



SSC Sub-group Research Priorities Initial Review REPORT

January 11, 2024 11:30am – 2:30pm (AKT)

Virtual via Zoom; [eAgenda](#)

Members in attendance:

Amy Bishop (UAF)
Michael Downs (Independent)
Kailin Kroetz (ASU)
Chris Siddon (ADFG)
Patrick Sullivan (Independent)
Nicole Watson, Coordinator (NPFMC)
Ali Whitman, SSC Vice-Chair (ODFW)

Member(s) absent: Curry Cunningham (UAF), Robert Foy (AFSC)

Research Priorities

The SSC subgroup for research priorities met on January 11, 2024 to review existing research priorities and new priorities submitted by members of the public during the solicitation procedure. This meeting is one of a series of initial review meetings where various NPFMC Plan Teams met to review research priorities and provide their highest priorities (three to five) to the SSC at the February 2024 NPFMC meeting. The SSC subgroup specifically reviewed priorities that did not fit well with other plan teams' expertise, as the subgroup had a diverse range of backgrounds that mirror the makeup of the full SSC.

Prior to the meeting, the SSC subgroup reviewed their subset of research priorities and voted individually on their top three to five priorities to discuss at the meeting on January 11. The SSC received a presentation from Nicole Watson (NPFMC) on the 2024 research priorities process to date and expectations for the current meeting. There was no public comment. Following the NPFMC presentation, the SSC identified priorities that should be considered for their final three to five priorities to advance to the SSC. During this process, a number of the priorities proposed by members of the public were revised to clarify their intent and remove unnecessary text, and similar comments were grouped under a single comment. Then the SSC subgroup members used rank choice voting to identify their final five priorities to elevate to the SSC. Finally, the SSC discussed the outcome of the voting and established consensus around the priorities to advance. The top five priorities are listed below in order, along with unranked supplemental priorities deemed important but not advanced to the top five. There was also one priority that was recommended to be elevated to the Critical Ongoing Monitoring category.

As a part of the general discussion, the SSC subgroup felt that the new process for research priorities in 2024 was more efficient for the Plan Teams' participation. The subgroup also felt the public solicitation process provided an important opportunity for constituents to provide direct input. Most of the subgroup discussion revolved around the concept of lumping or splitting specific priorities. It was noted that this is a common theme discussed in each research priorities cycle. The subgroup also recognized and discussed that the disciplinary range of the SSC subgroup is not as broad as that of the SSC as a whole and could influence the voting outcomes. An open discussion helped to alleviate concerns and the SSC subgroup recommends that this explicit discussion regarding potential bias and consensus building around the final set of priorities to advance be done during future research priority meetings. This is less of a concern for the Plan Teams as all members are more narrowly focused on the topical priorities they review.

SSC subgroup recommended top priorities to advance to the SSC in February 2024. Those with a * in the Final Rank column are supplemental priorities deemed important but not included in the top five. Finally, there is one priority suggested to add to the Critical Ongoing Monitoring category.

Final Rank	ID	Title	Description
1	733	Climate change: Develop predictive tools to inform management options related to resilience and adaptation.	This research priority supports the work of the Climate Change Taskforce to identify and map out climate and environment change drivers and their likely response within fishery management, and specifically work on management options that provide a management response. Might support with groundfish specifications risk tables, and can also use these predictive tools to be able to evaluate the potential risk of different management responses related to potential scenarios.
2	SSCSub001	Further research on monitoring, understanding, and reducing western Alaska salmon bycatch in Bering Sea groundfish fisheries. (Combines N024, N029, N031, N034, N035c)	
3	SSCSub002	Quantifying the magnitude of benthic habitat disturbance due to contact with fishing gear and their associated impacts on benthic species in Bering Sea (Combines N025, N028, N030, N033, N039d)	
4	N035a	Emphasize the ongoing urgency of priority #189 from the 2021 review: “Develop stock-specific ecosystem indicators and incorporate into stock assessments.” This work should include precautionary responses to climate change factors.	Informing ecosystem-based fisheries management with data collection and research that bolsters use of ecosystem indicators, and dynamic management frameworks, within stock assessments, fishery management plan development, and TAC setting processes. These approaches are increasingly critical considering the large-scale changes occurring in North Pacific ecosystems, the cascading effects of those changes, and the complexity of interactions/impacts between fisheries.
5	N027	Retrospective and meta- analysis regarding whether, how, when and why objectives and goals of fishery management plans are or are not achieved over time. In light of the PEIS discussion, a fruitful first focus would be the existing BSAI groundfish FMP.	Changes to fishery management plan structures may be beneficial in light of changing conditions, updated information, and changing approaches to fishery management. However, such work should be prefaced by analyzing whether, how, when and why objectives and goals of previous/existing structures are or are not achieved over time. Failure to do so risks, among other things, misunderstandings of the rationales for structural changes and misapplication of effort towards requisite changes (e.g. modifying goals and objectives vs modifying the implementation of such goals and objectives).

Final Rank	ID	Title	Description
*	SSCSub006	Quantifying the magnitude of unobserved fishing mortality due to contact with fishing gear in the Bering Sea (Combines N025, N028, N030, N033, N039d)	
*	SSCSub007	Evaluate direct marine mammal-fishery interactions (including feeding on discards and bycatch spatial and temporal trends) and potential mitigation measures for marine mammal conservation	
*	SSCSub008	Improved documentation and understanding of indirect marine mammal / fishery interactions and bi-directional competition for fish resources.	

Suggested priorities to add to the Critical Ongoing Monitoring category:

ID	Title	Description
246	Cooperative research efforts to supplement existing at-sea surveys that provide seasonal, species-specific information on upper trophic levels	Continue and expand cooperative research efforts to supplement existing at-sea surveys that provide seasonal, species-specific information on upper trophic levels (seabirds and marine mammals). Updated surveys to monitor distribution and abundance of seabirds and marine mammals are needed to assess impacts of fisheries on apex predators, improve the usefulness of apex predators as ecosystem indicators, and to improve ecosystem management.