



**UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE  
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration**

*National Marine Fisheries Service*

*P.O. Box 21668*

*Juneau, Alaska 99802-1668*

December 5, 2007

Clarence Pautzke, Executive Director  
North Pacific Research Board  
1007 West 3rd Avenue, Suite 100  
Anchorage, Alaska 99501

Dear Clarence,

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) reviewed the North Pacific Research Board (NPRB) 2008 request for proposals and would like to suggest a method for refining the call for habitat surveys in the Bering Sea Canyons before NPRB funds any such proposals. The request for proposals allocates \$350,000 for fish habitat mapping in the Northern Bering Sea Research Area and also seeks proposals for habitat mapping in the canyons as part of the \$400,000 allocated for cooperative research with industry. Specifically, topic 4.a.vi reads as follows:

vi. Habitat mapping

NPRB is seeking cooperative proposals that will undertake comprehensive surveys of habitat types in the Bering Sea canyons. Applicants should consult NPRB project 615 for information on the recent Marine Habitat Mapping Technology Workshop for Alaska.

The Bering Sea canyons have been a subject of considerable management interest from the North Pacific Fishery Management Council. A proposal to identify Bering Sea canyons as a Habitat Area of Particular Concern was submitted to the Council in 2004 and a white paper, entitled "A Review of Scientific Information Related to Bering Sea Canyons and Skate Nursery Areas", was produced by the Alaska Fisheries Science Center in 2006 at the Council's request to gather relevant scientific information into one document. The exploratory cruise conducted by Greenpeace in 2007 showed that while there are diverse habitats in the Zhemchug and Pribilof Canyons, a more systematic survey is needed. Several sources of information would be extremely useful to any effort to survey these canyons. Multibeam data collected in 2006 and 2007 by the R/V Healy has not yet been published and is still being processed. These data could provide the ability to target study sites and focus on areas of particular interest rather than attempting to randomly sample or map the entirety of the canyons.


It may be preferable to hold a workshop to prioritize the questions to be answered before funding cooperative research on the Bering Sea canyons. Given the vast size of Pribilof and Zhemchug Canyons, consulting with managers, scientists, industry, and other stakeholders may be in order to ascertain the most relevant questions to address. If the goal is to examine areas vulnerable to fishing effects, then the research may focus on the upper canyons. Attempting to map the entire canyons may be outside the scope of the amount of funds available.



A project utilizing the mapping techniques most applicable to answering the identified questions would be the most beneficial. The proceedings for the Marine Habitat Mapping Technology Workshop for Alaska, referenced in your call for proposals, have not been yet published, but it may be possible to consult with experts in that field to provide input on the most feasible methods to map the canyons.

NMFS would be happy to assist NPRB in conducting a workshop to identify the relevant research questions and guide future priorities for research projects. Please contact John Olson at 907-271-1508 if you would like to pursue this idea.

Sincerely,

  
*for* James W. Balsiger  
Administrator, Alaska Region

cc: Chris Oliver, North Pacific Fishery Management Council  
Doug Demaster, Alaska Fisheries Science Center