from 2017; condition low; natural mortality remains high.

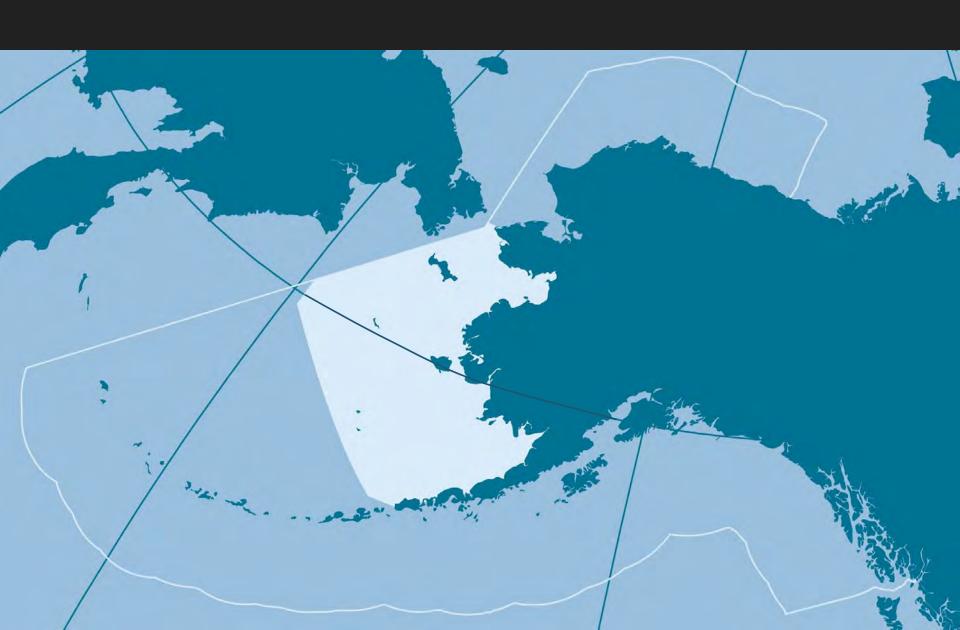
Drift trajectory favorable for winter-spawning flatfish.

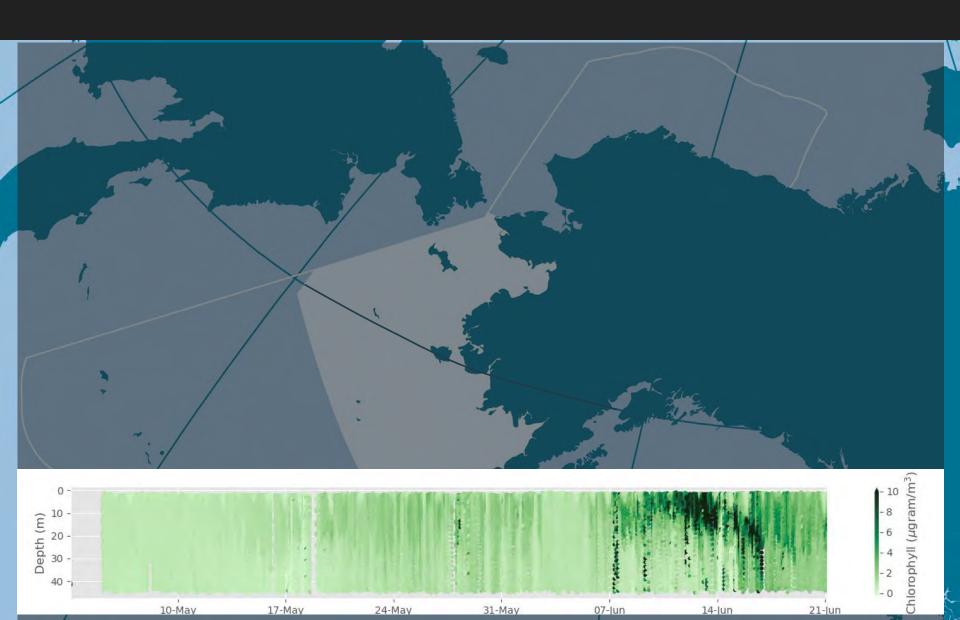
Poor reproductive success for seabirds at Pribilof Islands.

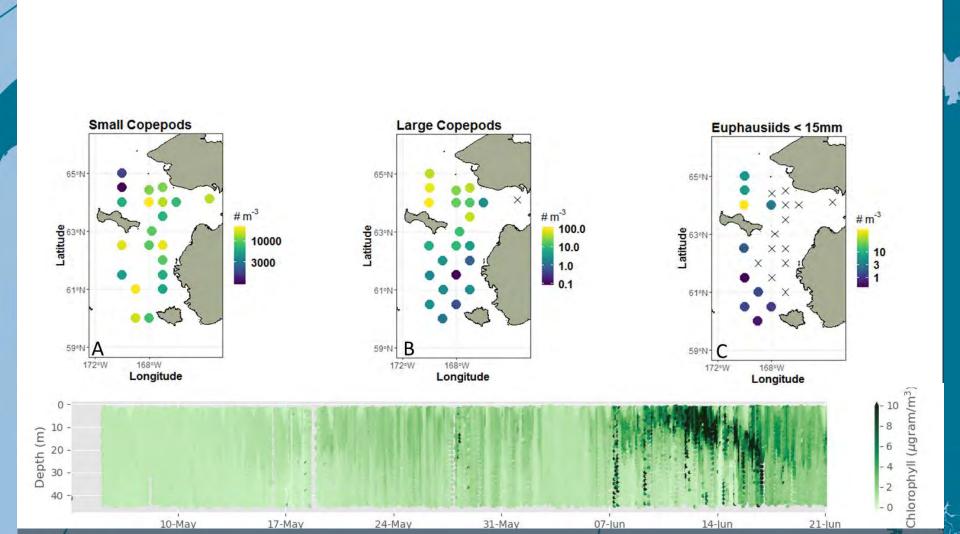
Fur seal pup production down at St. Paul; up at St. George.

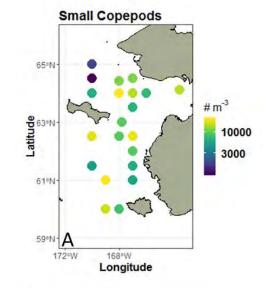
Decrease in RKC, BKC, and Tanner; increase in snow crab

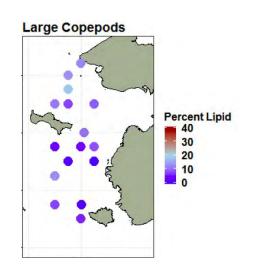
# Northern Bering Sea

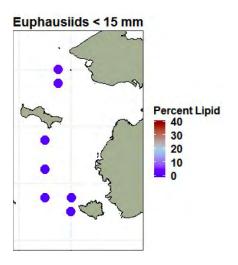


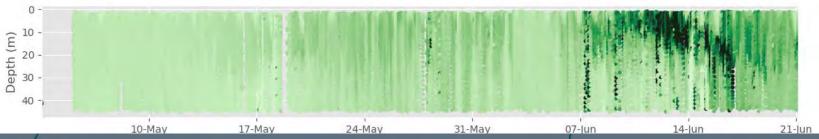




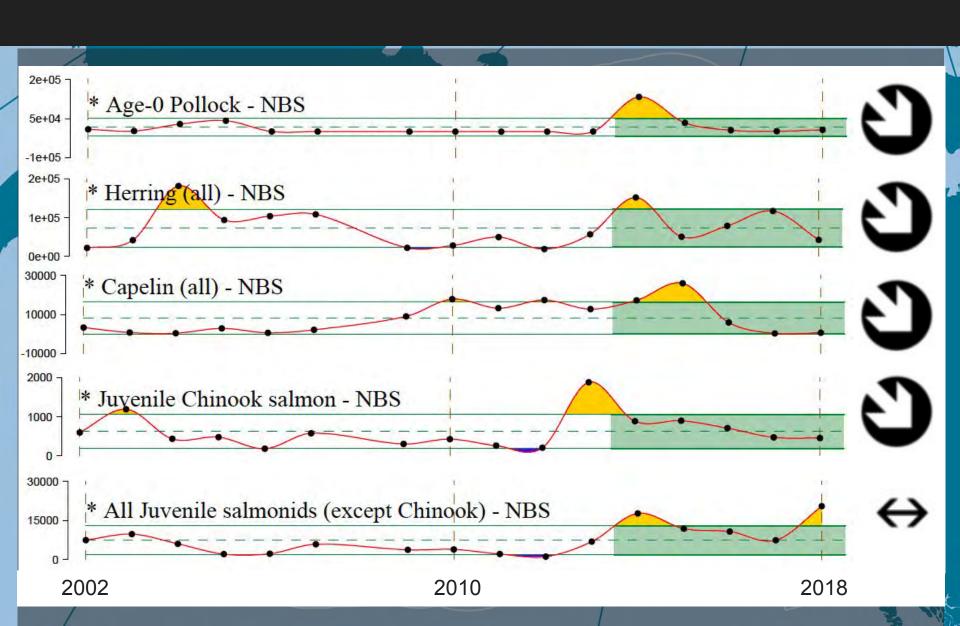


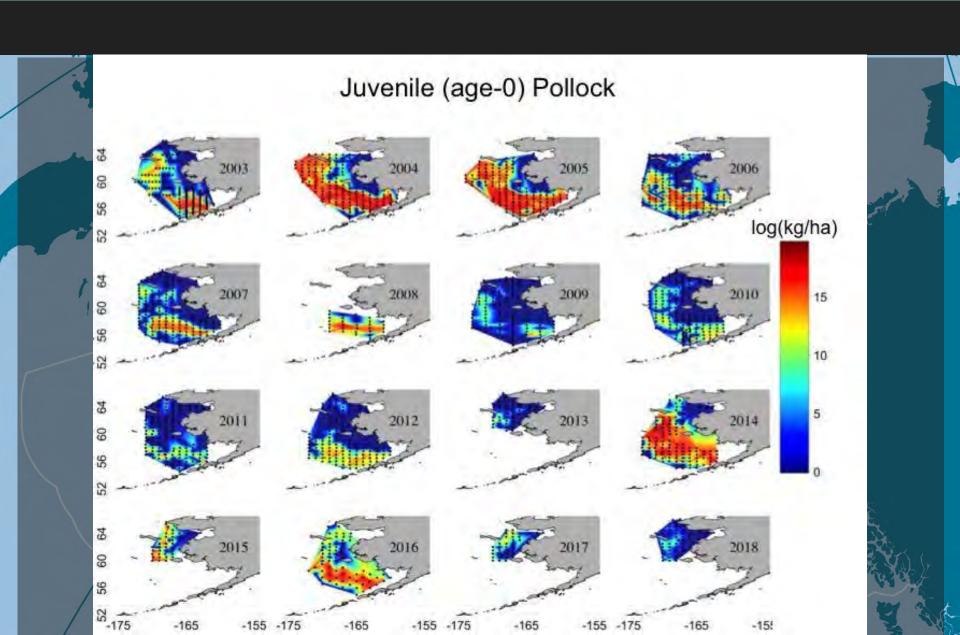


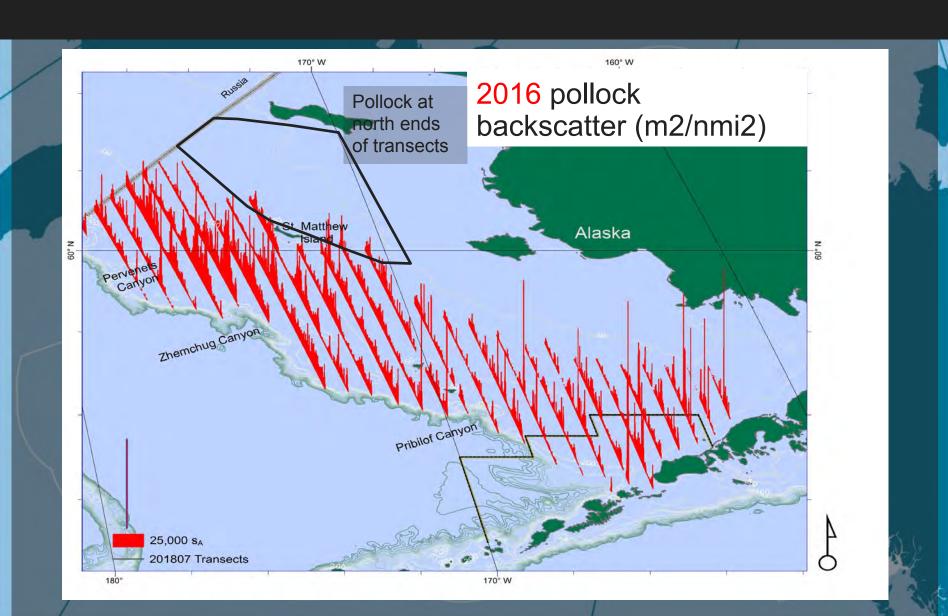


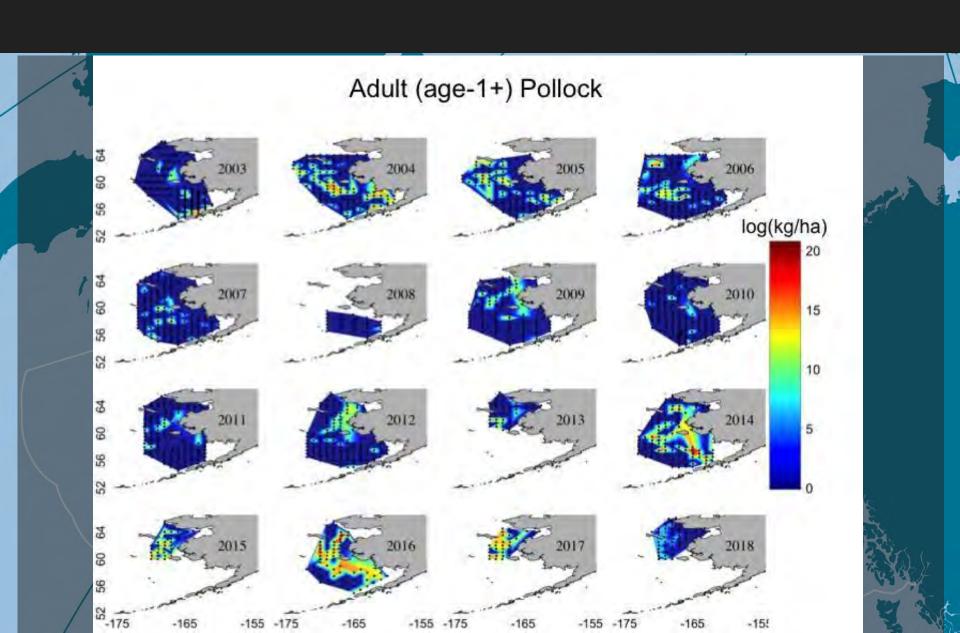


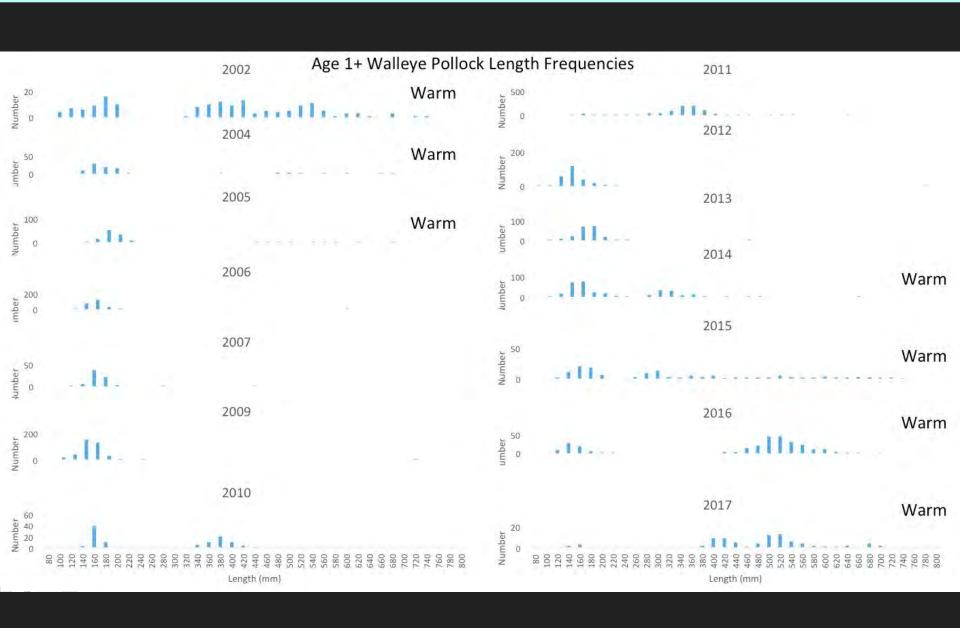
Chlorophyll (µgram/m³)

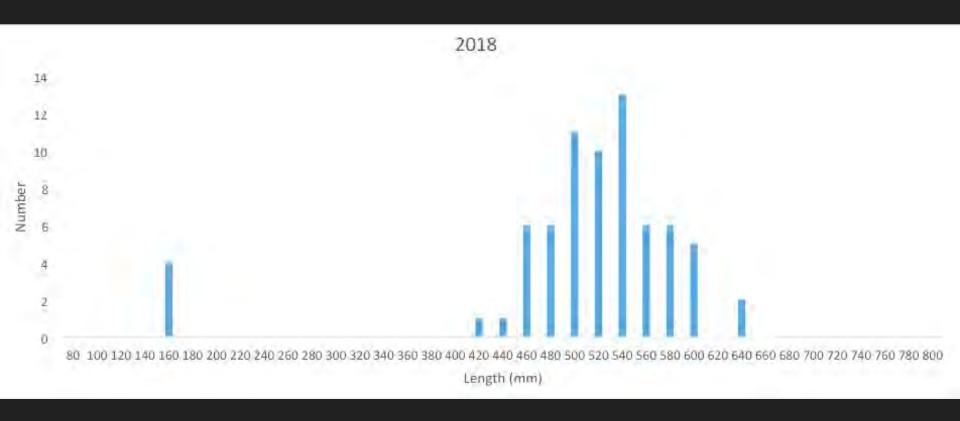


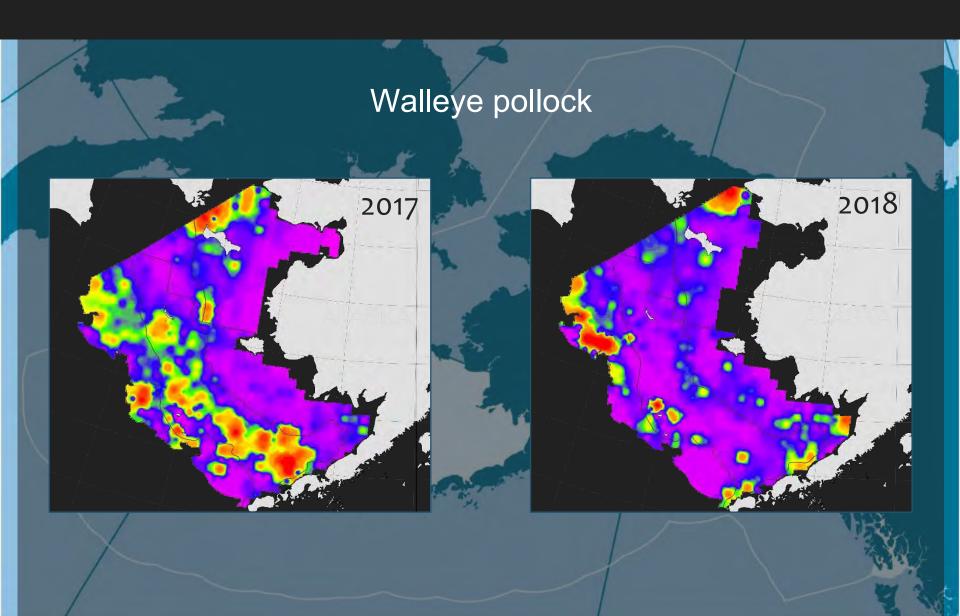


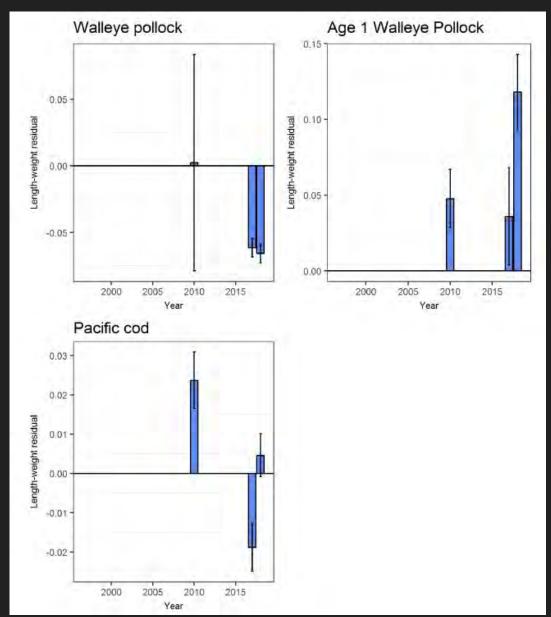






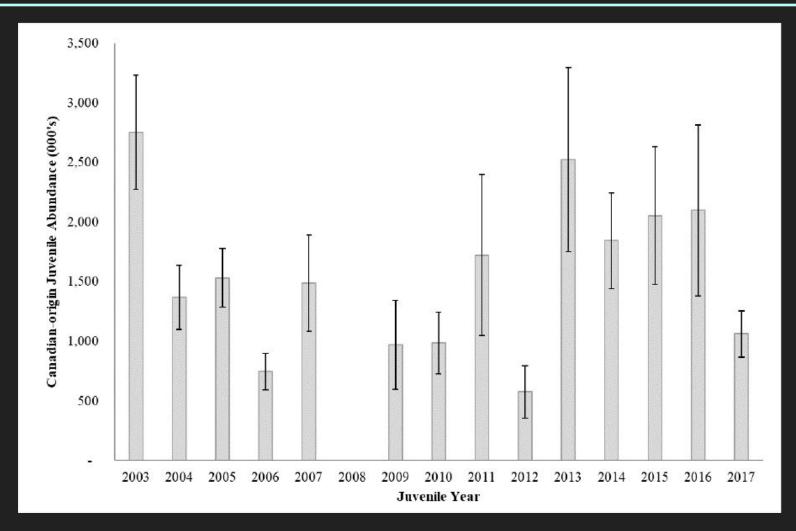






Adult pollock had below average condition, consistent with the rest of the eastern Bering Sea.

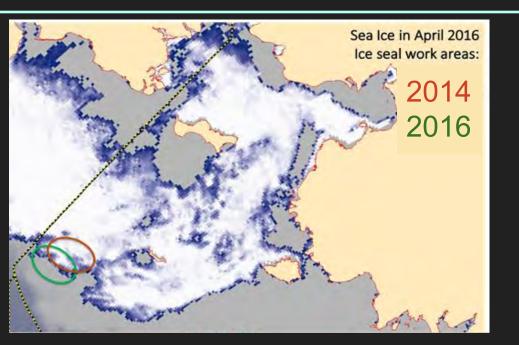
Juvenile pollock and Pacific cod had above average condition (relative to the entire Bering Sea population).

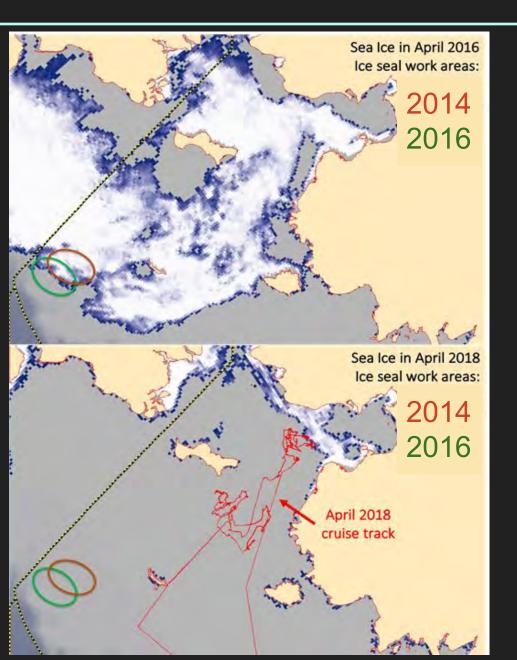


- 2018 juvenile Chinook were among lowest observed since 2003.
- Below average for 2<sup>nd</sup> consecutive year.
- Juvenile abundance has important implications for bycatch caps in pollock fishery.

# Marine Mammals Boveng, Sheffield

# Boveng



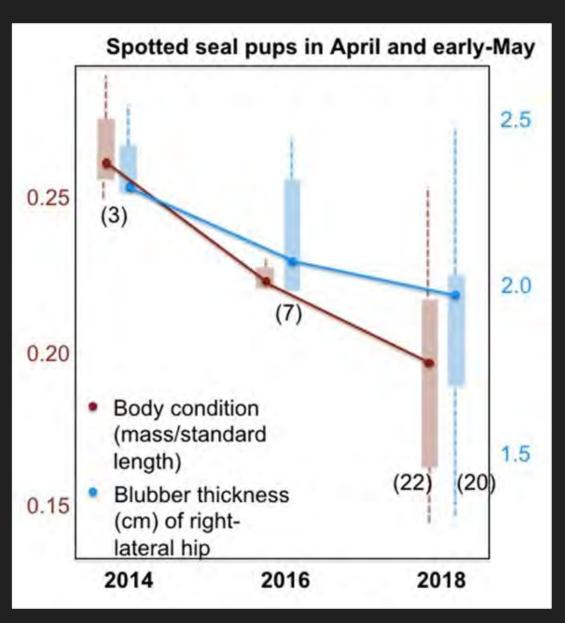


Ice seals scarce.

Pupping areas on ice were displaced north.

Seal strandings reported at Wales and St Lawrence.

In July, exceptionally large numbers of humpbacks north of St. Lawrence.

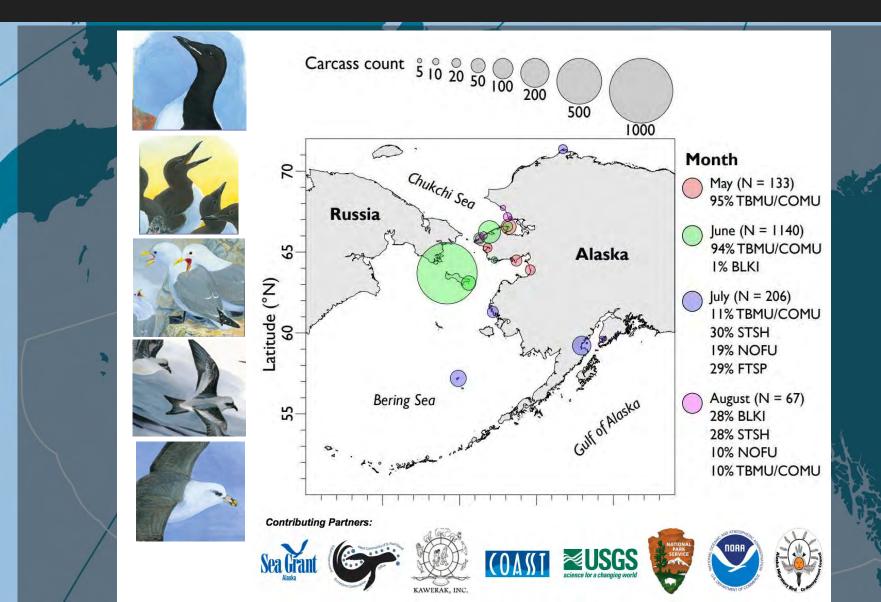


Preliminary data suggest spotted seal pups had poor body condition relative to earlier years.

#### Seabird breeding success observations 2018 - Alaska Maritime NWR **Kittiwakes** Colony Murres Cormorants Auklets Notes Kittiwakes either failed or late Cape Lisburne (sitting tight) Not present Cape Thompson no chicks observed, only 1 egg Few noted Not present Cape Lewis Not present Murres observed attending cliffs on Puffin, not Chamisso Duffin/Chamies Door weather brief look only Sledge Not present 8% of kittiwakes had chicks Bluff Not present 10% of kittiwakes had chicks Red-legged kittiwakes breeding St. Matthew for first time Nunivak Poor weather, brief look only Not present Murres initiated very late St. Paul Murres initiated very late St. George Zero production (2) Low production Average to above average

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# Kuletz, Labunski, Kaler (USFWS); Parrish, Jones, Burgess (COASST) Sheffield (UA-Nome); Ahmasuk (Kawerak, Inc.); Schoen (USGS)



Large Pacific cod were caught in crab pots.

Unusual occurrence of king salmon caught on rods from the beach.

Record returns of pink and silver salmon; came in strong and early.

Halibut fishing off Savoonga was "really great".

Subsistence hunters for auklet fledglings struggled to find live birds.

An Elder on St. Lawrence Island: "when there is no dirty ice, there is less food for the krill, and consequently, no food for the birds".

Dead and emaciated murres, shearwaters, and crested auklets in Nome and on St. Lawrence Island.

#### **SUMMARY**

Lack of sea ice (unprecedented).

Weak stratification.

Well-mixed water column.

Zooplankton abundance increased with latitude, but overall low.

Large copepods dominated by *Eucalanus bungii* (not lipid-rich).

Juvenile forage fish abundance low.

Adult pollock biomass decreased from 2017, condition low.

Juvenile Chinook preliminary abundance estimate low; bycatch implications.

Ice seals scarce; pup condition poor.

Seabird reproductive failures and die-off event (unprecedented).

#### **IMPLICATIONS**

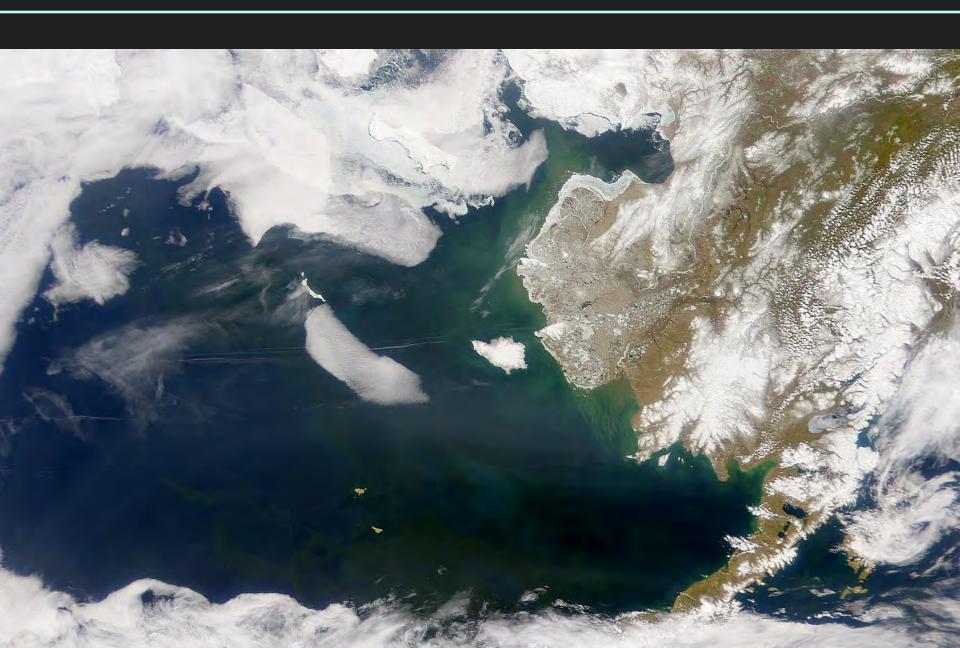
Did fish overwinter in the northern Bering Sea last winter (2017/18)?

- If so, what impact did they have on prey resources?
- Did their presence shift the food web balance?

Ecosystem indicators suggest poor productivity and lack of a sufficient prey base.

Will fish overwinter in the northern Bering Sea this winter (2018/19)?

# Eastern Bering Sea



Alex Whiting
Native Village of Kotzebue

# Stock Differences in Pacific Herring

Largest spawning biomass is from Togiak, but largest sampled biomass is from the NBS (BASIS).

Is the NBS (i.e., Norton Sound) an important nursery area for EBS herring populations?

Togiak and Norton Sound were genetically similar; both differ from Kotzebue.

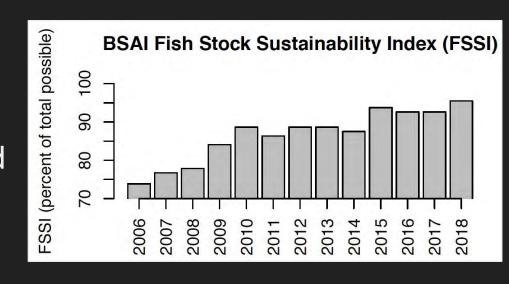
Isotopic results and otolith analyses underway.



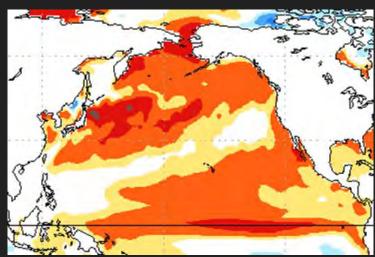
No groundfish stock/complex is subjected to overfishing, considered overfished, or approaching an overfished condition.

Pribilof Islands BKC considered overfished, but not subject to overfishing. In year 4 of rebuilding plan.

St. Matthew BKC...







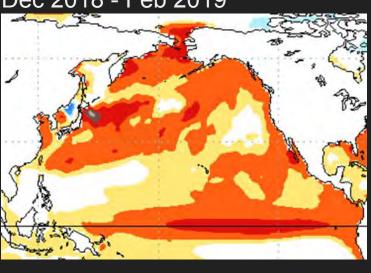
Warm conditions across the North Pacific through December.

Positive anomalies (>1°C) greatest in NBS.

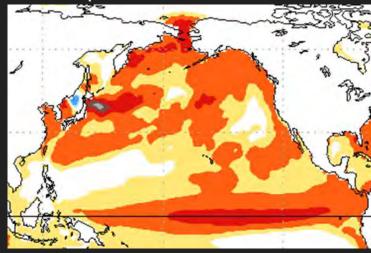
ALPS deeper than normal in late winter of 2018/19 = warm weather for Alaska enhanced by warm waters.

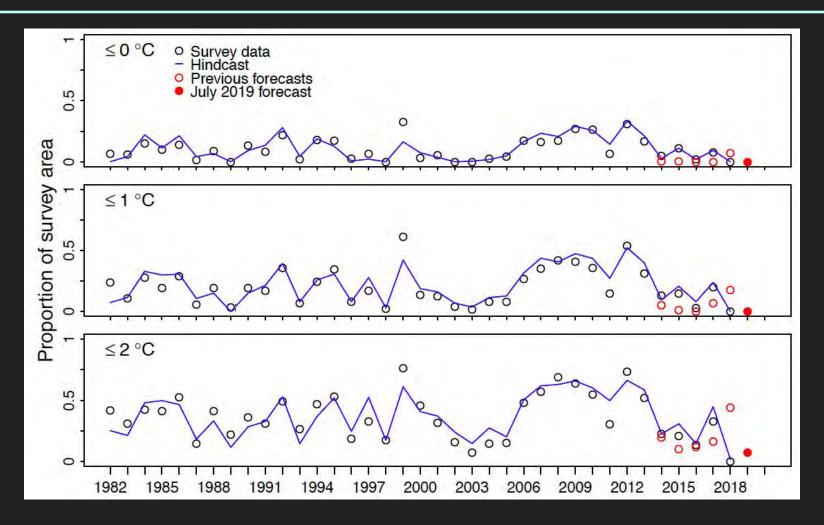
No typical PDO pattern in North Pacific (warm everywhere).

Dec 2018 - Feb 2019



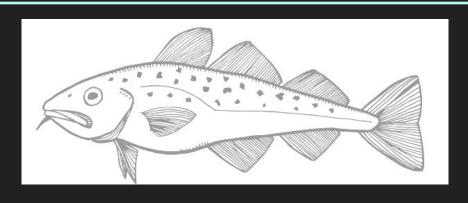
Feb - April 2019





The predictions for summer 2019 are for continued warm conditions substantially similar to 2014 - 2018.

#### **Forecasts and Predictions**



#### Pacific cod

Probability of the 2016 year class being above average is 56% (but the associated error is largest in the time series.)

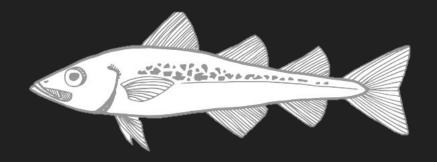
#### Walleye pollock

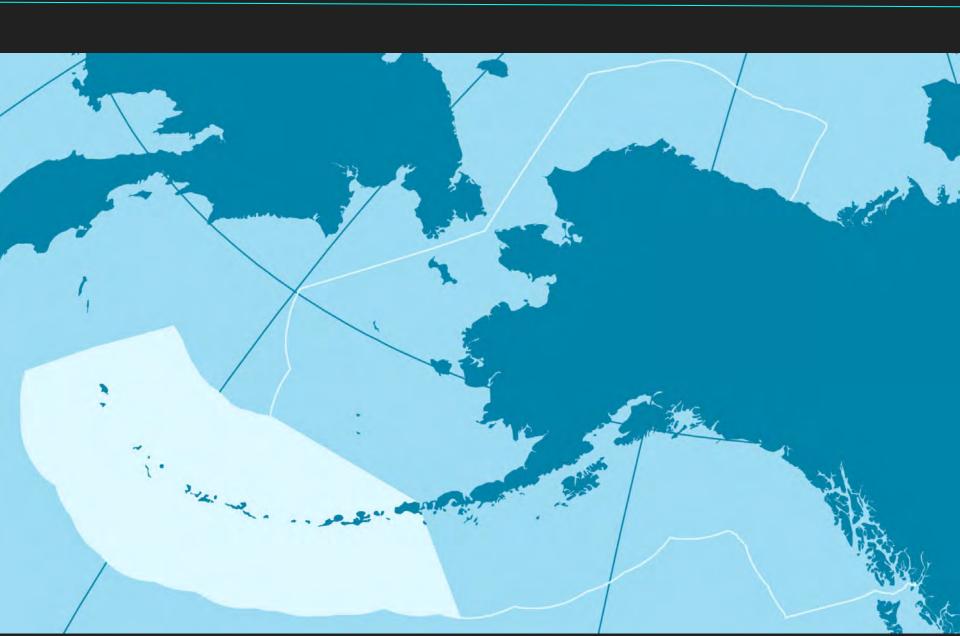
2016 year class appears below average.

- Temp change index
- Large copepod abundance 🗸
- Energy density ≈

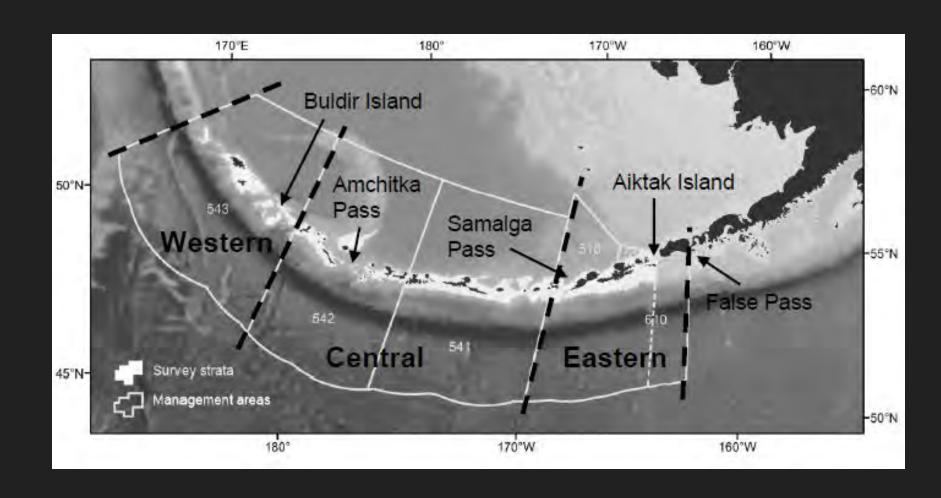
#### 2017 year class

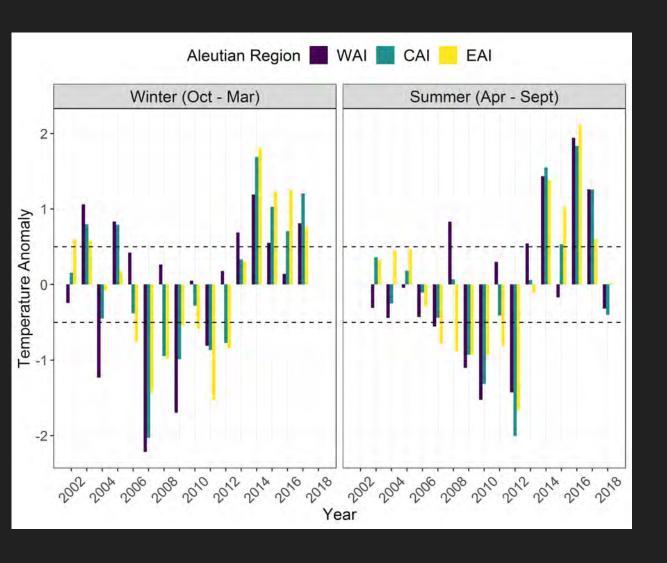
- Temp change index ≈
- Energy density ≈





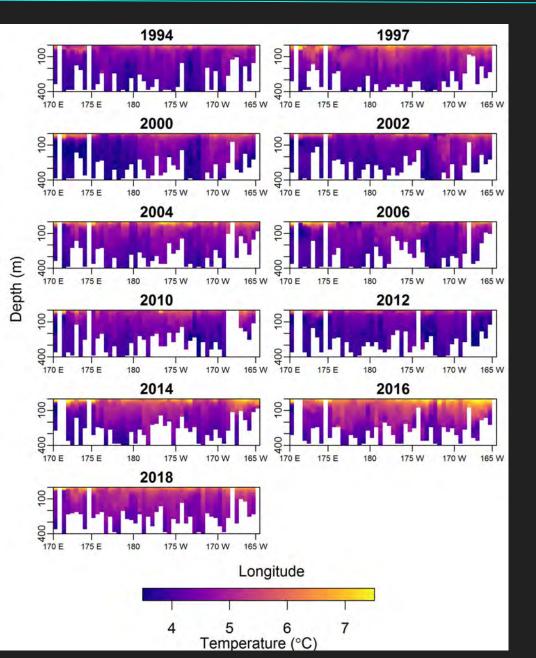
# Aleutian Islands Ecoregions

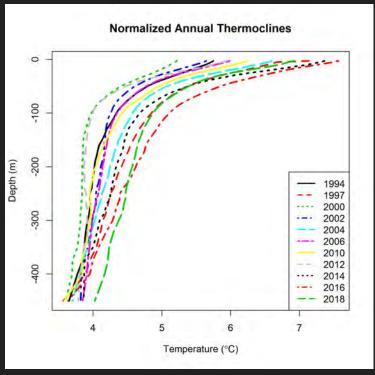




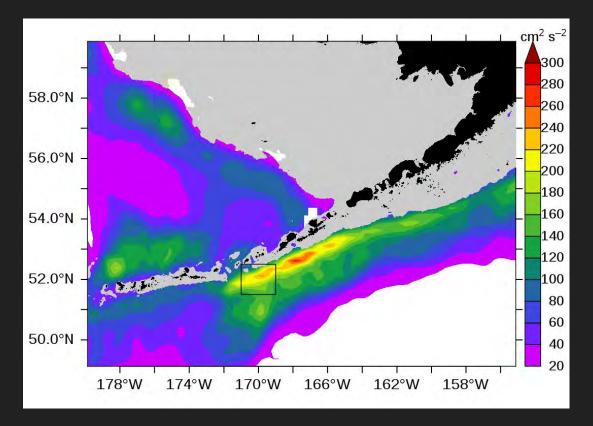
- Warm from 2013–2017
- Cooled to normal during summer 2018
- Western AI
   mostly likely to
   diverge from
   Central and
   Eastern

# Bottom trawl survey temperatures

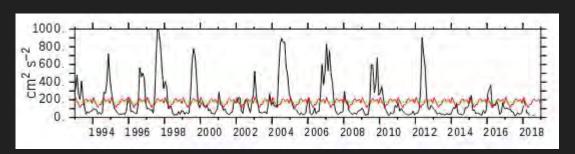


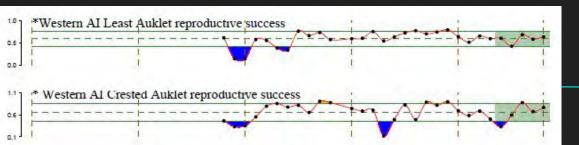


- Surface temperatures cooled relative to 2016
- Warmth remained at depth



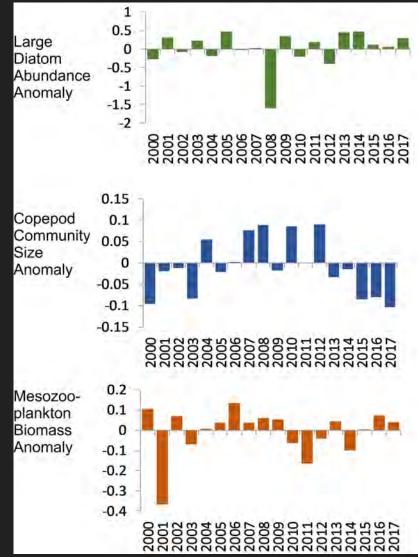
- Eddy kinetic energy at Amutka Pass has been low since 2013
- Diffuse Alaska Stream in 2018



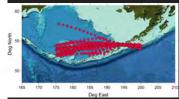


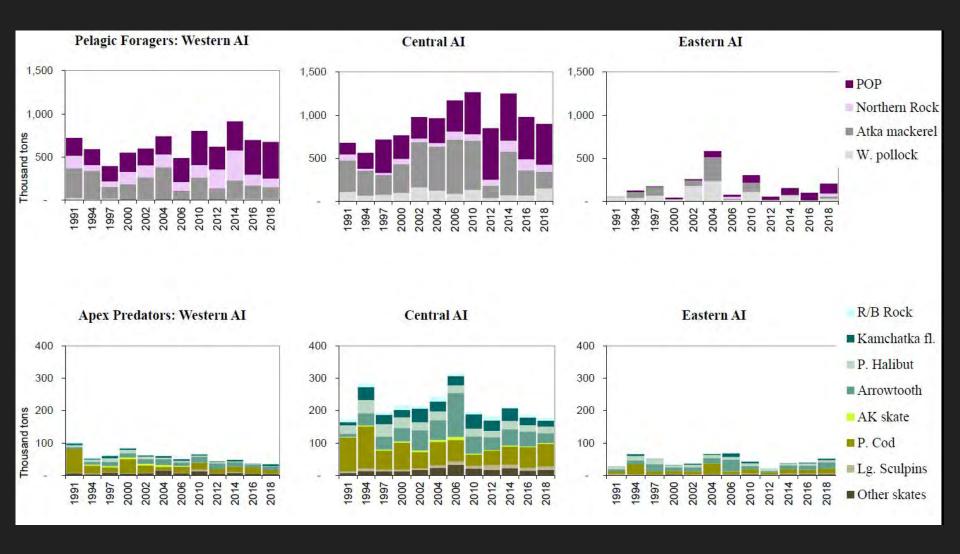
# Zooplankton

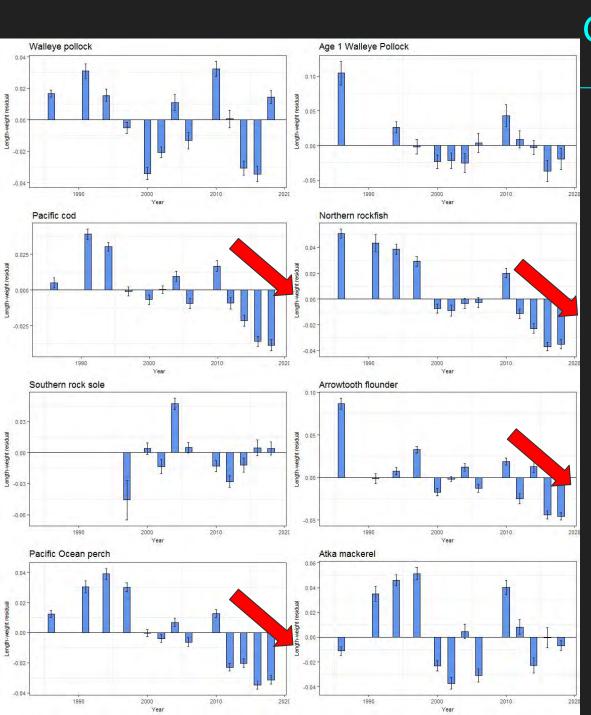
Renner, Batten



- Auklet reproductive success mostly good during warm years = sufficient zooplankton to raise chicks
- Zoops sampled by Continuous Plankton Recorder, mostly north of
- Copepod taxa have been small 2013-2017
- Biomass average to above-average 2015-2017



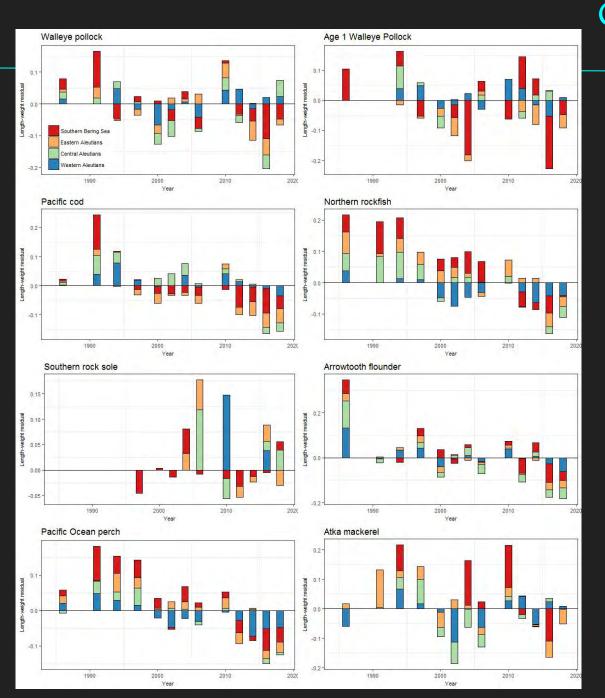




# **Groundfish Condition**

Rooper, Boldt et al

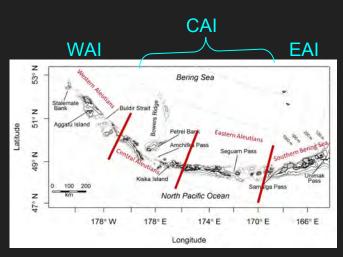
- Weight-length residuals across the Al
- Continued overall negative conditions indicators since 2010
- Cod, northern rockfish, ATF, POP strongly negative in 2018
- Atka slightly negative across AT



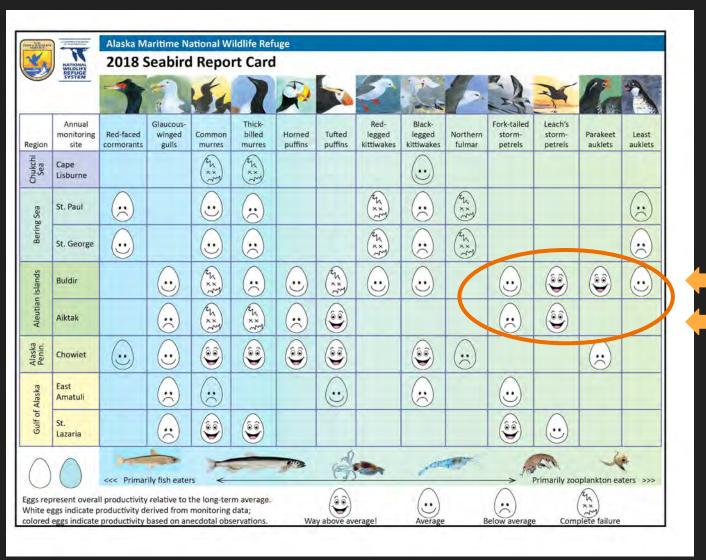
# **Groundfish Condition**

Rooper, Boldt et al

- Weight-length residuals by management unit
- Atka slightly positive in the Western ecoregion, but
- Atka "skinny" in eastern part of the Central ecoregion ("eastern Al")



### Seabirds

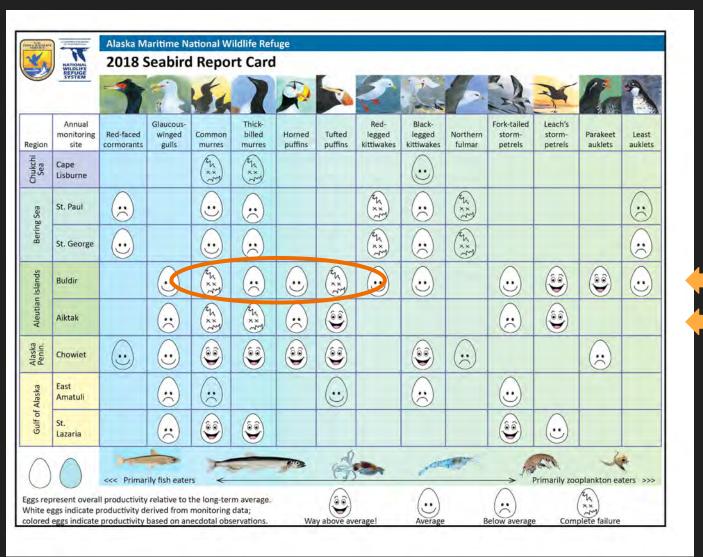


 Planktivorous seabirds did well reproductively in both W and E Al in 2018

West Al

East Al

### Seabirds



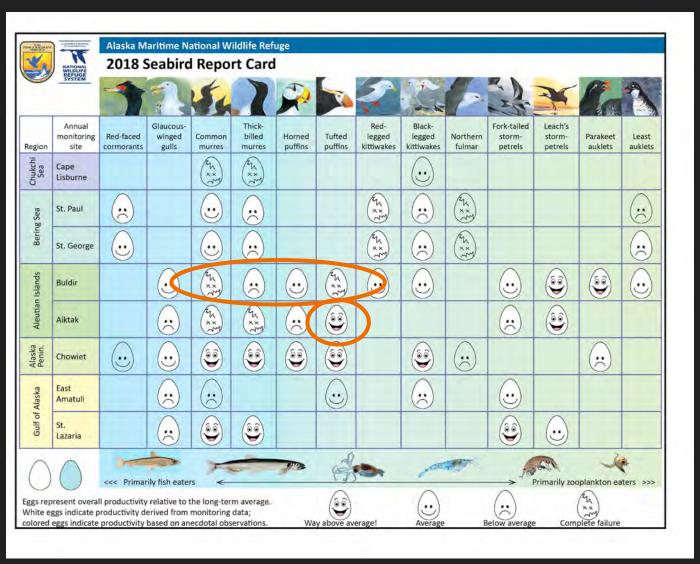
 Piscivorous seabirds failed reproductively in W AI in 2018

West Al

East Al

Renner

### Seabirds



- But tufted puffins (piscivorous seabirds) did well reproductively in E AI in 2018
- Corresponds with good reproduction of piscivorous seabirds in W GOA (Chowiet)

# **Aleutian Islands Summary**

- As usual, data-poor relative to EBS and GOA
- Water has been warm; eddy activity low
- Overall, ecosystem response to recent warm conditions seem similar to that in the GOA
- Indicators suggest zooplankton abundant but small during warm years
- Piscivorous predators less successful during warm years
- Some longer term negative trends (SSL, fish condition)

# Contributors

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