



September 29, 2023

## Agenda B-2: NMFS Management Report

### Status of Actions Report Online

Updated daily at: <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/sites/default/files/akro/amendments.pdf>

### Progress on Rulemaking

Highlights on progress since the June 2023 meeting include:

- Effective **June 23, 2023**, NMFS issued a correcting amendment to the final rule implementing Amendments 124 and 122 to the BSAI and GOA FMP (IFQ Omnibus Amendments).
- On **July 6, 2023**, NMFS published a proposed rule to modify monitoring requirements for catcher/processors using pot gear in the BSAI. Comments were invited through August 7, 2023. NMFS is preparing a final rule.
- Effective **July 26, 2023**, NMFS issued a final rule to modify Area 4 Vessel use caps from 2023 through 2027.
- On **August 3, 2023**, NMFS published a notice of Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands Crab Rationalization Cost Recovery Program fee percentage for 2024 ([88 FR 51301](#), August 3, 2023). NMFS published notification of a 3 percent fee for cost recovery under the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands Crab Rationalization Program for the 2023/2024 crab fishing year.
- Effective **September 7, 2023**, NMFS issued a final rule to implement the Pacific Cod Trawl Cooperative Program (PCTC Program, 88 FR 53704, 8/8/2023) and published a correction on August 22, 2023 (88 FR 57009).
- On **September 7, 2023**, NMFS published a notice of decision announcing that NMFS approved Amendment 53 to the Fishery Management Plan for Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands King and Tanner Crabs to implement the snow crab rebuilding plan (88 FR 61477).
- **Attachment 1** provides additional detail.

### Inseason Management Report

**Attachment 2** provides additional detail.

### PCTC Program Implementation

Effective September 7, 2023, NMFS issued a final rule to implement the PCTC Program ([88 FR 53704](#), August 8, 2023). Alaska Regional Office staff have been busy sending out Official Record summaries to participants as well as fielding questions and data requests from the public. Staff presented two workshops to the public on the elements of the program, one in Seattle and one webinar-based on September 20 and September 27, 2023. Additional information about the PCTC Program and upcoming deadlines is available on the [Alaska Region website](#):

- October 10: Applications for Quota Share are due to NMFS



- October 15: Aleutian Island communities must notify NMFS they intend to process Pacific cod for the 2024 fishing season
- November 1: Applications for Cooperative Quota are due to NMFS
- December 31: Inter-cooperative Agreements are due to NMFS

### **ANPR Control Date**

On August 1, 2023, at the request of the North Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council), NMFS published an advance notice of proposed rulemaking to announced a control date of August 1, 2023, that may be used to determine future participation in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands (BSAI) Pacific cod fishery by license limitation program (LLP) license holders, vessel owners and vessel operators of catcher/processors (C/Ps), and vessel owners and vessel operators of catcher vessels (C/Vs) greater than or equal to 60 ft (18.3 meters (m)) length overall (LOA), who participate in Federal groundfish fisheries with pot gear in the BSAI ([88 FR 50097](#)). The document informed interested parties that the Council is considering a future action that may affect or limit the number of participants in this fishery and that participants should locate and preserve all fishing related documents. Comments are requested by October 2, 2023.

### **Halibut Abundance Indices**

On September 25, 2023, the Alaska Fisheries Science Center (AFSC) provided the Eastern Bering Sea (EBS) shelf trawl survey estimate of halibut abundance (NMFS EBS index). NMFS expects a final rule implementing Amendment 123 to the BSAI FMP to be effective prior to the start of fishing for the 2024 season. The EBS index will be used annually to determine the halibut prohibited species catch (PSC) limit that will apply to the Amendment 80 sector according to proposed Table 58 to Part 679. The 2023 Eastern Bering Sea shelf trawl survey index estimate of halibut abundance is 170,238 mt and is above the threshold level of 150,000 mt in the high abundance state. See the attached memorandum. NMFS also sent a letter to the International Pacific Halibut Commission requesting their halibut abundance index before December 1, 2023.

### **NEPA Changes**

The Fiscal Responsibility Act (FRA), signed into law on June 3, 2023, included changes to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). The Council on Environmental Quality published a proposed rule to add those changes together with other, more extensive revisions to the NEPA implementing regulations (88 FR 49924, July 31, 2023). The public comment period closed on September 29, 2023, and a final rule is expected to be published mid 2024. However, the specific changes to NEPA included in the FRA were effective immediately upon signing. Included in the FRA changes are a one year time limit for the completion of environmental assessments (EA) and a two year time limit for the completion of environmental impact statements (EIS). The FRA also stipulated page limits for EAs (75 pages) and EISs (150 pages or 300 pages for a complex EIS). No waiver opportunities are available for the page or time limits. The CEQ and NMFS are currently developing guidance for implementing the immediate FRA changes to NEPA. Federal agencies are expected to be granted a year following the publication of the final rule to develop implementation guidance for the rest of the revisions to the NEPA implementing regulations.

**Attachment 3** provides additional detail.

### **Cook Inlet Salmon**

NMFS is developing a Secretarial Amendment to the Fishery Management Plan for the Salmon Fisheries in the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) Off Alaska (Salmon FMP). The FMP amendment under development would establish Federal management for the salmon fisheries in the Federal (EEZ) waters of upper Cook Inlet. NMFS will publish a notice that the FMP amendment is available, as required by MSA 304(c)(4)(B), and proposed regulations in the **Federal Register** for a 60-day public comment period, consistent with MSA 304(c)(6). The Council will be invited to submit comments and recommendations on the FMP amendment and proposed regulations during the public comment period. The public comment period will overlap with the December 2023 Council meeting and NMFS will provide an overview of the proposed Amendment and implementing regulations to the Council at that time.

### **Wildfish Conservancy v. Quan - Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the Incidental Take Statement (ITS) for Southeast Alaska Salmon Fisheries**

Based on guidance from the Department of Justice, NMFS is planning to prepare an EIS to analyze the impacts of alternatives related to NMFS's issuance of an ITS for species listed as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) affected by salmon fisheries in Southeast Alaska (SEAK) that are managed consistent with the provisions of the 2019 Pacific Salmon Treaty (PST) Agreement. NMFS plans to publish a Notice of Intent and start the scoping process as soon as possible.

In 2020, the Wild Fish Conservancy (WFC), a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization, filed a lawsuit in the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Washington challenging the 2019 BiOp (*Wild Fish Conservancy v. Quan*). WFC alleged NMFS violated the ESA and NEPA. On August 8, 2022, the district court found that NMFS violated both the ESA and NEPA. With respect to the ESA, the court determined the prey increase program lacked specificity and deadlines or otherwise enforceable obligations and was not subject to agency control or reasonably certain to occur. The court also concluded that NMFS failed to evaluate the effects of the prey increase program on ESA-listed Chinook salmon.

With respect to NEPA, the court concluded NMFS failed to conduct NEPA analyses for the issuance of the ITS exempting take of ESA-listed species associated with the SEAK salmon fisheries considered in the 2019 BiOp. The court also concluded that NMFS failed to conduct adequate NEPA analysis for the adoption of the prey increase program. The court remanded to the agency to address its conclusions regarding the ESA and NEPA deficiencies.

As part of its effort to address the court's orders on remand, NMFS intends to conduct an ESA Section 7 consultation and prepare two EISs. This EIS would respond specifically to the court order with respect to the stated failure to prepare an analysis pursuant to NEPA for the issuance of the ITS for the SEAK salmon fisheries. The EIS will analyze the effects of a reasonable range of alternatives for the issuance of an ITS to exempt otherwise prohibited take of ESA-listed species in the SEAK salmon fisheries under the 2019 PST Agreement. NMFS is also preparing a separate EIS for the expenditure of Federal funding to provide additional prey for SRKW (88 FR 54301, August 10, 2023).

### **Integrated Fisheries Application**

The Integrated Fisheries Application (IFA) has seen progress since last discussed, most notably including the implementation of a fisheries permits application tracking system for internal NMFS staff. Additionally, there is steady development progress leading up to the rollout of the new Pacific Cod Trawl Cooperative (PCTC) program. PCTC and most of the underlying technical functions and processes to support this new program will be housed in the IFA system. Project work is also planned over the next 6-9 months to incorporate processes for other programs, such as Rockfish and Amendment 80.

### **Crab Rationalization Crew Quota Share**

Work has continued toward further analysis and administration of active participation requirements for Crew Quota Share holders within the BSAI CR program. For the 2023/24 crab season, NMFS is required by existing regulations to carry out withholding or revocation actions based on lack of meeting participation requirements.

NMFS is aware of 28 active participation actions for the 2023/24 season, consisting of 14 participants that applied for IFQ and 14 that did not apply for annual IFQ. Of the 14 participants that applied for annual IFQ and did not meet active participation requirements, there are 7 IFQ withholdings (will not lose QS this year) and 7 revocations (will lose QS). The 14 participants that filed a timely application had the opportunity to provide additional qualifying active participation evidence to NMFS during a 30 day evidentiary period, and furthermore are eligible to appeal the agency's decision during an additional 45 day appeal period explained in Initial Administrative Determination letters sent to the affected participants.

Of the remaining 14 participants that did not timely apply for IFQ, 13 are due for revocation of QS, and 1 is a withholding of IFQ. NMFS extended the process for providing for evidentiary and appeal periods related to active participation requirements to these participants as well, however, please note the additional factor of failure to file an annual application also applies to these individuals.

### **Maximum Retainable Amount (MRA) Potential Regulatory Changes**

We have recognized some challenges with current regulations governing MRAs and are looking at changes to improve clarity, efficiency, and effectiveness. NMFS is preparing a discussion paper which includes the following clarifications:

- Calculate MRAs on a mothership taking deliveries of unsorted codends. Since a catcher vessel does not know the catch composition prior to delivering an unsorted codend to a mothership the MRA needs to be calculated on the mothership.
- Calculate MRAs under different management programs (open access, Amendment 80, AFA, CDQ, etc.). Some vessels participate in several management programs and each program has different species that are open for directed fishing. Therefore MRAs are calculated separately for each management program. However, when a CP is also acting as a mothership for the same management programs the calculation may be combined for the CP and the mothership MRA.
- Update the regulations pursuant to section 305(i)(1)(B)(iv) of the MSA (previously listed in the NMFS management report for the February 2023 Council meeting). Harvest of Amendment 80 groundfish species under the CDQ program, including AFA vessels, can be

regulated in a manner no more restrictive than harvest of those same species under the Amendment 80 Program, i.e., vessels should be subject to the same MRA calculation regulations.

### **eLandings HTML Rollout**

The eLandings team is wrapping up a multiyear project to replace the aging eLandings web interface that is used by shoreside processors to enter and submit landings data. After extensive development, internal testing, and beta testing by industry users, we have begun migrating users to the new interface. At this time, all shoreside processor production reports and federal landing reports are being completed and submitted through the new interface. We expect to have all federal fisheries reporting through eLandings migrated to the new interface before Jan 1, 2024. Our next long term goal will be to replace the electronic reporting interface for at-sea users. We intend to leverage advances in technology and increased internet availability at sea to provide an updated interface for any vessel participating in federal fisheries to electronically report their landing, production, and/or logbook information. We will also continue to support development of both internal and third party logbook interfaces. As part of that support, we have received several requests to move to a fully electronic logbook, which would allow digital signatures and would not require printing aboard the vessel. We will begin discussions with stakeholders and partner agencies on this topic.

### **Crab Guide**

The monitoring team has published a guide for the identification of crab species in Alaska. The guide has descriptions and photos of all Alaska crab species with instructions for identifying them in English, Spanish, and Tagalog. It was designed to facilitate better education to vessel operators and processing plant personnel when accounting for catch of crab. It can be viewed and downloaded at: <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/alaska/sustainable-fisheries/bering-sea-and-aleutian-islands-bsai-crab-fisheries> under “Crab Species Guide”

### **2024 Proposed List of Fisheries under the Marine Mammal Protection Act**

The 2024 proposed Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) List of Fisheries published in the *Federal Register* on September 13 (88 FR 62748). The MMPA requires NOAA Fisheries to publish an annual list of commercial fisheries and classify each fishery based on whether it has frequent (Category I), occasional (Category II), or remote likelihood (Category III) of incidental mortality and serious injury (M/SI) of marine mammals. The classification approach is based on comparison of the rate of M/SI of marine mammals due to commercial fishing operations relative to the potential biological removal (PBR) level for each marine mammal stock. PBR is the maximum number of animals, not including natural mortalities, that may be removed from a marine mammal stock, while allowing that stock to reach or maintain its optimum sustainable population

Fisheries in all categories have reporting requirements under MMPA, however, Category I and II fisheries have additional requirements for vessel/gear owners under the MMPA. These include enrollment in the Marine Mammal Authorization Program, accommodation of observers upon request, and compliance with any applicable Take Reduction Teams (TRT) that NMFS may develop. There are no differences in these requirements between Category I and Category II fisheries, only in how NMFS may evaluate their priorities for fishery observation and TRTs.

In 2022, stock structures for North Pacific humpback whale stocks and the Southeast Alaska harbor porpoise stock were revised. Three stocks of North Pacific humpback whale were replaced by five, and the single Southeast Alaska harbor porpoise stock was split into three. These revisions to the stock structures triggered changes to the List of Fisheries for 2024 for two fisheries in Alaska, described in the proposed rule:

- Category II AK Southeast salmon drift gillnet fishery to a Category I fishery based on M/SI of the Southern Southeast Alaska inland waters stock of harbor porpoise estimated at 121 percent of its PBR level.
- Category II AK Bering Sea, Aleutian Islands Pacific cod pot fishery to a Category III fishery based on a reduction of M/SI of humpback whales to 6 percent of its PBR.

The proposed rule can be found [here](#). NMFS is accepting comments on the 2024 proposed List of Fisheries through October 13, 2023.

NMFS Alaska Region has been in contact with the Southeast Alaska Fishermen's Alliance (SEAFSA) regarding publication of the proposed rule. SEAFSA has communicated with their members about the proposed change for the SE drift gillnet fishery from a Category II fishery to a Category I fishery. They have informed members that there will be no immediate change with this designation change, and that the possibility exists for a Harbor Porpoise TRT to be formed in the future. NMFS expects that new data collected through the Alaska Marine Mammal Observer Program (AMMOP) will help inform the need for a Harbor Porpoise TRT. NMFS Alaska Region will continue outreach to the AK Southeast salmon drift gillnet fishery this fall by presenting at the November 2023 Southeast Alaska drift gillnet task force meeting to be held in Wrangell, as well as producing a set of FAQs to be published on our website and/or distributed by mailer. NMFS will coordinate with SEAFSA and United Southeast Alaska Gillnetters as these plans move forward, to provide opportunities for review of any outreach materials intended for the fleet.

### **North Pacific Right Whale 12-month Finding**

The 12-month finding on a petition to revise NP right whale critical habitat was published in the Federal Register on September 26, 2023. NMFS concluded that a revision to critical habitat is warranted and outlined how we intend to proceed. The following steps will be taken to revise critical habitat: 1) analyze acoustic data collected in areas recommended by the petitioners and in currently designated critical habitat; 2) assess spatial and temporal patterns of prey species in conjunction with oceanographic information; 3) analyze sightings data for evidence of feeding behavior; 4) synthesize available acoustics data, trends in zooplankton, and sightings data to identify areas that meet the definition of critical habitat; 5) section 4(b)(2) impacts analysis; 6) develop proposed rule for public comment. For more information, see our [web story](#).

### **Killer Whale Incidental Catches in Alaska**

NMFS is analyzing data collected from killer whale incidental catches in Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands groundfish trawl fisheries and in its annual longline survey for sablefish and groundfish this year. See the Agency Statement available at: <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/agency-statement/response-recent-reports-killer-whale-incident-catches-alaska>.



## **Alaska Aquaculture Opportunity Areas Request for Information**

As a follow-up to our June 1, 2023 announcement beginning the process to identify [Aquaculture Opportunity Areas \(AOAs\) in Alaska](#) state waters, in partnership with the State of Alaska, NMFS is preparing a Request for Information to be published in the Federal Register this Fall. NMFS will invite public comment on the identification of study areas, data, and analyses relevant to identifying AOAs in Alaska state waters (see attached flier). The notice will be open for 60-days.

We look forward to further engaging with the Council on this process. For more information on the AOA identification process in Alaska visit the [AK AOA webpage](#) and [FAQ page](#). If you have questions, please contact the Alaska Regional Office's Aquaculture Coordinator Alicia Bishop at [Alicia.Bishop@noaa.gov](mailto:Alicia.Bishop@noaa.gov).

## **Tribal Relations Update**

### *Key Tribal Engagements*

NMFS recently participated in the following tribal engagements:

1. On July 18-20, 2023, participation in a federal and state agency river tour provided by the Tanana Chiefs Conference focused on the lower Yukon River region, including visits to the Native villages of Shageluk, Grayling, Anvik, and Holy Cross. It was a good opportunity for positive engagement with Alaska Native tribes that are very interested in salmon bycatch issues, and we provided outreach materials regarding salmon bycatch during the visit.
2. On August 28-September 1, presented "NOAA Hour" at the Southeast Alaska Tribal Environmental Forum, which highlighted NOAA/Tribal Collaborative opportunities such as upcoming NOAA grant funding, Aquaculture Opportunity Areas, eDNA monitoring, and our nationwide Equity & Environmental Justice Strategy.
3. On September 20-22, presented at the Archipelago Rural Regional Leadership Forum on NOAA's nationwide Equity & Environmental Justice Strategy, Federal Tribal funding opportunities, and Alaska Aquaculture Opportunity Areas.
4. On September 23, 2023, participated in the Belugas Count celebrating 50 years of the ESA on Dena'ina Lands near Anchorage.
5. On September 18, 2023, traveled to Savoonga with Kim Damon-Randall, Teri Rowles, John Bengston (AFSC) and AKR Protected Resources staff to meet separately with Savoonga IRA Council President Ben Pungowiyi and IRA Board and AEWK Commissioner John Waghiyi, Jr. as well as conduct a public meeting with the Native Village of Savoonga regarding 1) tribal concerns and experiences with whales, porpoises, seals, and sea lions; 2) the Endangered Species Act; 3) the Marine Mammal Protection Act; and 4) subsistence use of seals and whales. On the same day, met with Tom Gray, ABWC Chairman and conducted a Nome community meeting with King Island Native Community, Native Village of Solomon, Native Village of Council, Nome Eskimo Community, and IPcOMM Alaska Executive Director, Megan Onders.
6. On September 19, 2023, held a Meet & Greet with Kawerak, Inc. to listen and learn via an open conversation regarding: 1) tribal concerns and experiences with whales, porpoises, seals, and sea lions; 2) the Endangered Species Act; 3) the Marine Mammal Protection Act; and 4) subsistence use of seals and whales as well as how our staff can better coordinate with the tribal organization on these topics.

7. On September 24, 2023, participated in the Belugas Count celebrating 50 years of the ESA with the Native Village of Tyonek.

#### *Tribal Engagement Session Ahead of October Council Meeting*

On September 6, 2023, AKR and the NPFMC held a tribal engagement session focused on October Council meeting fisheries actions. This tribal session was the second tribal engagement session of the year but the first jointly hosted by an Alaska Native Tribe, the Aleut Community of St. Paul Island (ACSPI). Before discussing October Council meeting agenda items, a presentation on the Council process, who makes up the Council, and how to engage in the Council process was given. This was followed by a high level overview of all October Council meeting agenda items and a more in depth discussion on next steps for the LKTK protocols and on ramps, the next Ecosystem Committee engagement, and a more in-depth overview of the Chum bycatch agenda item. Following discussion of these topics was an opportunity for questions and discussion and airing of any concerns. Tribal questions revolved around how to comment on specific agenda items, what information sources Council members use in making decisions (ie. public comments received regarding NMFS rulemaking, testimony, written comments, analyses, public meetings, tribal consultations, etc.) and whether any of these information sources are given a greater weight. *There were also numerous comments made on the dire food safety issue facing western Alaska communities due to low salmon returns. It was also specifically stated that while food safety is a huge concern among western Alaskan Native communities, the loss of cultural opportunities and sharing of knowledge to younger generations is as great, or of greater concern, with little to no salmon fishing opportunities.* Lastly, a conversation around research priorities occurred with the following topics identified:

- Prioritizing salmon genetics information, focusing on better and more timely information
- Community and cultural impacts of loss/reduction of salmon abundance and associated prohibition of fishing activities
- Chum and their ecological role
- All of the above should be done in collaboration with tribal communities

#### *Tribal Consultation Invitations*

NMFS AKR provided four invitations to consult with Alaska Native Tribes, Corporations, and Organizations that represent Tribal Governments since the June Council meeting.

1. See *Tribal Newsletter* section below for more information.

In late 2022, the Department of Commerce signed the Joint Secretarial Order on Fulfilling the Trust Responsibility to Indian Tribes in Stewardship of Federal Lands and Waters (JSO 3403)

2. JSO 3403 is meant to ensure that the agencies within the DOC, DOI, and USDA are managing Federal lands and waters in a manner that seeks to protect the treaty, religious subsistence, and cultural interests of federally recognized Indian Tribes; that such management is consistent with the nation-to-nation relationship between the United States and federally recognized Indian Tribes; and that such management fulfills the United States' unique trust obligation to federally recognized Indian Tribes and their citizens.
  - a. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) is hosting the consultations and engagement sessions on advancing co-stewardship as outlined in the [Joint Secretarial Order 3403](#) on:
    - i. October 3, 2023, 9:00-11:00 AM AKT. Please register [here](#) to join



- ii. October 4, 2023, 10:00-12:00 PM AKT. Please register [here](#) to join
- iii. October 13, 2023, 11:00-1:00 PM AKT. Please register [here](#) to join
- b. Public comment is due **November 9, 2023**. Please send written submissions to Becky Cruz Lizama, NOAA Senior Tribal Liaison, at [OLIA.Tribal@noaa.gov](mailto:OLIA.Tribal@noaa.gov), and identify submissions as “Advancing Co stewardship Consultation/Engagement.”

### *Tribal Consultation*

NMFS AKR participated in one Tribal Consultation.

1. On July 28, 2023, tribal consultation occurred with the Native Village of Eklutna on the Eklutna River Restoration and Hydroelectric Project.
2. On August 16, 2023, NMFS AKR conducted local outreach to Alaska Native Tribes, Corporations, and Organizations by including the NOAA Nationwide Tribal Co-stewardship Consultations on Joint Secretarial Order 3403 in the October Tribal Newsletter released on August 16, 2023.
  - a. NMFS AKR received two tribal concerns regarding the headquarters tribal consultation dates that overlapped with the October Council meeting
    - i. Per discussion with NOAA Headquarters, a third tribal consultation webinar was offered on October 13, 2023 and the public comment period extended to November 9, 2023 (30 days from the last tribal consultation date)

### *Tribal Newsletter*

NMFS released the [October Edition of our Tribal Newsletter](#) on August 16, 2023. The newsletter serves as an information source for NOAA Fisheries contacts, job postings, grants, educational opportunities available throughout Alaska, and upcoming Council meetings and issues. This month’s newsletter included:

1. C1: BSAI crab harvest specifications (Yearly Report)
  - a. Tribal consultation was offered in May 2023 for this action item; no tribal requests for consultation were received
2. C2: Observer 2024 Annual Deployment Plan (Yearly Report)
  - a. Tribal consultation was offered in May 2023 for this action item; no tribal requests for consultation were received
3. C3: BBRKC closure areas (Initial Review)
  - a. Tribal consultation was offered in May 2023 for this action item; no tribal requests for consultation were received
4. C3: BSAI/GOA Groundfish Proposed Specifications (Yearly Specifications)
  - a. Tribal consultation was offered for this action item in August 2023; no tribal requests for consultation were received
5. C4: Chum Salmon Bycatch (Preliminary Review)
  - a. Tribal consultation was offered for this action item. This action was consulted on and continues to be open for consultation to interested Tribes
6. C5: Area 4 Vessel Use Caps (Initial Review)
  - a. Tribal consultation was offered for this action item in August 2023; no tribal requests for consultation were received
7. C6: Crab facility use caps (Initial Review)
  - a. Tribal consultation was offered for this action item in August 2023; no tribal requests for consultation were received

For further information on NMFS Sustainable Fisheries tribal engagement activities please contact Kelly Cates at [kelly.cates@noaa.gov](mailto:kelly.cates@noaa.gov).

For further information on NMFS Alaska Region tribal consultations please contact Amilee Wilson at [amilee.wilson@noaa.gov](mailto:amilee.wilson@noaa.gov) or 907-723-7099.

### **Personnel Changes**

We are very sad to report that our friend and colleague **Steve Lewis** passed away on Saturday, September 2, 2023, after an intense battle with cancer. Steve started working for AKR in 1998 and he was a very dedicated public servant and had an incredible work ethic. He was an analytical bedrock for AKR, serving as our principal GIS coordinator and spatial analyst and providing the foundation for innumerable analyses related to sustainable fishery management, protected species, and habitat conservation. He mentored coworkers and students and brought a lot of intensity and creativity to his work. Steve conceptualized and developed the Catch-in-Areas database that AKR has relied upon for many years to understand the spatial distribution of fisheries catches and evaluate impacts of new management measures, and he was always refining and improving it. He also pioneered the extensive ShoreZone database and web application that allows users to view data and photographs of coastal geomorphology and habitat features across almost the entire Alaska coastline. He worked tirelessly to refine GIS shoreline data to allow for better spatial resolution of fishery management areas and pinniped haulouts and rookeries. He received a number of awards from ESRI, the preeminent GIS software company, for his innovative work.

Steve also served the public in other ways. He was a proud member of the Alaska National Guard where he flew Blackhawk helicopters, including service in the war in Iraq. Steve was the founding member of Juneau Mountain Rescue and proudly served as a team leader and committed volunteer for many years. He was also co-owner of The Gym, a Juneau small business.

### ***Sustainable Fisheries New Hires***

We are pleased to report that there are a number of new additions to the Sustainable Fisheries Division (SFD). In addition to the following announcements, **Attachment 4** includes our revised organizational chart.

**Joel Kraski** joined the Sustainable Fisheries Division (SFD), Monitoring branch team on July 31, 2023. Joel worked with us on a Lantern detail assignment from December through February 2023 assisting with vessel monitoring plan approvals and implementation of Trawl Electronic Monitoring (EM). Joel will continue this work to implement EM and work on Cook Inlet salmon monitoring from our Anchorage office. He will also assist with scale and Catch Monitoring and Control Plan inspections/approvals. Joel has a degree in Marine Biology from the University of Oregon. He has been with the AFSC's Fisheries Monitoring and Analysis Division (FMA, aka the Observer Program) in Anchorage since 2020. Prior to that he worked for Saltwater, Inc. as a fisheries observer off Alaska and the West Coast.

**Andrew Olson** joined the SFD Catch Shares branch in Juneau on August 28, 2023. Andrew has a Master of Science degree in Fisheries Science from the University of Alaska Fairbanks and 14

years of experience managing and researching groundfish and shellfish fisheries in Southeast Alaska with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game. Andrew has a strong understanding of the biology for a variety of species, quantitative experience in utilizing the best data available to make informed management decisions, and experience leading a team of professional staff and experts. He has honed his communication skills working with stakeholders of varying backgrounds, including presenting and negotiating policy decisions at the Alaska Board of Fisheries. He is highly motivated and passionate about sustainably managing our fisheries and is continuously searching for ways to progress and apply new research and management strategies.

**Amanda Oliver** joined SFD as our Administrative Assistant on September 11, 2023. Amanda has a degree in Biology from Bowling Green State University and has worked for Douglas Island Pink and Chum (DIPAC) since 2019. She has served in several administrative and managerial roles at DIPAC including: administrative specialist; visitor center supervisor overseeing tour operations; and the tourism & education manager. Prior to that she worked for the Juneau School District as a substitute teacher and special education educator. Amanda brings strong administrative experience, excellent organizational skills, and passion for assisting coworkers and creating a welcoming work environment.

**Doug Shaftel** joined SFD as a Fishery Management Specialist on September 11, 2023. He is working in the Catch Shares branch out of the Anchorage office. Doug brings a wealth of diverse experiences to our team. He has a Master of Advanced Studies degree in marine biodiversity and conservation from Scripps Institution of Oceanography, where he studied climate change impacts on the marine environment and coastal communities. He just completed an Alaska Sea Grant fellowship, during which he worked with the Alaska Mariculture Alliance. Prior to receiving his Master's, Doug was an attorney for many years representing state and local government in real estate, land use, and environmental issues.

**Adam Zaleski** joined SFD, Inseason branch as a Fishery Management Specialist. He started with the Alaska Region in Juneau on September 25, 2023. Adam has worked as a Research Manager at DIPAC salmon hatchery since 2015. He worked on database management, catch accounting, return forecasting, and direct supervision of the Evaluations and Lab department. He also worked in Alaska fisheries as a groundfish observer after his undergraduate degree. Adam has a Master of Science degree in Fisheries from the University of Alaska Fairbanks studying the endangered western population of Steller sea lions.

### ***Habitat Conservation New Hires***

**Cathy Coon** joined the Habitat Conservation Division in Anchorage on July 19th, 2023. Cathy joined NOAA in July 2023. She brings with her a passion for ocean sustainability. She served within the Department of Interior's Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) as both an advisor on science & policy with an emphasis on Arctic issues and as branch chief for the Alaska Environmental Sciences Program. Prior to Federal service worked for the North Pacific Fishery Management Council on Essential Fish Habitat issues. Cathy has a degree in biology from the University of Arizona and a masters degree from the University of Alaska Fairbanks College of Fisheries and Ocean Sciences. She originally came to Alaska as a fishery observer!

**Mason Smith** joined HCD in Juneau on July 31, 2023. Mason earned a PhD in Geosciences from Florida Atlantic University in 2022. He brings valuable expertise in spatial analysis, GIS, habitat conservation, and fishery management, and practical experience working on a variety of issues related to Alaska groundfish and crab fisheries as a Fishery Management Specialist with AKR SFD since 2021. He has published recent peer reviewed journal articles on applications of species distribution and ecosystem models to address management concerns related to climate change effects on fish habitat.

**Lucas (Luke) Byker** joined HCD in Anchorage on August 14th, 2023. Luke brings a broad experience in habitat conservation and policy from his work with the USFWS, Army Corps of Engineers, and the Alaska Department of Fish and Game. His experience with Pacific salmon fills an expertise that we have long needed. Prior to his fish and wildlife conservation work, Luke was a Special Operations Communications Team Lead in the U.S. Army. Luke has a Master of Science in Environmental Policy and Management and Bachelor of Science in Environmental Science, focusing on Fish and Wildlife Management, from the American Military University, Charles Town, WV. He has additional education from the University of Alaska-Southeast in Applied Science in Fisheries Technology.

**Meggie Stogner** joined HCD and PRD in Juneau on August 28, 2023 as an administrative assistant. Meggie holds a BA in Psychology from the University of Louisville. She worked for the Council on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault within the Department of Public Safety for the past eight years as a Program Coordinator. Some of her notable past work includes leading a federally funded, COVID relief effort to improve sexual assault response across Alaska, focusing on providing people in rural and remote areas access to necessary medical and legal services. She has also worked as an Assistant Residential Director for Juneau Alliance for Mental Health, Inc.

**Mallarie Yeager** joined HCD in Juneau on September 11, 2023. Mallarie earned a PhD in Ecology from Northeastern University in 2021. She brings valuable expertise to NMFS in quantitative fisheries ecology with practical interdisciplinary experience. Her most recent works as a postdoctoral fellow with UC Santa Cruz include developing model derived network connectivity metrics to assess marine protected areas off California, using nested bio-physical, species distribution, and fleet dynamics modeling.