

North Pacific Fishery Management Council
D-2 Staff Tasking
Bering Sea Canyons Motion

April 3, 2012

The Council has received numerous proposals designed to preserve representative portions of the highly productive shelf break zone in the Bering Sea, specifically the Pribilof and Zhemchug canyons, as candidates for management measures to provide EFH protection for deep-sea corals, sponges, and other benthic habitat important to FMP-managed species.

In 2006/2007, the Council requested and reviewed information from the Alaska Fisheries Science Center (AFSC) identifying available information on the Pribilof, Pervenets and Zhemchug canyons as was known at that time, and considered HAPC designation for submarine canyons. The Council ultimately postponed taking action, as scientific information was not available to establish the dependence of managed species on habitat features of the canyons, under the EFH mandate.

Since that time, new information has become available from several sources that merits a re-examination of possible habitat protection and management measures for the Pribilof and Zhemchug canyons. .

The council thereby requests that:

1. The AFSC review and summarize existing and new information on the canyons, their habitat, and fish associations in those areas; and
2. The council staff scope and prepare a discussion paper on fishing activity within the canyons, past actions for protection in the area, and process for any potential future actions.

Further detail on motion:

The intent of this motion is to help the Council to understand what is known about issues related to protection of the canyons, including but not limited to the following:

- *How do the canyons' substrate and habitat characteristics compare to the rest of the Bering Sea slope and shelf?*
- *To what extent is habitat homogeneous within individual canyons?*
- *Where can fish associations with particular habitat features be established or suggested, and how do these relationships compare to those for the entire Bering Sea shelf?*
- *What is the expected vulnerability of the canyons to anthropogenic activity (including fishing)? Are adverse impacts likely to primarily affect benthic habitat?*

Potential sources of information:

- *2007 canyon research and resulting publications, and recent backscatter canyon mapping*
- *Other published papers, including those addressing BS circulation and deep water fauna*
- *Data from BS trawl shelf and slope surveys, and longline survey*
- *AFSC studies since 2006, including echo-sounder mapping of Pribilof Canyon*
- *Observer database for fishery information, and food habits database (presence of species in canyons)*