

Alaska Marine Ecosystem Forum

MEETING SUMMARY

June 10, 2009, 1-4 pm

Conference room, Department of Environmental Conservation, Anchorage, AK

The following member agencies attended the meeting. Underlined participants represented their agency.

Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC)

Larry Hartig, Commissioner
Betty Schorr, Kristin Ryan, Ira Rosen

Department of Fish and Game (DFG)

Stefanie Moreland, Extended Jurisdiction
Program Manager

Department of Natural Resources (DNR)

Samantha Carroll, Special Assistant

North Pacific Fishery Management Council (NPFMC)

Eric Olson, Chair
Chris Oliver, Diana Evans

National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries)

Jon Kurland, Acting Deputy Regional
Administrator
John Olson

Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS)

Greg Balogh

National Park Service (NPS)

Deb Cooper

Bureau of Land Management (BLM)

James Moore, NEPA Coordinator, Anchorage
Field Office

Minerals Management Service (MMS)

Cathy Coon, Marine Biologist, Environmental
Studies Program

Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)

Marcia Combes, Director, Alaska Operations
Officer

17th Coast Guard District (CG)

CPT James Robertson, Anchorage

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (COE)

Brent Walters

Other participants:

US Geological Survey
University of Alaska, Fairbanks
Alaska Sea Grant

Mark Shasby
Keith Criddle
Paula Cullenberg

Introductions

Larry Hartig, as Chair of the AMEF, opened the meeting and attendees introduced themselves. At the request of the group, Mr Hartig rearranged the agenda to begin with the discussion of marine protected areas.

Nomination of Alaska sites to the national system of marine protected areas (MPAs)

Mr Oliver prefaced the discussion by explaining that the national MPA framework was initiated by executive order (EO), signed by President Clinton in 2000. The directive was for NOAA to establish a national network of MPAs. Provisions in the EO require agencies to “avoid harm to natural and cultural resources that are protected by an MPA” that is identified on the national network. Mr Kurland noted that a MPA center has been set up within NOAA to accomplish this task. A rolling nomination process is in place for adding MPAs to the national registry, and sites can be nominated by the managing entity.

An initial listing process has occurred for Alaska, and four areas are now included on the national network: Glacier Bay, the Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge, the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, and the Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge. The NPFMC has been contacted by NMFS with a draft list of MPAs where fishery management closures have been put in place, to be nominated for the national registry, formally initiating a consultation process between the agencies. The Council intends to evaluate the draft list relative to the MPA criteria, and discuss further action at the December 2009 Council meeting. The Council’s handout shows a map of some of the fishery closures in place in Alaska. The Council has concerns about nominating fishery closures to the national network, partly because of the proviso in the EO requiring that agencies must avoid harm to the MPAs, which seems to be an ill-defined standard. Additionally, the time, area, and gear-specific fishery closures that are managed by the Council are not necessarily permanent closures, and the Council is concerned that registering the closures on the national MPA network may limit the Council’s flexibility in the future should they wish to remove or alter the closure provisions.

With respect to the initial four MPA sites, Ms Moreland noted that ADFG and DNR wrote letters to NMFS opposing the nominations (attached). Three of the nominated areas include lands owned and managed by the State of Alaska, and the State objected to the fact that the nomination of these areas to a national registry did not include a public process in Alaska. Ms Moreland asked what the process is for providing appropriate feedback to the State. Mr Kurland responded that his understanding was that the proposed nominations were published in the Federal Register, providing an opportunity for public comment, but that if the proposed sites meet the MPA criteria, and are nominated by the managing entity, it was likely that the sites would in fact be accepted.

The group discussed what it means for an area to be listed as an MPA on the national registry. Once it is listed, is it still at the discretion of the managing entity to remove the site from the list, or to change management measures associated with the area? MPA center representatives have made various presentations to Federal agencies in Alaska, and stated that the intent of the registry is not to impose management measures. Mr Kurland suggested that the purpose of the national registry was to provide more collaboration on management strategies, education, and outreach for the nationally registered MPAs, rather than to define management policy or restrictions associated with the nationally registered areas. However, the process for removing or changing an MPA site once it is listed in the registry did not seem to be clear.

The group discussed whether any other agencies are planning to nominate sites to the national network. Mr Balogh noted that the USFWS had not had internal discussion about nominating areas, but some candidate areas might be the northwestern portion of the area designated as Steller’s eider critical habitat, and an area in eastern Norton Sound, west of Besboro Island, which is also a subset of critical habitat. Ms

Cooper also noted that the NPS had not had specific discussions about nominating areas, but Katmai National Park would be the most likely candidate, of the Alaska parks.

The group decided to continue discussion of this agenda item at a future meeting, and in the meantime to pursue answers to the following questions, raised with respect to the MPA nomination process:

- What is the process for listing and delisting MPAs from the national registry. Does this occur at the discretion of the managing entity?
- How does public comment on proposed nomination sites influence the nomination process?
- If proposed MPA sites include State waters or land, is there a public process for consulting with State managing entities?
- Further clarification is needed on the EO provision to “avoid harm to natural and cultural resources that are protected by an MPA”. MPAs may be set up to offer protection to some but not all of the resources within a geographical area. Does the provision relate the harm avoidance provision to the managing entity’s objectives for the MPA? What is threshold at which a resource is harmed?
- How are agencies planning to use the national MPA network? What are the implications of an MPA being listed on the national network?

Agency briefings

Each agency present at the meeting gave a brief update on activities of interest with respect to the Aleutian Islands or other Alaska marine ecosystems. Some agencies provided handouts, which are attached to this summary.

Cathy Coon, MMS (handout attached)

Ms Coon reported on the MMS environmental studies program, and provided a handout of 2009 research projects. The budget for this year is \$12 million for marine research, and MMS works with the State, other Federal agencies, and the university to accomplish the research. Funded studies include polar bear research, the Beaufort Sea fish survey, and oil spill impact studies. An annual study plan comes out each November, and nominations are accepted for all different types of research. The agency is looking toward funding broader studies that address ecosystem management, for example combining species-specific research with the tracking of physical oceanographic parameters in one field study.

Another source of research funding is the SEAPP program. Alaska has been awarded \$75million in funding over the next two years. MMS is working in partnership with DNR. Five projects have been funded already, and 39 have been nominated.

Ms Carroll noted that there is an open process for nominations for projects. Open solicitation for nominations from the public is currently on hold, but will hopefully be revived in the fall. It was noted that ADFG currently has projects on the nomination list.

Greg Balogh, USFWS

The USFWS is looking at the potential for fisheries expansion northwards in the Bering Sea, and the likely impacts on spectacled eider habitat. The agency is also evaluating the effect of loss of sea ice on walrus. This winter, USFWS worked with animals which had been displaced by sea ice from Fesborough Island area, and they were emaciated. Another concern with the retreat of sea ice is the effect on distribution of ice seals, on which polar bears depend, and the availability of breeding platforms for raising walrus young.

With respect to populations at risk, Mr Balogh noted that loons, scooters, and longtailed ducks are in decline, but the agency does not know why. Sea otter critical habitat has been proposed, and is currently in its second open comment period. A petition to list walrus has been received, and a 90-day finding is due on Sep 10. Short-tailed albatross work is being done in Japan, to establish a colony on a non-volcano island.

Wind turbine projects are becoming increasingly common, and these represent strike threats for birds, especially along ground transmission lines. There is currently insufficient information on ways to make these lines visible to birds, so strikes become less likely. The USFWS has a short list of ARRA projects, but the only one of relevance to this group is the planned removal of animals from islands where they don't belong.

Jon Kurland, NMFS (handout attached)

Mr Kurland identified that NOAA has received \$167 million nationwide for habitat restoration under the ARRA. A number of Alaska proposals have been submitted, but no final decision has been made yet. The proposals are under technical review within NOAA. There is much interest and scrutiny with how the ARRA funding is used, and on which projects. An announcement is expected in late June.

The Arctic Fishery Management Plan, adopted by the Council in February, has been submitted to NOAA for Secretarial Review. The public comment period is open until July. The plan closes the Arctic to fishing until there is sufficient information to make sure that fisheries will be sustainably managed. There has been a lot of good press for this action. Additionally, in conjunction with the Council, NMFS is conducting a five-year review of essential fish habitat information in each of the Council fishery management plans, the results of which will be available in 2010.

Mr Kurland noted that the Center for Biological Diversity has filed an intent to sue the agency for the listing of ice, ringed, spotted, and bearded seals under the ESA. Cook Inlet beluga whales have been listed as endangered, and the agency will be holding public hearings on a critical habitat designation this fall.

NOAA has created a regional team in Alaska to coordinate NOAA programs within the state, and to provide more integrated services. The new lead of that team is Doug Demaster, director of the Alaska Fisheries Science Center.

Marcia Combes, EPA

EPA is in conversations with MMS and the Aleutians East Borough to explore the potential for requiring zero discharge for any oil and gas exploration and production activities in the North Aleutian Basin. This would be a more stringent guideline than the effluent limit guidelines that are currently in place, although zero discharge is standard in other parts of the country. Cook Inlet has an exemption from zero discharge (because of economic viability), and zero discharge is not a requirement for exploration. It is a very difficult issue, but there is pressure to require this standard before any further development goes forward. A lot of public process is required, and Mr Hartig noted that the State was interested in this issue as well. In the Chukchi and Beaufort Seas, EPA is looking at permitting for Shell's exploration activities in 2010 and 2011. It is expected that Conoco will also be bringing forward permit applications shortly as well. EPA is reviewing both air and water permits, but there is little data available for evaluating air data.

With respect to the national transition, a new administrator for Region 10 is expected this summer or early fall, but in the meantime the deputy is acting as regional administrator. ARRA funding for EPA programs is primarily for existing water and waste water programs and processes.

Samantha Carroll, DNR

Ms Carroll noted that an integrated ocean observing system workshop will be taking place in October, a joint effort with AOOS and the Division of Ocean and Coastal Management in DNR. It will be a 2-3 day workshop in Anchorage. As noted by Ms Coon, DNR is partnering with MMS for the SEAPP projects.

Deb Cooper, National Park Service

Ms Cooper noted that as previously mentioned, Glacier Bay has been listed as a marine protected area on the national network. NPS Alaska received \$20 million from the ARRA funds, but they were not specific to ocean or coastal programs. They will be used for getting youth outdoors, and dealing with noxious weeds.

NPS Alaska region has partnered with other west coast regions on an ocean coastal strategy. There is also some support nationally. Hopefully there will be funding for three ocean administrator posts: for the Alaska regional office, and one in Kenai Fjords, and one in the western Alaska parks or in southeast Alaska. These will allow the NPS to focus more on ocean and coastal issues.

There are four inventory and monitoring networks that are fairly well funded in NPS, looking at a suite of indicators of environmental health. Some of the data address ocean and coastal related issues, such as shoreline erosion and benthic habitat information. The agency is grappling with how to better assess information pertaining to the water column. The agency is becoming more data rich statewide, as this program is well funded.

Stefanie Moreland, ADFG

ADFG is supporting a joint proposal under SEAPP, with YAF and NMFS, for a bottom trawl survey in the Chukchi. This would establish a baseline for monitoring effects, and would start in 2011 if funded.

Ms Moreland also noted that the Council recently took action to put in place salmon bycatch restrictions in the Bering Sea pollock trawl fleet. ADFG has been really active in developing a systematic sampling protocol for salmon in Bering Sea trawl bycatch, by stock of origin. There is interest by the agency and from industry to better understand the distribution of salmon in the ocean, and the co-occurrence of salmon and pollock species, and to develop projects that look at these issues.

Eric Olson, NPFMC (handout attached)

Many of the Council's issues have already been addressed. The Council is focusing more on outreach, and identifying issues and ways to improve outreach and get input back from communities. A committee has recently been appointed to help the Council focus on key projects.

The Council is also developing a Northern Bering Sea Research Area research plan, similar in idea to the Arctic FMP (don't allow bottom trawling until we have a better idea of the potential effects). The research plan will be focusing on crab, ESA-listed species (such as the spectacled eider), marine mammals, and subsistence species, and will then identify how fishing might occur without impacting those species. Additionally, NMFS will be revising their Biological Opinion for Steller sea lions in March 2010, and the Council may then examine alternatives to the current Steller sea lion protection measures in the groundfish fisheries.

Mark Shasby, USGS

USGS has been well funded for loss of sea ice, polar bear, walrus, and implications of climate change studies. Additionally, the agency is looking at coastal erosion on the North Slope, with extensive studies this summer of the coastal and nearshore benthic environment, looking at rates of change of coastal erosion, and taking into account sea level rise. The USGS report on oil and gas resources on circumpolar regions of the globe indicates that most of the undiscovered oil is on the eastern North Slope. USGS is working with Canada to get a better idea of the geology of the area. The agency has also done work on seabirds, and sea otters.

Jim Robertson, USCG

CPT Robertson noted that the USCG is kicking off the Arctic risk ecological assessment this year, which will encompass from the Cape of Prince of Wales, north to the Canadian border. The intent is to evaluate if there is an oil spill, what is the best mitigation to use in an Arctic environment. The results of this study will also be able to be exported to Kotzebue, Norton Sound, and Bristol Bay during the ice seasons. The agency is planning several public hearings in Barrow, Fairbanks, and Anchorage, and perhaps also in Kotzebue.

The marine safety division did an oil exercise with Conoco Phillips, which went well. They are also planning to do a joint exercise at Dixon entrance, with the State of Alaska, DOI, and the Canadian Coast Guard and DOI. The CG is going to Nome this summer, rather than Barrow, as part of their Arctic exercises. There will be one ice breaker and two cutters stationed there. Some vessels will be going around to Barrow, as part of the ports and waterways study. There will also be overflights, leaving both from Nome and from Kodiak, although the aircraft aren't outfitted with fuel warming tanks, so they can't fly below 40 degrees C. The CG will probably try to use small boats again, and hopefully this will prove more successful in Nome than in did in Barrow. There will also be joint exercises with helicopters, probably the national guard or the air force, and they will bring medical and dental teams to the villages.

Larry Hartig, DEC

DEC is proposing to use some of the SEAPP funding to continue EMAP work. Mr Hartig chairs the governor's subcabinet on climate change. They have just finished a stakeholder, public process. Some of the technical workgroups have recommendations, which will be processed into reports by the end of July. The subcabinet will look at the various recommendations, and other strategies, and will bring them together for a draft State strategy. It is hoped that there will be a consistent strategy on climate change among the State, Federal agencies, and the tribes. The draft strategy will be released for public comment by the end of the year, after which the Governor, and then the legislature, will have time to address it. As part of this initiative, a compendium of research needs is also being pulled together, a report of which is out in draft form on the State climate change website, www.climatechangealaska.gov. The intent is to integrate research needs with funds to address them, as part of overall State strategy.

DEC is the Governor's representative on climate change issues, and has been involved in several western coast initiatives, such as the Coastal Impact Assessment Program, and the Western Climate Initiative. One initiative called the Pacific Coast Collaborative, which is being driven by British Columbia. It is looking at ways to collaborate on environmental and social issues, and a MOU is being negotiated among jurisdictions. The component dealing with ocean and climate change is probably the furthest along. Progress has stalled because of the economic crisis in California, Washington, and Idaho, and elections in British Columbia. It will be interesting to see what comes of these.

Paula Cullenberg, Alaska Sea Grant

SeaGrant is a partnership between the university and NOAA. The extension program in Alaska is the Marine Advisory Program, and there are representatives of the program in many of the coastal towns in Alaska. Ms Cullenberg is in the process of trying to develop an initiative to do community-based climate change outreach, using the MAP extension agents. SeaGrant is willing to partner with agencies to do community outreach efforts. SeaGrant has also developed a curriculum for grades K-8 on seas and rivers that is Alaska-based, in collaboration with the Anchorage School District and the Sea Life Center. They have hired someone to focus on ways to link ocean scientists with educators. The organization is also looking at king crab rehabilitation and enhancement, collectively with NOAA, communities, and fishing groups.

Brent Walters, COE

COE received some funding through ARRA, but they also lost their authority to fund small coastal erosion projects and village relocations, so all work on these projects has stopped since March. Mr Hartig noted that this has been a severe blow to coastal communities, as these relocations are only really viable with Federal money. The State is trying to help to get the funding restored.

James Moore, BLM

BLM is about to convey some of the land around the Sitka airstrip to the State of Alaska. They are also working on a land use plan for a broad area from Denali to the Yukon delta, including the Kuskokwim drainage. They will be looking for help from DEC for climate change information, as these impacts will need to be addressed in the plan.

Update on the Aleutian Islands Risk Assessment (Betty Schorr and Jim Robertson; handout)

There are four groups involved in the multiphase AI risk assessment: a management team, an advisory panel, a risk analysis team, and a peer review panel. The management team includes the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation in Alaska (they are providing the funds). The Advisory Panel is a diverse group, which includes lots of varied experience, both from the Bering Sea, but also from a global interest as well. There are 2 phases for the risk assessment: the first is a preliminary risk assessment, with semi-quantitative studies for data gathering. The second phase is for analysis of the data, and a focused risk assessment. The RFP for Phase 1 is currently out, and a contract will be issued in August. Phase 1 is scheduled for completion by August 2010, and phase 2 should be completed and a report of findings and recommendations should be available by August 2011. More information is available at the project website: <http://www.aleutiansriskassessment.com>. Mr Hartig noted that he is hopeful that the AI risk assessment methodology will be able to be a template for other areas, particularly the Arctic.

Status of Alaska Oil and Gas Risk Assessment (Cook Inlet portion) (Ira Rosen)

The risk assessment began 2 years ago, and was intended to be a oil and gas infrastructure study to determine what are the risks of operating existing infrastructure for another generation. The goal of the study is provide oversight agencies with a snapshot of the system that could then be used as the basis for a risk management study, the results of which would be useful for industry and the State. The project is currently three-quarters of the way through the first phase of developing the methodology for the study. DEC has contracted with the National Academy of Sciences for an independent peer review of the methodology.

Cook Inlet has the oldest infrastructure in the state. The study will look at all aspects of production (well, subsea pipelines, piping, terminals, waste, storage, loading, support), but not marine transportation, the refineries, or future development. The study will consider the original design, where such information is available, the intended operating life, aging process, operating and maintenance procedures, oversight, changes in composition of fluids (sediment, water, oil), and natural hazards (e.g., volcanoes). More information is available at the project website: <http://www.dec.state.ak.us/SPAR/ipp/ara/index.htm>.

Status of planning for 2010 Trans-boundary Contaminants Conference (Kristin Ryan)

Kristin Ryan is spearheading a State of Alaska effort to develop a State strategy for contaminants. The strategy would include all persistent contaminants, marine or interior, and affecting all species. A vision statement and goals have been identified. The object is to coordinate all the State researchers, for example, to have information to guide fish monitoring efforts in the State, and to develop a systematic sampling program. A steering committee has been identified, with members representing DEC, EPA, UAF, and the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium, and a framework outlined. There will be an emphasis on gaining information from traditional knowledge and local sources. Stakeholder meetings are planned in Anchorage and Fairbanks in July, and the stakeholder process will also continue throughout the year. These will culminate in a summit in 2010, which will bring all the various agencies, and at which there will hopefully be buy-in on a joint strategy.

Update on Aleutian Islands Research Plan (Keith Criddle; handout)

Keith Criddle updated the group on progress with developing the AI Research Plan, a project which is funded by Alaska SeaGrant. The research plan is one of ten regional research plans that are being developed nationally, although each has taken a different approach. The methodology identified for Alaska was to use a bottom-up approach to identify management-critical information needs for the AI. Initial scoping has been completed, and they are in the process of processing stakeholder input, and through the use of an expert panel, of prioritizing research needs within a structured hierarchy of research topics. It is intended that this process will be completed over the summer. A draft report is expected to be released to stakeholders and the expert panel in fall 2009, for public comment and revision. The report will then be disseminated in spring 2010 at the Alaska Forum for the Environment, and the Alaska Marine Symposium.

Election of Officers and Next meeting

The Memorandum of Understanding is structured so that the current Vice-Chair, Marcia Combes, will be the next Chair of the AMEF, during the upcoming year. The group agreed that Stefanie Moreland should be the next Vice-Chair. Autumn 2009 was identified as the timeframe for the next meeting.

seasons have been closed before the fishery quotas have been reached to prevent the fishery from reaching the halibut PSC limit. Reducing halibut mortality and assuring that each halibut returned to the sea has the highest possible chance of survival are therefore high priorities for the IPHC's, the Council's, and NMFS's management goals for both halibut and groundfish.

Before halibut are returned to the sea, the catch of halibut as well as other groundfish must first be estimated by at-sea observers. A number of regulations assure that observer estimates of halibut and groundfish catch are credible, accurate, and without bias. For example, NMFS requires that all catch be made available for sampling by an observer; prohibits tampering with observer samples; prohibits removal of halibut from a codend, bin, or conveyance system prior to being observed and counted by an at-sea observer; and prohibits fish (including halibut) from remaining on deck unless an observer is present.

With the implementation of Amendment 80 to the FMP on September 14, 2007 (72 FR 52668), allocation of halibut PSC amounts was modified for vessels in the Amendment 80 sector, but halibut mortality continued to limit fishing in some fisheries. The Amendment 80 sector received an initial allocation of 2,525 metric tons (mt) of halibut PSC in 2008, but that allocation will decrease by 50 mt per year until it reaches 2,325 mt in 2012 and subsequent years. This amount is further allocated between the BUC and the Amendment 80 limited access fishery. In certain years, the amount of halibut PSC allocated to the Amendment 80 sector is less than the sector's historic catch; therefore, finding ways to continue to reduce halibut mortality is important for this sector.

The EFP applicant proposes to assess various fishing practices and their effect on halibut survival. It would allow researchers onboard the three catcher processor vessels to sort halibut removed from a codend on the deck of the vessel and release those fish back to the water after determining the physical condition of the halibut using standard IPHC viability methods for predicting mortality of individual fish.

Fishing under the EFP would occur in two phases during 2009. In May and June, Phase I fishing would allow sorting of halibut on deck to determine practices for reducing halibut mortality. Later in the year, Phase II would apply the halibut mortality saved in Phase I to allow additional EFP catch of groundfish and halibut within the BUC's allocation.

This proposed action would exempt the participating vessels from the following:

1. The prohibition on biasing the sampling procedure employed by an observer through sorting of catch before sampling at § 679.7(g)(2);
2. A requirement to weigh all catch by an Amendment 80 vessel on a NMFS-approved scale at § 679.27(j)(5)(ii);
3. A requirement for all catch to be made available for sampling at § 679.93(c)(1); and
4. The requirement for halibut to not be allowed on deck without an observer present at § 679.93(c)(5).

The BUC would not be allowed to exceed the 2009 Amendment 80 cooperative apportionment of halibut mortality of (1,793 mt). In the event that the amount of halibut mortality savings estimated under this EFP shows less mortality than the amount estimated using standard 2009 halibut discard mortality rates established for the Bering Sea trawl fisheries (February 17, 2009, 74 FR 7333), BUC may be allowed to continue fishing for groundfish species later in the year, with some limitations. The BUC would be required to submit a report to NMFS and the IPHC of the estimated halibut mortality saved during the Phase I. After review and approval by NMFS, the BUC may be allowed to do subsequent EFP fishing later in the year as Phase II fishing under the EFP. The BUC would be limited to no more than the BUC's Amendment 80 groundfish allocation. The additional amount of halibut caught would not exceed the amount of the halibut mortality savings under the EFP, or BUC's 2009 allocation of halibut PSC.

This EFP would apply for the period of time required to complete the experiment in Phase I and potentially in subsequent fishing in Phase II, during 2009, in areas of the BSAI open to directed fishing by the BUC. The EFP activities would be of limited scope and duration and would not be expected to change the nature or duration of the groundfish fishery, fishing practices or gear used, or the amount or species of fish caught by the BUC.

The activities that would be conducted under this EFP are not expected to have a significant impact on the human environment as detailed in the categorical exclusion issued for this action (see **ADDRESSES**).

In accordance with § 679.6, NMFS has determined that the proposal warrants further consideration and has forwarded the application to the Council to initiate consultation. The Council considered the EFP application during its April 2009 meeting.

Public Comments

Public comments are being solicited on the application through the end of the comment period stated in this notice. To be considered, comments must be received by close of business on the last day of the comment period; that does not mean postmarked or otherwise transmitted by that date. Copies of the application and categorical exclusion are available for review from NMFS (see **ADDRESSES**).

Authority: 16 U.S.C. 1801 *et seq.*

Dated: April 17, 2009.

Kristen C. Koch,

Acting Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries, National Marine Fisheries Service.
[FR Doc. E9-9343 Filed 4-22-09; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3510-22-S

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

List of National System Marine Protected Areas

AGENCY: NOAA, Department of Commerce (DOC).

ACTION: Notice of availability of the List of National System Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) and response to comments on nominations of existing MPAs to the national system.

SUMMARY: NOAA and the Department of the Interior (DOI) invited federal, state, commonwealth, and territorial MPA programs with potentially eligible existing MPAs to nominate their sites to the national system of MPAs (national system). A total of 225 nominations were received. Following a 30-day public review period, 26 public comments were received by the National Marine Protected Areas Center and forwarded to the relevant managing agencies. After review of the public comments, managing agencies were asked to make a final determination of sites to nominate to the national system. All the nominations were confirmed by the managing agencies. Finding them to be eligible for the national system, the National Marine Protected Areas Center has accepted the nominations for 225 sites and placed them on the List of National System MPAs.

The national system and the nomination process are described in the *Framework for the National System of Marine Protected Areas of the United States of America* (Framework), developed in response to Executive Order 13158 on Marine Protected Areas. The final Framework was published on

November 19, 2008, and provides guidance for collaborative efforts among Federal, State, commonwealth, territorial, tribal and local governments and stakeholders to develop an effective and well coordinated national system that includes existing MPAs meeting national system criteria as well as new sites that may be established by managing agencies to fill key conservation gaps in important ocean areas.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Lauren Wenzel, NOAA, at 301-713-3100, ext. 136 or via e-mail at mpa.comments@noaa.gov. A more detailed electronic copy of the List of National System MPAs is available for download at <http://www.mpa.gov>.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Background on National System

The national system of MPAs includes member MPA sites, networks and systems established and managed by Federal, State, Territorial, Tribal and/or local governments that collectively enhance conservation of the nation's natural and cultural marine heritage and represent its diverse ecosystems and resources. Although participating sites continue to be managed independently, national system MPAs also work together at the regional and national levels to achieve common objectives for conserving the nation's important natural and cultural resources, with emphasis on achieving the priority conservation objectives of the Framework. MPAs include sites with a wide range of protection, from multiple use areas to no take reserves where all extractive uses are prohibited. The term MPA refers only to the marine portion of a site (below the mean high tide mark) that may include both terrestrial and marine components.

Benefits of joining the national system, which are expected to increase over time as the system matures, include a facilitated means to work with other MPAs in the MPA's region, and nationally on issues of common conservation concern; fostering greater public and international recognition of MPAs and the resources they protect; priority in the receipt of available technical and other support for cross-cutting needs; and the opportunity to influence Federal and regional ocean conservation and management initiatives (such as integrated ocean observing systems, systematic monitoring and evaluation, targeted outreach to key user groups, and helping to identify and address MPA research needs). In addition, the national system provides a forum for

coordinated regional planning about place-based conservation priorities that does not otherwise exist.

Joining the national system does not restrict or require changes affecting the designation process or management of member MPAs. It does not bring State, Territorial, Tribal or local sites under Federal authority. It does not establish new regulatory authority or revise existing regulatory authority. The national system is a mechanism to foster greater collaboration among participating MPA sites and programs in order to enhance stewardship in the waters of the United States.

Nomination Process

The Framework describes two major focal areas for building the national system of MPAs—a nomination process to allow existing MPAs that meet the entry criteria to become part of the system and a collaborative regional gap analysis process to identify areas of significance for natural or cultural resources that may merit additional protection through existing Federal, State, commonwealth, territorial, tribal or local MPA authorities. The initial nomination process for the national system began on November 25, 2008, when the National Marine Protected Areas Center (MPA Center) sent a letter to federal, state, commonwealth, and territorial MPA programs inviting them to submit nominations of eligible MPAs to the national system. The initial deadline for nominations was January 31, 2009; this was extended to February 13, 2009. A public comment period was held from March 6, 2009 through April 6, 2009.

There are three entry criteria for existing MPAs to join the national system, plus a fourth for cultural heritage. Sites that meet all pertinent criteria are eligible for the national system.

1. Meets the definition of an MPA as defined in the Framework.
2. Has a management plan (can be site-specific or part of a broader programmatic management plan; must have goals and objectives and call for monitoring or evaluation of those goals and objectives).
3. Contributes to at least one priority conservation objective as listed in the Framework.
4. Cultural heritage MPAs must also conform to criteria for the National Register for Historic Places.

Additional sites not currently meeting the management plan criterion can be evaluated for eligibility to be nominated to the system on a case-by-case basis based on their ability to fill gaps in the national system coverage of the priority

conservation objectives and design principles described in the Framework.

The MPA Center used existing information in the MPA Inventory to determine which MPAs meet the first and second criteria. The inventory is online at http://www.mpa.gov/helpful_resources/inventory.html, and potentially eligible sites are posted online at <http://mpa.gov/pdf/national-system/allsitesumsheet120408.pdf>. As part of the nomination process, the managing entity for each potentially eligible site is asked to provide information on the third and fourth criteria.

List of National System MPAs

The following MPAs have been nominated by their managing programs to join the national system of MPAs. A list providing more detail for each site is available at <http://www.mpa.gov>.

Federal Marine Protected Areas

Marine National Monument

Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument (Hawaii)

National Marine Sanctuaries

Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary (California)
 Cordell Bank National Marine Sanctuary (California)
 Fagatele Bay National Marine Sanctuary (American Samoa)
 Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary (Florida)
 Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary (Texas)
 Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary (Georgia)
 Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary (Massachusetts)
 Gulf of the Farallones National Marine Sanctuary (California)
 Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary (Hawaii)
 Monitor National Marine Sanctuary (North Carolina)
 Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary (California)
 Olympic Coast National Marine Sanctuary (Washington)
 Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary (Michigan)

National Parks

Assateague Island National Seashore (Virginia, Maryland)
 Biscayne National Park (Florida)
 Channel Islands National Park (California)
 Dry Tortugas National Park (Florida)
 Everglades National Park (Florida)
 Glacier Bay National Park (Alaska)
 Isle Royale National Park (Minnesota, Michigan)
 Point Reyes National Park (California)

- Virgin Islands Coral Reef National Monument (US Virgin Islands)
Virgin Islands National Park (US Virgin Islands)
National Wildlife Refuges
ACE Basin National Wildlife Refuge (South Carolina)
Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge (Alaska)
Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge (North Carolina)
Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge (Texas)
Aransas National Wildlife Refuge (Texas)
Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (Alaska)
Back Bay National Wildlife Refuge (Virginia)
Baker Island National Wildlife Refuge (Hawaii)
Bandon Marsh National Wildlife Refuge (Oregon)
Big Boggy National Wildlife Refuge (Texas)
Big Branch Marsh National Wildlife Refuge (Louisiana)
Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge (Maryland)
Block Island National Wildlife Refuge (Rhode Island)
Bombay Hook National Wildlife Refuge (Delaware)
Bon Secour National Wildlife Refuge (Alabama)
Brazoria National Wildlife Refuge (Texas)
Breton National Wildlife Refuge (Louisiana)
Cape May National Wildlife Refuge (New Jersey)
Cape Romain National Wildlife Refuge (South Carolina)
Cedar Island National Wildlife Refuge (North Carolina)
Cedar Keys National Wildlife Refuge (Florida)
Chassahowitzka National Wildlife Refuge (Florida)
Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge (Virginia, Maryland)
Conscience Point National Wildlife Refuge (New York)
Crocodile Lake National Wildlife Refuge (Florida)
Cross Island National Wildlife Refuge (Maine)
Crystal River National Wildlife Refuge (Florida)
Currituck National Wildlife Refuge (North Carolina)
Delta National Wildlife Refuge (Louisiana)
Don Edwards San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge (California)
Dungeness National Wildlife Refuge (Washington)
Eastern Neck National Wildlife Refuge (Maryland)
Eastern Shore of Virginia National Wildlife Refuge (Virginia)
Edwin B. Forsythe National Wildlife Refuge (New Jersey)
Featherstone National Wildlife Refuge (Virginia)
Fisherman Island National Wildlife Refuge (Virginia)
Grand Bay National Wildlife Refuge (Mississippi, Alabama)
Grays Harbor National Wildlife Refuge (Washington)
Great Bay National Wildlife Refuge (New Hampshire)
Great White Heron National Wildlife Refuge (Florida)
Guam National Wildlife Refuge (Guam)
Howland Island National Wildlife Refuge (Pacific Islands)
Huron National Wildlife Refuge (Michigan)
Island Bay National Wildlife Refuge (Florida)
J.N. Ding Darling National Wildlife Refuge (Florida)
Jarvis Island National Wildlife Refuge (Pacific Islands)
John H. Chafee National Wildlife Refuge (Rhode Island)
Johnston Island National Wildlife Refuge (Pacific Islands, Hawaii)
Key West National Wildlife Refuge (Florida)
Kingman Reef National Wildlife Refuge (Pacific Islands)
Lewis and Clark National Wildlife Refuge (Washington, Oregon)
Lower Suwannee National Wildlife Refuge (Florida)
Mackay Island National Wildlife Refuge (Virginia, North Carolina)
Marin Islands National Wildlife Refuge (California)
Martin National Wildlife Refuge (Maryland)
Mashpee National Wildlife Refuge (Massachusetts)
Matlacha Pass National Wildlife Refuge (Florida)
Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge (Hawaii)
Monomoy National Wildlife Refuge (Massachusetts)
National Key Deer Refuge (Florida)
Nestucca Bay National Wildlife Refuge (Oregon)
Ninigret National Wildlife Refuge (Rhode Island)
Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge (Washington)
Nomans Land Island National Wildlife Refuge (Massachusetts)
Occoquan Bay National Wildlife Refuge (Virginia)
Oyster Bay National Wildlife Refuge (New York)
Palmyra Atoll National Wildlife Refuge (Pacific Islands)
Parker River National Wildlife Refuge (Massachusetts)
Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge (North Carolina)
Pelican Island National Wildlife Refuge (Florida)
Pine Island National Wildlife Refuge (Florida)
Pinellas National Wildlife Refuge (Florida)
Plum Tree Island National Wildlife Refuge (Virginia)
Pond Island National Wildlife Refuge (Maine)
Prime Hook National Wildlife Refuge (Delaware)
Protection Island National Wildlife Refuge (Washington)
Rachel Carson National Wildlife Refuge (Maine)
Rose Atoll National Wildlife Refuge (Pacific Islands)
Sabine National Wildlife Refuge (Louisiana)
Sachuest Point National Wildlife Refuge (Rhode Island)
San Bernard National Wildlife Refuge (Texas)
San Pablo Bay National Wildlife Refuge (California)
Seatuck National Wildlife Refuge (New York)
Shell Keys National Wildlife Refuge (Louisiana)
Siletz Bay National Wildlife Refuge (Oregon)
St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge (Florida)
St. Vincent National Wildlife Refuge (Florida)
Stewart B. McKinney National Wildlife Refuge (Connecticut)
Supawna Meadows National Wildlife Refuge (New Jersey)
Susquehanna National Wildlife Refuge (Maryland)
Swanquarter National Wildlife Refuge (North Carolina)
Sweetwater Marsh National Wildlife Refuge (California)
Target Rock National Wildlife Refuge (New York)
Ten Thousand Islands National Wildlife Refuge (Florida)
Waccamaw National Wildlife Refuge (South Carolina)
Wallops Island National Wildlife Refuge (Virginia)
Wertheim National Wildlife Refuge (New York)
Willapa National Wildlife Refuge (Washington)
Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge (Alaska)
Federal/State Partnership Marine Protected Areas
National Estuarine Research Reserves
Guana Tolomato Matanzas National Estuarine Research Reserve (Florida)

Jacques Cousteau National Estuarine Research Reserve (New Jersey)
Rookery Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve (Florida)
Waquoit Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve (Massachusetts)

State Marine Protected Areas

American Samoa

Aua

California

Ano Nuevo Area of Special Biological Significance
Ano Nuevo State Marine Conservation Area
Asilomar State Marine Reserve
Big Creek State Marine Conservation Area
Big Creek State Marine Reserve
Bird Rock Area of Special Biological Significance
Bodega Area of Special Biological Significance
Cambria State Marine Conservation Area
Carmel Bay Area of Special Biological Significance
Carmel Bay State Marine Conservation Area
Carmel Pinnacles State Marine Reserve
Del Mar Area of Special Biological Significance
Double Point Area of Special Biological Significance
Duxbury Reef Area of Special Biological Significance
Edward F. Ricketts State Marine Conservation Area
Elkhorn Slough State Marine Conservation Area
Elkhorn Slough State Marine Reserve
Farallon Islands Area of Special Biological Significance
Farnsworth Bank Area of Special Biological Significance
Gerstle Cove Area of Special Biological Significance
Greyhound Rock State Marine Conservation Area
Heisler Park Area of Special Biological Significance
Irvine Coast Area of Special Biological Significance
James V. Fitzgerald Area of Special Biological Significance
Jughandle Cove Area of Special Biological Significance
Julia Pfeiffer Burns Area of Special Biological Significance
King Range Area of Special Biological Significance
La Jolla Area of Special Biological Significance
Laguna Point to Latiga Point Area of Special Biological Significance
Lovers Point State Marine Reserve
Moro Cojo Slough State Marine Reserve

Morro Bay State Marine Recreational Management Area
Morro Bay State Marine Reserve
Natural Bridges State Marine Reserve
Northwest Santa Catalina Area of Special Biological Significance
Pacific Grove Area of Special Biological Significance
Pacific Grove Marine Gardens State Marine Conservation Area
Piedras Blancas State Marine Conservation Area
Piedras Blancas State Marine Reserve
Point Buchon State Marine Conservation Area
Point Buchon State Marine Reserve
Point Lobos Area of Special Biological Significance
Point Lobos State Marine Conservation Area
Point Lobos State Marine Reserve
Point Reyes Headlands Area of Special Biological Significance
Point Sur State Marine Conservation Area
Point Sur State Marine Reserve
Portuguese Ledge State Marine Conservation Area
Redwoods National Park Area of Special Biological Significance
Robert E. Badham Area of Special Biological Significance
Salmon Creek Coast Area of Special Biological Significance
San Clemente Area of Special Biological Significance
San Diego Scripps Area of Special Biological Significance
San Nicolas Island & Begg Rock Area of Special Biological Significance
Santa Barbara & Anacapa Island Area of Special Biological Significance
Santa Rosa & Santa Cruz Island Area of Special Biological Significance
Saunders Reef Area of Special Biological Significance
Soquel Canyon State Marine Reserve
Southeast Santa Catalina Area of Special Biological Significance
Trinidad Head Area of Special Biological Significance
Vandenberg State Marine Reserve
Western Santa Catalina Area of Special Biological Significance
White Rock (Cambria) State Marine Conservation Area

Florida

See National Estuarine Research Reserves, above.

Hawaii

Ahihi Kina'u Natural Area Reserve
Hanauma Bay Marine Life Conservation District, Oahu
Kaho'olawe Island Reserve
Kealakekua Bay Marine Life Conservation District
Molokini Shoal Marine Life Conservation District

Pupukea Marine Life Conservation District, Oahu
West Hawaii Regional Fisheries Management Area

Maryland

U-1105 Black Panther Historic Shipwreck Preserve

Massachusetts

See National Estuarine Research Reserves, above

New Jersey

See National Estuarine Research Reserves, above

Virginia

Bethel Beach Natural Area Preserve
Blue Crab Sanctuary
Dameron Marsh Natural Area Preserve
False Cape State Park
Hughlett Point Natural Area Preserve
Kiptopeke State Park
Savage Neck Dunes Natural Area Preserve

Washington

Admiralty Head Preserve
Argyle Lagoon San Juan Islands Marine Preserve
Blake Island Underwater Park
Brackett's Landing Shoreline Sanctuary Conservation Area
Cherry Point Aquatic Reserve
Cypress Island Aquatic Reserve
Deception Pass Underwater Park
False Bay San Juan Islands Marine Preserve
Fidalgo Bay Aquatic Reserve
Friday Harbor San Juan Islands Marine Preserve
Haro Strait Special Management Fishery Area
Maury Island Aquatic Reserve
San Juan Channel & Upright Channel Special Management Fishery Area
Orchard Rocks Conservation Area
Shaw Island San Juan Islands Marine Preserve
South Puget Sound Wildfire Area
Sund Rock Conservation Area
Yellow and Low Islands San Juan Islands Marine Preserve
Zelia Schultz/Protection Island Marine Preserve

Response to Public Comments

On March 6, 2009, NOAA and DOI (agencies) published the Nomination of Existing Marine Protected Areas to the National System of Marine Protected Areas for public comment. By the end of the 30-day comment period, 26 individual submissions had been received from a variety of government agencies, non-governmental organizations, industry and conservation interests, advisory groups

and the public. Given the breadth and multi-faceted nature of comments and recommendations received, related comments have been grouped below into categories to simplify the development of responses. For each of the comment categories listed below, a summary of comments is provided, and a corresponding response provides an explanation and rationale about changes that were or were not made in the Official List of National System Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) for this first round of nominated sites.

- Comment Category 1: Purpose and Scope of National System
- Comment Category 2: Agency Review Process
- Comment Category 3: Public Review Process
- Comment Category 4: Support for Nomination of Specific Sites to National System
- Comment Category 5: Questioning Eligibility of Specific Sites for the National System
- Comment Category 6: Concerns about Potential Restrictions on Use
- Comment Category 7: Information Available to Assess Nominations
- Comment Category 8: Information Quality Act
- Comment Category 9: Gap Analysis

Comments and Responses

Comment Category 1: Purpose and Scope of National System

Summary

A few comments called for more clarity about the purpose and vision of the National System of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), although there were different perspectives about what this vision should include. One respondent thought that the agencies should create more specific minimum criteria for the national system, while another contended that the nomination process should mirror the creation of new sites under the National Marine Sanctuaries Act. Some respondents had comments on entry criteria for nominations to the National System of MPAs, or on plans for implementation of the federal responsibility to avoid harm to the resources protected by a national system MPA. One respondent recommended that the name of the "National System of MPAs" be revised and called the "National Network of MPAs" stating that "a National Network is opinion-based; a National System is science-based."

Response

The purpose and scope of the national system, and plans for its implementation, were developed with extensive stakeholder engagement over a four year period from 2004 through 2008. During this period, the *Framework for the National System of Marine*

Protected Areas of the United States (Framework) was developed. Three separate public comment periods on the document were held and announced in the **Federal Register**. In addition, the National Marine Protected Areas Center (MPA Center) held numerous meetings with stakeholders to obtain input on the Framework, and worked closely with the Marine Protected Areas Federal Advisory Committee (MPA FAC) in open meetings on key concepts that were incorporated into the document. The Framework document was finalized in November 2008; no public comments were received on the **Federal Register** notice announcing its release. Issues raised by respondents focused on the content of the Framework are not considered germane to this public comment notice.

Regarding the recommendation that the nomination process should mirror the National Marine Sanctuaries Act (NMSA), the agencies contend that the NMSA should not be the model for nominations to the national system for the following reasons: (1) The national system is charged with working to coordinate diverse MPAs across all levels of governments. These sites and programs have diverse authorities, and it is inappropriate to impose the requirements of one federal MPA program (e.g. the NMSA) on other federal, state, and territorial MPA programs, which have their own legal authorities, processes and purposes; (2) The procedural elements for the NMSA are focused on the designation of new MPAs, while the nomination process for national system of MPAs is focused on the admission of existing MPAs into the national system for the purposes of enhanced coordination, recognition and stewardship and (3) The NMSA's extensive procedural requirements for sanctuary designation (including public involvement and interagency consultation) are not warranted for inclusion of a site in the national system of MPAs since that action has no regulatory impact or potential to restrict human uses of that site.

The agencies disagree with the recommendation that the National System of MPAs be renamed the "National Network of MPAs." Section 4(e) of Executive Order 13158 calls for the development of a National System of MPAs. In addition, the terms "system" and "network" as used in the Framework are clearly defined in Section VI. Glossary of Key Terms of the final Framework. These definitions were developed in consultation with the MPA Federal Advisory Committee to ensure clarity of usage and consistency with current scientific thinking.

Comment Category 2: Agency Review Process

Summary

Two respondents called for nominations to the national system to undergo special review by particular management agencies. One called for all nominations in a given region to be reviewed and approved by regional Fishery Management Councils. Another respondent called for all sites in Alaska to be reviewed and approved by the Alaska Board of Fisheries.

Response

The current process for nominations to the national system provides for nominations to be made by the MPA's managing agency and for a public review process of the MPAs proposed for nomination. The agencies believe that while it is appropriate for other agencies or bodies in a region to comment on such proposed nominations as part of the public process, it is inappropriate for these other agencies or bodies to have the authority to approve or disapprove nominations made by the agency legally responsible for the management of an MPA.

Comment Category 3: Public Review Process

Summary

Two respondents noted that the 30-day public comment period was not sufficient to review information for 225 nominated sites, and requested that the public comment period be extended. One respondent recommended that all nominated sites be reviewed by the Marine Protected Areas Federal Advisory Committee.

Response

The agencies have concluded that this extension is not necessary because the public has had ample opportunity to address many of the issues raised through the multi-year public process to develop the Framework, which included three separate **Federal Register** public comment periods. The agencies followed the Framework's process and provided an opportunity for the public to comment on issues related specifically to nominations to the national system. The agencies do not believe that an extended comment period would substantively change the comments received. Moreover, because the national system of MPAs is a non-regulatory program that will not change the management or regulations of member sites, there is no risk of harm to the public resulting from declining this extension. Regarding the

recommendation that the Marine Protected Areas Federal Advisory Committee should review the nominations, the Committee was actively involved in developing and recommending the entry criteria for the national system. However, the role of the Committee is to provide advice to the Departments of Commerce and the Interior, not to engage in governmental decision-making regarding operational details of the national system.

Comment Category 4: Support for Nomination of Specific Sites to National System

Summary

A number of comments supported the nomination of specific sites to the national system, noting the significant ecological and cultural value of the areas, and adding that the participation of these sites in the national system will lead to a strengthening of their conservation efforts, as well as enhancing the national system. One comment sought better integration among NOAA Fisheries and National Marine Sanctuaries, and further sought opportunities to leverage funds and establish partnerships.

Response

Comments that support the nominations of sites to the national system were forwarded to the appropriate managing agencies. Regarding the call for enhanced integration, the agencies believe that the national system will result in enhanced collaboration and coordination of all MPA managing agencies, including NOAA Fisheries and National Marine Sanctuaries.

Comment Category 5: Questioning Eligibility of Specific Sites for the National System

Summary

Several comments questioned the eligibility of specific sites for inclusion in the national system. Eligibility concerns included whether sites met the definitions of 'marine' and 'MPA,' as well as concerns over a specific site's management plan. In particular, several respondents noted that the Cherry Point Aquatic Reserve (WA) did not meet the national system entry criteria to have a management plan because its management plan is still in draft.

Response

According to the *Framework for the National System of Marine Protected Areas of the United States of America* (Framework), a site is eligible for inclusion in the national system if the

site: (1) Meets the definition of an MPA as defined in the Framework; (2) has a management plan (can be site-specific or part of a broader programmatic management plan); (3) contributes to at least one priority conservation objective as listed in the Framework; and (4) cultural heritage resources must also conform to criteria for the National Register of Historic Places.

It is important to note that only the 'marine' portion of a site will be eligible for inclusion in the national system. According to the Framework, to be marine, a site "must be: (a) Ocean or coastal waters (note: coastal waters may include intertidal areas, bays or estuaries); (b) an area of the Great Lakes or their connecting waters; (c) an area of submerged lands under ocean or coastal waters or the Great Lakes or their connecting waters; or (d) a combination of the above. The term "intertidal" is understood to mean the shore zone between the mean low water and mean high water marks. An MPA may be a marine component part of a larger site that includes uplands. However, the terrestrial portion is not considered an MPA. For mapping purposes, an MPA may show an associated terrestrial protected area."

Recognizing the often lengthy process in finalizing a management plan, which in some cases can take years to complete, the agencies determined that an established site may submit a draft management plan in order to meet this eligibility criterion.

Comment Category 6: Concerns About Potential Restrictions on Use

Summary

Several comments addressed the concern that the inclusion of a site in the national system will limit access to an area, and in particular will restrict recreational fishing or boating, sportfishing, commercial fishing, aquaculture operations, or coastal industry.

Response

The national system has no authority under Executive Order 13158 to either change the management or regulatory authority of existing MPAs or create new MPAs. MPAs will continue to be established, managed and revised under each site's existing federal, state, territorial, tribal or local authorities and their associated legal processes. The inclusion of an MPA into the national system in no way "federalizes" any state or local areas included within the system. The Executive Order states that the national system is "intended to support, not interfere with, agencies'

independent exercise of their own existing authorities."

Comment Category 7: Information Available to Assess Nominations

Summary

Several respondents contended that the information available on the nominated sites was not sufficient for the public to assess whether the entry criteria had been met. Respondents noted that additional information was needed to ensure the transparency of the review process. For example, one respondent wanted to view information that indicated how, not merely whether, sites met the nomination criteria.

Response

The agencies posted information on the nominated sites on the public Web site, <http://www.mpa.gov> in a downloadable PDF format. Information provided in this format included: site name, management agency, level of protection, permanence, constancy, protection focus, fishing restrictions and management plan type. In addition, information on the primary conservation objective(s) addressed by each site, and the regulatory or management tools used to address the primary conservation objective(s) was provided. One week after the **Federal Register** notice appeared, based on a request from the public, the location of all federal sites sorted by the state in which it is located was added to the downloadable file to improve ease of utility. Users were also able to download GIS data for nominated sites as part of the MPA Inventory posted on www.mpa.gov. Information regarding the MPA Center's assessment of eligibility was available to the public through the Web site. For example, the Web site provided information on the type of management plan for each site, as well as the evidence the management program for each site provided to indicate how it met the primary conservation objective(s) of the national system.

The MPA Center recognizes the need to expand the data available on <http://www.mpa.gov> and to make it more accessible and usable to the public, and is in process of developing and improving Web-based applications to address this need.

Comment Category 8: Information Quality Act

Summary

One respondent expressed concern that because of general disclaimers on the <http://www.mpa.gov> Web site (at: http://mpa.gov/helpful_resources/

disclaimers_pr.html), the data contained therein regarding the Marine Protected Areas Inventory does not comply with the Information Quality Act (IQA). The respondent states that in light of the disclaimer language, the public "has no reason to believe that any of these data are accurate, reliable, and complete or they have any utility." If true, dissemination of such information would violate NOAA's Information Quality (IQ) guidelines, published pursuant to the IQA. In support of this assertion, the respondent cites NOAA's IQA guidelines as follows: "Information quality is composed of three elements: utility, integrity and objectivity. Quality will be ensured and established at levels appropriate to the nature and timeliness of the information to be disseminated. NOAA will conduct a pre-dissemination review of information it disseminates to verify quality. Information quality is an integral part of the pre-dissemination review * * *."

Response

NOAA's MPA Inventory information is reliable and complies with the NOAA IQ guidelines standards for utility, integrity, and objectivity. The content of the initial Marine Managed Area (MMA) Inventory and its successor Marine Protected Areas Inventory (MPA Inventory) were developed and designed in cooperation with federal, state and territorial agencies and were the subject of public comment under the Paperwork Reduction Act. The definition of "MPA" was the subject of **Federal Register** comment processes as part of the inventory development process, and three additional times as part of the development and publication of the *Framework for the National System of Marine Protected Areas of the United States of America*. Data were collected directly from primary sources, and from the Federal, State, or territorial agency programs that designate and manage MPAs. Once initial data were collected, inventory information for each site was sent by the MPA Center to the pertinent MPA management agency for verification prior to posting on the www.mpa.gov Web site as part of the quality assurance/quality control process.

In addition, on November 20, 2008 the MPA Center Director sent a letter to MPA program managers providing each with a set of potential nominee sites from the pertinent program. The MPA program managers reviewed and verified the accuracy of the information provided. As a result of these review processes, the agencies believe NOAA's MPA inventory and related information disseminated through the MPA Center

Web site meet the applicable NOAA IQ standards.

Regarding the disclaimer language posted on the MPA Center Web site (at: http://mpa.gov/helpful_resources/disclaimers_pr.html), the agency has taken the respondent's comments into consideration and will replace the existing disclaimer with more appropriate language regarding limitations on the use of the data contained on the MPA Center Web site.

Comment Category 9: Gap Analysis

Summary

Two respondents noted the importance of the gap analysis described in the Framework document, and urged that the agencies move forward with the gap analysis to identify areas meeting the conservation objectives of the national system in need of additional protection.

Response

The regional gap analysis process described in the Framework will complement the nominations of existing sites to the National System of MPAs by providing information on areas in need of additional protection to MPA management agencies. NOAA and DOI are currently in the design phase of the gap analysis process; information on the process will continue to be posted on <http://www.mpa.gov>.

Dated: April 17, 2009.

John H. Dunnigan,

Assistant Administrator.

[FR Doc. E9-9335 Filed 4-22-09; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE P

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

Minority Business Development Agency

[Docket No.: 090416673-9681-01]

Solicitation of Applications for the Minority Business Enterprise Center (MBEC) Program

AGENCY: Minority Business Development Agency, Commerce.

ACTION: Notice.

SUMMARY: In accordance with 15 U.S.C. 1512 and Executive Order 11625, the Minority Business Development Agency (MBDA) is soliciting competitive applications from organizations to operate a Minority Business Enterprise Center (MBEC) in the two locations and geographical service areas specified in this notice. The MBEC operates through the use of business consultants and provides a range of business consulting

and technical assistance services directly to eligible minority-owned businesses. Responsibility for ensuring that applications in response to this competitive solicitation are complete and received by MBDA on time is the sole responsibility of the applicant. Applications submitted must be for the operation of a MBEC and to provide business consultation services to eligible clients. Applications that do not meet these requirements will be rejected. This is not a grant program to help start or to further an individual business.

A link to the full text of the Announcement of Federal Funding Opportunity (FFO) for this solicitation may be accessed at: <http://www.Grants.gov>, <http://www.mbda.gov>, or by contacting the appropriate MBDA representative identified above. The FFO contains a full and complete description of the application and programmatic requirements under the MBEC Program. In order to receive proper consideration, applicants must comply with the requirements contained in the FFO.

DATES: The closing date for receipt of applications is June 4, 2009 at 5 p.m. Eastern Daylight Time (EDT). Completed applications must be received by MBDA at the address below for paper submissions or at <http://www.Grants.gov> for electronic submissions. The due date and time is the same for electronic submissions as it is for paper submissions. The date that applications will be deemed to have been submitted electronically shall be the date and time received at Grants.gov. Applicants should save and print the proof of submission they receive from Grants.gov. Applications received after the closing date and time will not be considered. Anticipated time for processing is seventy-five (75) days from the closing date for receipt of applications. MBDA anticipates that one award under this notice will be made with a start date of September 1, 2009.

Pre-Application Conference: In connection with this solicitation, a pre-application conference is scheduled for May 7, 2009. The time and location of the pre-application conference have yet to be determined. Participants must register at least 24 hours in advance of the conference and may participate in person or by telephone. Please visit the MBDA Internet Portal at <http://www.mbda.gov> (MBDA Portal) or contact an MBDA representative listed below for the specific time and location of the pre-application conference and for registration instructions.

ADDRESSES:

STATE OF ALASKA

DEPARTMENTS OF FISH AND GAME and NATURAL RESOURCES OFFICES OF THE COMMISSIONERS

SARAH PALIN, GOVERNOR

P.O. BOX 115526
JUNEAU, AK 99811-5526
PHONE: (907) 465-4100
FAX: (907) 465-2332

550 W. 7TH AVE., S 1400
ANCHORAGE, AK 99501
PHONE: 907-269-8431
FAX: 907-269-8918

April 6, 2009

Dr. Joseph A. Uravitch
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
National Marine Protected Areas Center
1305 East West Highway, N/ORM
Silver Spring, MD 20910

Dear Dr. Uravitch:

The State of Alaska provides the following comments in response to the nomination of sites in Alaska for inclusion in the national system of marine protected areas (MPA), as published in the Federal Register for March 6, 2009.

The State of Alaska is opposed to the nomination of the four Alaskan sites listed¹:

1. Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge,
2. Arctic National Wildlife Refuge,
3. Glacier Bay National Park and Preserve, and
4. Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge.

The State is opposed to these nominations because they are not necessary for resource protection. Ample federal and state authorities already exist to maintain the integrity of these marine areas; therefore, these designations represent an unnecessary administrative burden.

In addition, the Constitution of the State of Alaska requires that its resources be made available for maximum use consistent with the public interest and that replenishable resources be managed on the sustained yield principle. MPA designation would not contribute to these objectives. The duty of federal agencies established under Executive Order to "avoid harm to natural and cultural resources that are protected by an MPA" is not well defined and might be construed as a basis for denial of permits for responsible resource development or for prohibitions or restrictions on fishing and other activities that could be inconsistent with sustained yield management.

Further, the boundaries of three of the areas, as depicted in the MPA.gov inventory², include tidelands and submerged lands owned and managed by the State of Alaska. Specifically:

¹ Grays Harbor National Wildlife Refuge, in Washington state, is incorrectly listed as an Alaskan site at http://www.mpa.gov/pdf/national-system/nomsites_state3_17_09.pdf

² http://mpa.gov/helpful_resources/inventory.html

1. The Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge is largely terrestrial with marine waters owned by the State within three nautical miles of shore. While the mapped boundaries show a mostly land-based refuge, the mapped boundaries include numerous tracts of State tide and submerged lands and waters, such as in the western and central Gulf of Alaska and in coastal regions of the Bering Sea.
2. The boundaries shown for Glacier Bay National Park and Preserve include State tide and submerged lands and waters, such as the open coast from Cape Spencer to the northwest beyond Cape Fairweather and at Dry Bay and East Alsek.
3. The boundaries shown for the Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge include state tide and submerged lands and waters, such as within the Kuskokwim River mouth, numerous embayments on the mainland, in Baird Inlet, and adjacent to Nelson Island.

In addition to our objections to including these areas as MPAs, we reiterate our request in the enclosed letter, dated February 10, 2009, responding to the original call for nominations that indicates our expectation that nominations of sites in State of Alaska waters would initially go through a public process in Alaska, including review and approval by the Alaska Board of Fisheries.

Sincerely,



Denby S. Lloyd
Commissioner
Department of Fish and Game



Thomas E. Irwin
Commissioner
Department of Natural Resources

Enclosure

STATE OF ALASKA

DEPARTMENTS OF FISH AND GAME and NATURAL RESOURCES OFFICES OF THE COMMISSIONERS

SARAH PALIN, GOVERNOR

P.O. BOX 115526
JUNEAU, AK 99811-5526
PHONE: (907) 465-4100
FAX: (907) 465-2332

550 W. 7TH AVE., S 1400
ANCHORAGE, AK 99501
PHONE: 907-269-8431
FAX: 907-269-8918

February 10, 2009

Dr. Joseph A. Uravitch, Director
National Marine Protected Areas Center
1305 East West Highway
Silver Spring, MD 20910-3281

Dear Dr. Uravitch:

Thank you for your invitation of November 25, 2008, to nominate marine areas in state waters of Alaska to become part of the national system of marine protected areas. Both the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) and the Alaska Department of Natural Resources (ADNR) have an interest in Marine Protected Areas (MPAs). ADF&G is responsible for the protection, maintenance, and improvement of the fish, game, and aquatic plant resources of the state. ADNR is responsible for the development, conservation, and enhancement of natural resources. ADNR is the primary land manager for submerged lands within the state's three mile limit. ADF&G and ADNR co-manage all lands within state game refuges, sanctuaries, and critical habitat areas, including tide and submerged lands, and some local jurisdictions have management authority for tide and submerged lands within political subdivisions.

ADF&G and ADNR have reviewed the explanatory materials and the list of 32 potential sites forwarded to us by your office. We have chosen not to make any nominations at this time for two reasons:

First, all of the 32 listed sites have fishery management restrictions that have been approved by the Alaska Board of Fisheries through a formal public process. For any of these sites to be considered for the national system, it would be important that the Board of Fisheries and the public be involved prior to nomination. In addition to the 32 sites, there are about 2 dozen other marine areas, including state refuges, sanctuaries, and critical habitat areas that might qualify for consideration, and these have been designated by the Alaska Legislature. A public process would also be needed if those sites were to be nominated.

Second, we are concerned that there may be unexpected consequences of federal designation of marine protected areas in state waters. We have asked for a review by our Department of Law to clarify this issue.

In a separate communication to Ms. Laurel Wenzel, we will send corrections to the list of 32 sites as well as information on significant shipwreck sites and information on our state refuges, sanctuaries, and critical habitat areas.

Sincerely,



Denby S. Lloyd
Commissioner
Department of Fish and Game



Thomas E. Irwin
Commissioner
Department of Natural Resources



NOAA / National Marine Fisheries Service
Overview of Issues Related to the Alaska Marine Ecosystem Forum
June 10, 2009

Background

NOAA Fisheries' mission is stewardship of living marine resources through science-based conservation and management and the promotion of healthy ecosystems.

NOAA Fisheries has three major resource management programs:

- Sustainable Fisheries (groundfish, crabs, scallops, halibut)
- Protected Resources (marine mammals and endangered species)
- Habitat Conservation (protection and restoration)

Issues

- **American Recovery and Reinvestment Act Funding** – NOAA Fisheries received approximately \$167M nationwide for shovel-ready habitat restoration projects that create jobs. A request for proposals closed on April 6, 2009. Over 800 proposals were submitted for over \$3B worth of projects. Applications went through a technical review and the top ranked projects went to a panel for further review. Several applications were submitted from Alaska. NOAA plans to announce funding decisions by the end of June.
- **Arctic Fishery Management Plan** – NOAA Fisheries assisted North Pacific Fishery Management Council staff with the development of a new Fishery Management Plan for the Chukchi and Beaufort Seas under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. The Council voted to adopt the new plan in February 2009. The plan is now undergoing Secretarial review, with the public comment period closing July 27, 2009. If approved by the Secretary, the new plan will close the federal waters of the Arctic to all commercial fishing except for traditional fisheries until sufficient information is available to support sustainable harvests.
- **Ice Seals** – On December 30, 2008, NOAA Fisheries determined in response to a petition that listing ribbon seals under the Endangered Species Act is not warranted (annual ice, which is critical for reproduction, molting and resting, will continue to form each winter in Bering Sea and Sea of Okhotsk where most ribbon seals are located). The petitioner filed a 60-day notice of intent to sue on March 31, 2009. The same petitioner requested that we list ringed, spotted, and bearded seals. Status reviews for those three species are underway and determinations are pending. The petitioner filed a 60-day notice of intent to sue regarding ringed, spotted, and bearded seals on June 1, 2009.

- **Cook Inlet Beluga Whales** – NOAA Fisheries listed Cook Inlet beluga whales as endangered effective December 22, 2008. We are presently evaluating relevant information to designate critical habitat under the Endangered Species Act by the end of the year.
- **Review of Essential Fish Habitat** – NOAA Fisheries and the North Pacific Fishery Management Council are undertaking a review of the Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) components of Council fishery management plans, including the areas designated as EFH and the analysis of the effects of fishing and non-fishing activities on EFH. National regulations implementing the EFH provisions of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act specify that a complete review of the EFH information should be conducted at least once every five years. Any resulting amendments to the fishery management plans will be evaluated with public input through the Council process in 2010.
- **Marine Protected Areas** – NOAA’s Marine Protected Areas Center has begun the process of soliciting nominations for sites to be included in the National System of Marine Protected Areas under Executive Order 13158. For purposes of the Executive Order, NOAA Fisheries is the managing entity for sites established through the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. NOAA Fisheries intends to collaborate with the North Pacific Fishery Management Council to consider the possibility of nominating any such sites off Alaska. Staff will develop a white paper for Council consideration, but the time frame for evaluating possible sites has not yet been determined.
- **NOAA Alaska Regional Collaboration Team (ARCTic)** – NOAA continues to implement a regional team to coordinate its programs in Alaska and provide more integrated services to the public. The team includes NOAA Fisheries, NOAA Weather Service, NOAA Ocean Service, NOAA Research, and NOAA Satellite and Information Service. Doug Demaster, director of the Alaska Fisheries Science Center, recently succeeded Laura Furgione (former NOAA Weather Service Regional Director) as the chair for ARCTic.



Briefing for the Alaska Marine Ecosystem Forum

June 10, 2009

Transition news

The new NOAA administrator, Dr Jane Lubchenko, has identified the development of catch share programs and marine spatial planning to be priority issues for her administration. The Council has a lot of experience with catch share programs, which are widely used in the Alaska Federal fisheries.

Alaska-wide issues

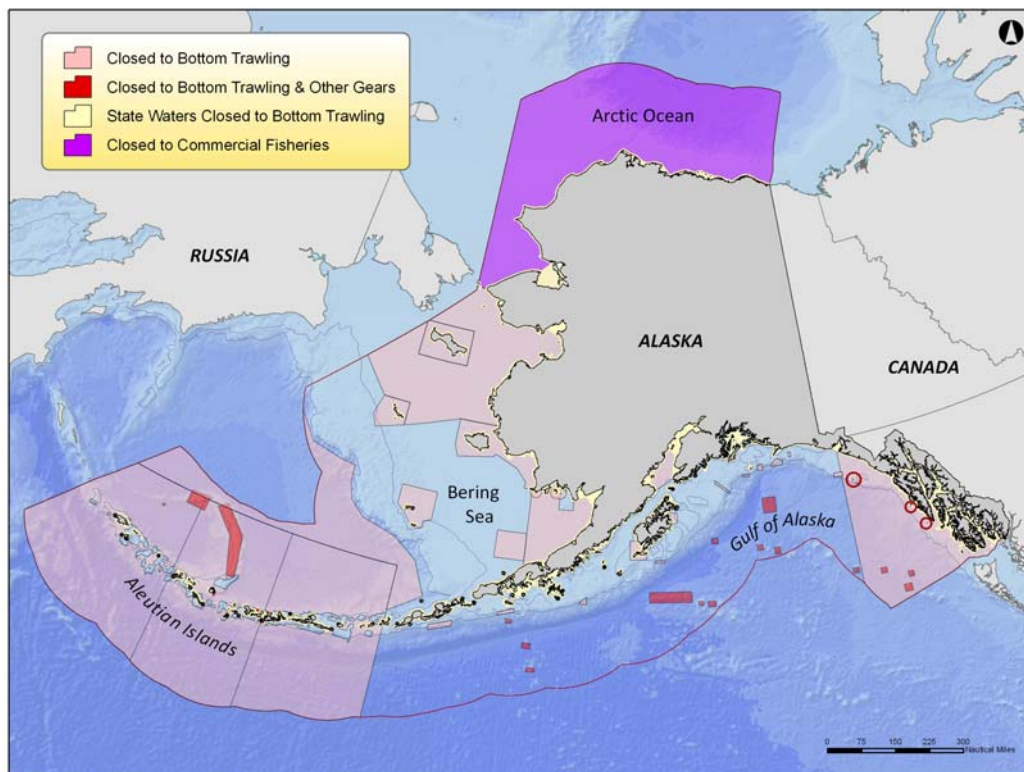
Essential Fish Habitat Review

NMFS and the Council are undertaking a five-year review of the specification of essential fish habitat distribution for each of the fish stocks managed under the Council's Fishery Management Plans (FMPs). The review will be completed in early 2010, and may result in changes to the description and distribution of essential fish habitat for managed species. The review will also evaluate non-fishing impacts on essential fish habitat, and identify conservation and enhancement recommendations for fishing and non-fishing threats to essential fish habitat.

National Marine Protected Area framework

NMFS has formally contacted the Council with a partial list of the Council's fishery closures, in order to begin the consultation process as to whether and which of the closures may appropriately be entered on the national MPA registry. The Council is evaluating how the various time and area closures used for management of the fisheries compare to the criteria identified for candidates for the registry. Discussion of this issue is next scheduled for December 2009.

Map of Council year-round fishery management closures





Outreach to Alaska coastal communities

The Council is developing a policy approach to improve outreach and communications with rural communities and Alaska Native entities, and a method for systematic documentation of this participation in the development of fishery management actions. Targeted outreach efforts were piloted during development of the Arctic Fishery Management Plan and the Chinook Salmon Bycatch EIS. The Council intends to continue to expand its ongoing communication with communities, as well as outreach on particular projects.

Specific fishery management actions in the Arctic, Bering Sea, and Aleutian Islands

Arctic Fishery Management Plan adopted

In February 2009, the Council adopted a Fishery Management Plan (FMP) for the Arctic Management Area. The Council's FMP initially prohibits commercial fishing until data are available with which to make sound fishery management decisions. The FMP also establishes a policy framework to allow commercial fishing in the Beaufort and Chukchi Seas in the future, once adequate scientific information is available on fish stocks and ecological relationships in Arctic marine waters.

Northern Bering Sea Research Plan

The Council and the NOAA Alaska Fisheries Science Center (AFSC) are working on developing a research plan for the northern Bering Sea which would investigate the effects of bottom trawling on benthic habitat. The plan and subsequent management measures would first identify protection areas for crab, marine mammals, ESA-listed species (such as the spectacled eider), and subsistence needs. Bottom trawl fishing is currently prohibited in the northern Bering Sea, but under the research plan, experimental fishing could occur in the area. The AFSC and the Council are trying to collect available ecological baseline data for this area, which is currently not covered by the NMFS bottom trawl survey.

Chinook salmon bycatch hard cap adopted for the Bering Sea pollock fisheries

In April, the Council took action to limit the number of Chinook salmon that can be taken in the Bering Sea pollock trawl fishery before closing the pollock fishery. The management action includes incentives for the annual reduction of salmon bycatch in the pollock fishery at all levels of salmon abundance and salmon encounters. The Council has just begun to consider similar options for addressing chum bycatch in the pollock fishery.

Steller sea lions

The Council is expecting NMFS to issue a draft Biological Opinion on fishery interactions with Steller sea lions (SSLs) in March 2010. The SSL population in portions of the Aleutian Islands continues to decline. Depending on the conclusions of the BiOp, the Council will likely examine alternative proposals for changing SSL protection measures, which currently restrict groundfish fishing, especially for SSL prey species (pollock, Pacific cod, and Atka mackerel). It is possible that changes to the management of Aleutian Islands groundfish fishing may result from this process.

Alaska Contaminants Strategy

A process hosted by The Environmental Protection Agency, University of Alaska, State of Alaska, and Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium

Vision:

Protect the people and environment of Alaska from exposure to contaminants.

Mission:

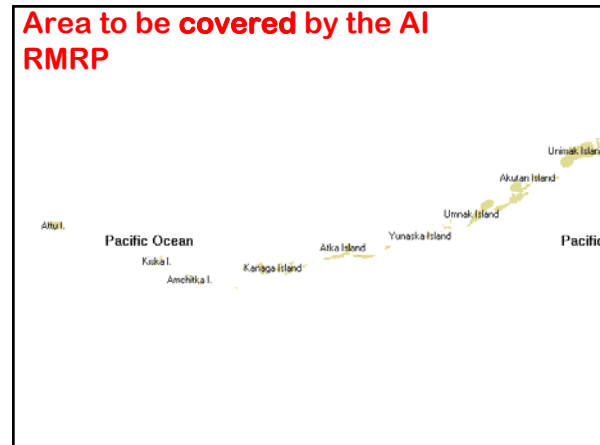
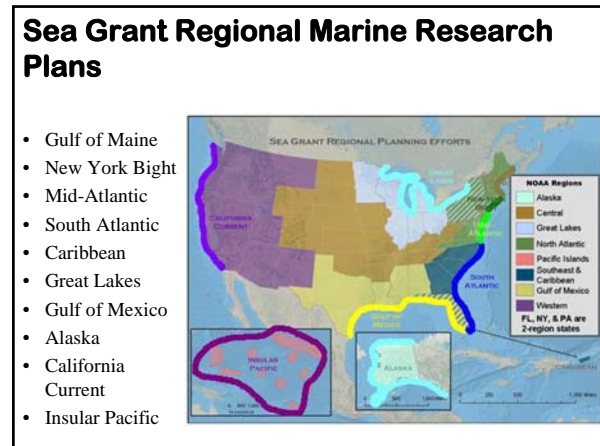
Engage those interested in the presence of persistent organic pollutants, heavy metals and emerging contaminants in Alaska's environment to develop an overall strategy organized by region. Identify areas of greatest concern and gaps in knowledge and solidify what we currently know. Synchronize efforts so that future research is collaborative, complementary, and answers complex questions. Guide research so that it is accessible and useful to Alaskans, informs policy decisions and results in action.

Goals:

- Identify data needs to ground truth predictive models and confirm contaminant sources
- Verify impacts on our environment, subsistence resources and human health
- Develop a method for researchers to connect and interact more easily
- Create guidelines for sample collection, chemical analysis, and data quality
- Provide useful information to subsistence consumers, policy makers and the general public
- Recommend future contaminant monitoring by region.

Process:

- Develop steering committee - 12/08
- Host initial work session to get brainstorming feedback from wider audience - 2/09
- Form workgroups and develop sections of strategy to address goals – 4/09 – 08/10 (*hosting two formal workgroup discussions in 07/09. Additional meetings to follow*)
- Host summit to finalize strategy, hear from experts in the field, and gain support - 10/10 (*State of Alaska has identified \$400,000 for this event - seeking other organizations to co-sponsor*)



Background

- NRC (2000) *Bridging Boundaries Through Regional Marine Research*
- US Commission on Ocean Policy (2004) *An Ocean Blueprint for the 21st Century*
- NOSG (2006) RFP for the development of Regional Marine Research Plans
- National Science and Technology Council’s Joint Subcommittee on Science and Technology—JSOST (2007) *Charting a Course for Ocean Science in the US for the Next Decade: an Ocean Research Priorities Plan and Implementation Strategy*

NOSG Regional Marine Research Plans

- Bottom-up assessment based on stakeholder input
- Stakeholder input gathered through workshops, town meetings, and surveys
- Focus on management-critical needs
- To help identify common research needs among regions.

ORPP Societal Themes

- Stewardship of Natural and Cultural Ocean Resources
- Increasing Resilience to Natural Hazards
- Marine Transportation and Security
- The Ocean's Role in Climate
- Improving Ecosystem Health
- Enhancing Human Health and Safety

Stewardship of Natural and Cultural Ocean Resources



Accurate information about natural and cultural resources, enables resource managers to select options that prevent adverse impacts to ecosystems, promote sound development and use of resources, preserve cultural sites, and restore depleted populations.

Increasing Resilience to Natural Hazards



Mai-Gun, St. George Island
Andrew R. Plinkonoff

Although natural hazards cannot be eliminated, their impacts on communities, maritime operations, cultural resources, social services, and ecosystems can be reduced through understanding the role of physical processes, social systems, and human behavior in increasing vulnerability or enhancing resilience.



Hurricane Debris, South Pedro Island
Eric Gay AP


Marine Transportation and Security




Increased understanding of the environmental impacts of marine transportation and the impacts of environmental conditions on safe and secure marine transportation is needed.



The ocean plays a fundamental role in governing climate through its capacity to store and distribute heat and carbon. Improved understanding of the ocean's role in climate change and variability will enable better predictions of climate effects on ocean processes and components.



The Ocean's Role in Climate



Improving Ecosystem Health



Research can provide information to balance competing uses of the marine environment, to predict impacts, to manage those impacts in a manner that ensures the long-term health and sustainability of marine ecosystems, and to help restore damaged ecosystems.





St. George Island
NOAA Marine Debris Program

Enhancing Human Health and Safety




Understanding the causes of health hazards and how they can be mitigated or managed will lead to fewer illnesses from contaminated seafood, polluted waters, known and emerging disease-causing microbes, and harmful algal blooms (HABs).

Cross-Cutting Issues and Other Research Priorities

Research questions or information needs that straddle multiple themes or that do not fit well within the confines of the six themes.

St. George Island, Marine Conservation Alliance

Sea Grant Regional Marine Research Plans—Different Regions, Different Approaches

- Gulf of Maine
- New York Bight
- Mid-Atlantic
- South Atlantic
- Caribbean
- Great Lakes
- Gulf of Mexico
- Alaska
- California Current
- Insular Pacific

Sea Grant Regional Marine Research Plans—Different Regions, Different Approaches

- Varied approaches for gathering stakeholder input:
 - Poll existing or new Regional Advisory Group
 - Survey of Resource Agencies
 - Survey of Sea Grant research directors
 - Survey of research community
 - Survey of resource users
 - Scoping meetings
 - Workshops
 - Inventory of existing research planning documents

Sea Grant Regional Marine Research Plans—Different Regions, Different Approaches

- Various processes for prioritizing stakeholder input:
 - Advisory board/Science Council
 - Expert panel

Sea Grant Regional Marine Research Plans—Different Regions, Different Approaches

- Various intentions for use of the results:
 - Targeted project funds
 - Internal strategic planning
 - Coordinated research funding
 - General information

Sea Grant Regional Marine Research Plans—Different Regions, Different Stages of Development

Mature	In Development	Conceptual
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Great Lakes Gulf of Mexico California Current 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gulf of Maine Alaska Mid-Atlantic South Atlantic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> New York Bight Insular Pacific Caribbean

Development of the AI RMRP

1. Gather input from a broad cross-section of stakeholders
2. Coalesce stakeholder input into structured hierarchies
3. Apply the Analytic Hierarchy process (AHP) to solicit judgments from an expert panel composed of representative stakeholders.
4. Share results with stakeholders.

Initial Stakeholder Input

- Web- and print-based questionnaire supplemented with 1-on-1 interviews
 - A non-random mechanism for capturing a breadth of perspectives of research and information needs
- Surveys submitted by 124 individuals, organizations, and agencies
- 1,007 unique research and information needs identified

Stakeholder Survey

Regional Research and Information Themes for the Aleutian Island Region

Answer this survey and qualify for a prize drawing for \$200 in Alaska Sea Grant publications, videos, and posters!

Welcome to the survey on regional research priorities for the Aleutian Island Region. For this project, research needs are those that require the discovery of new knowledge about the coast and/or ocean. Information needs are those that require the synthesis or translation of existing knowledge. We are focusing on needs that will contribute to management of coastal and oceanic natural resources and the communities that depend on them.

Over the next several pages, we will ask you to provide input on research and information needs associated with six topical themes. You will also have an opportunity to provide input on needs that cut across topical areas or are not included within the areas we have listed.

Stewardship of resources	Ecosystem health
Resilience to natural hazards	Human health & safety
Marine transportation/security	Cross-cutting and other priorities
The ocean's role in climate	

You may take this survey as often as you like, but we ask that if you do so, please identify yourself each time so that we can accurately track the number of individuals who have responded.

Theme #1: Stewardship of Natural and Cultural Ocean Resources

To sustain a high quality of life for those who enjoy and rely on coastal and ocean resources, we need better ways to define and measure the social and economic vitality of coastal communities and a better understanding of factors that contribute to this vitality. For example,

- What is the value of Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) certification and what are the implications of growing international interest in the carbon footprint of fisheries and food miles?
- What are the characteristics of the major undersea habitats near the Aleutians, and how critical are they to commercial and non-commercial species? What invasive species have been introduced in the past 5 years, and what are the paths of introduction?

Please list up to 5 research and information priorities for this theme area. For each priority, indicate if it is a near-term (1-3 years) or long-term (4 or more years) research priority and please rate its importance. When you are done entering priorities under this theme, please select "Next" at the bottom of the page.

Stewardship research priority #1

a. Is this a near-term or long-term priority?

b. Please rate the importance of this research or information priority.

Low Moderate High Very High Highest

Theme 2: Resilience to Natural Hazards

Coastal storms and tsunamis have demonstrated that natural hazards can affect our economy, environment, public health, and safety. Flooding, tsunamis, earthquakes, landslides, volcanic eruptions, severe storms, and other natural hazards cannot be eliminated. However, with well targeted research and information we can improve management and predictions to reduce impacts to coastal communities and natural resources. For example,

- How can we bring together engineering knowledge of shoreline reinforcement, administration of federal reinforcement projects, natural erosion processes, etc., to make best management decisions for communities?
- What areas are at particular risk for damage from natural hazards?
- How do natural hazards affect fish and marine mammals?

Please list up to 5 research and information priorities for this theme area. For each priority, indicate if it is a near-term (1-3 years) or long-term (4 or more years) research priority and please rate its importance. When you are done entering priorities under this theme, please select "Next" at the bottom of the page.

Resilience research priority #1

a. Is this a near-term or long-term priority?

b. Please rate the importance of this research or information priority.

Low Moderate High Very High Highest

Theme 3: Marine Transportation and Security

Our ports, both small and large, are essential to healthy coastal economies. Ports and maritime transportation also present security risks and environmental hazards. A better understanding of the impacts of our marine transportation system can help managers meet the challenge of maintaining safe and secure ports and preventing groundings while reducing the negative environmental impacts. For example,

- What are optimal strategies for stationing response vessels in the Aleutian Islands region? How should these strategies evolve in response to changes in shipping routes and the intensity of traffic as arctic shipping routes open?
- How critical are the linkages between the maintenance of port services and the presence of shore-based processing capacity?
- How do port operations and marine transport affect management of living marine resources, including northern right whales?

Please list up to 5 research and information priorities for this theme area. For each priority, indicate if it is a near-term (1-3 years) or long-term (4 or more years) research priority and please rate its importance. When you are done entering priorities under this theme, please select "Next" at the bottom of the page.

Marine transport research priority #1

a. Is this a near-term or long-term priority?

Near-term (1-3 years)
 Long-term (4 or more years)

b. Please rate the importance of this research or information priority.

Low Moderate High Very High Highest

Marine transport priority #1

Theme 4: The Ocean's Role in Climate

Our ability to better predict climate changes on both seasonal and decadal scales depends on our knowledge of the interrelationships between the ocean and the atmosphere. Better projections of climate will help society respond to climate-related hazards and adapt to climate change and variations such as sea level rise and changing weather patterns. For example,

- What satellite data tools can be developed to track changing ocean conditions?
- What are the links between physical oceanographic systems and living marine resources? Which species provide early indications of climate-related changes and sensitivities? How do we monitor those species and use the information for management decisions?
- What are the links between the spatial distribution of species, their carrying capacity, and climate-driven changes in the ocean and atmosphere?

Please list up to 5 research and information priorities for this theme area. For each priority, indicate if it is a near-term (1-3 years) or long-term (4 or more years) research priority and please rate its importance. When you are done entering priorities under this theme, please select "Next" at the bottom of the page.

Ocean and climate research priority #1

a. Is this a near-term or long-term priority?

Near-term (1-3 years)
 Long-term (4 or more years)

b. Please rate the importance of this research or information priority.

Low Moderate High Very High Highest

Ocean-climate priority #1

Theme 5: Ecosystem Health

Open ocean, coastal, and estuarine ecosystems host an abundance of natural resources and provide numerous benefits to society. For managers to be more effective in achieving sustainable use, as well as protecting and restoring ecosystem health, we need to gain a better understanding of how these complex ecosystems work. For example,

- What are the movement patterns associated with nearshore fish species?
- Are predator/prey relationships hindering the recovery of depleted species?
- What factors trigger regime shifts in the ecosystem? How do regime shifts affect the feasibility of current management objectives and the stability of fisheries and fishery-dependent communities?

Please list up to 5 research and information priorities for this theme area. For each priority, indicate if it is a near-term (1-3 years) or long-term (4 or more years) research priority and please rate its importance. When you are done entering priorities under this theme, please select "Next" at the bottom of the page.

Ecosystem health research priority #1

a. Is this a near-term or long-term priority?

Near-term (1-3 years)
 Long-term (4 or more years)

b. Please rate the importance of this research or information priority.

Low Moderate High Very High Highest

Ecosystem priority #1

Theme 6: Human Health and Safety

The coastal and ocean environment can be a source of risks and benefits for human health. Research and information are needed to reduce human health risks from things like harmful algal blooms, seafood contamination, and poor water quality. Research and information is also needed to identify and sustainably derive health benefits from bio-products, safe seafood consumption, and other yet-to-be-imagined ocean commodities. For example,

- Which environmental signs can help predict the beginning and/or end of harmful algal bloom events?
- How do changes in the management of fisheries, changes in the geographic distribution of fish populations, and changes in shipping traffic affect the best positioning of emergency response resources?
- Do changes in the mix of lower-trophic species affect the nutritional value of seafoods?

Please list up to 5 research and information priorities for this theme area. For each priority, indicate if it is a near-term (1-3 years) or long-term (4 or more years) research priority and please rate its importance. When you are done entering priorities under this theme, please select "Next" at the bottom of the page.

Human health/safety research priority #1

a. Is this a near-term or long-term priority?

Near-term (1-3 years)
 Long-term (4 or more years)

b. Please rate the importance of this research or information priority.

Low Moderate High Very High Highest

Health-safety priority #1

Theme 7: Cross-Cutting Themes and Other Research Priorities

Please do not let the previous six themes limit your responses. If you would like to provide input on research and information needs not covered by those themes, please do so. For example,

- What are the effects of marine debris—including garbage discarded under MARPOL V, river-borne garbage, and derelict fishing gear—on living marine resources, including marine mammals, seabirds, and living marine substrate?
- What are links between physical, biological, and social systems in the Aleutian Islands region?

Please list up to 5 research and information priorities for this theme area. For each priority, indicate if it is a near-term (1-3 years) or long-term (4 or more years) research priority and please rate its importance. When you are done entering priorities under this theme, please select "Next" at the bottom of the page.

Cross-cutting research priority #1

a. Is this a near-term or long-term priority?

Near-term (1-3 years)
 Long-term (4 or more years)

b. Please rate the importance of this research or information priority.

Low Moderate High Very High Highest

Cross-cutting priority #1

Background Information

Please provide us with some background information to help us determine whether this survey represents a diverse group of people.

Where do you live?

Country:

State:

City:

County or borough:

Please check all answers that characterize your relationship to the coast and ocean.

Beach or ocean enthusiast
 Coastal and ocean advocacy in part or all of my job
 Coastal and ocean education in part or all of my job
 Coastal and ocean management in part or all of my job
 Coastal and ocean research in part or all of my job
 Coastal resident
 Subsistence harvester
 Sport fisherman
 Marine business or charter industry owner, operator, or employee
 Other (please specify):

Gender

Female
 Male

Age range

Younger than 18
 18 to 19
 20-29
 30-39
 40-49
 50-59
 60-69
 70 or older

Ethnicity

Optional Contact Information

Would you like to:

- Stay informed about this project. You can expect a maximum of one email or postal mailing per month.
- Be entered in the drawing for \$200 in Alaska Sea Grant publications, videos, and posters.

Mailings may include the progress of this project, additional opportunities to participate, draft reports, and final reports. Your contact information will not be shared.

To qualify for the survey prize drawing, we will need your name and email address or phone number.

Contact information

First name

Last name

Organization or affiliation (if any)

If you prefer to be contacted by email please enter your email address below.

If you prefer to be contacted via post, please provide your mailing address.

Address

City

State

Zip

Country

Phone number

Would you like to be recognized for your contribution? If you choose to be recognized, your name and/or organization will be listed in an appendix of the final report. Your specific comments will not be connected with your name and/or organization. Alaska Sea Grant will clearly state that not all views represent all people who provided input.

- Yes, I would like both my name and organization listed in the report as a voluntary participant
- I would only like my name and not my organization listed
- I would only like my organization and not my name listed
- No, please do not list my name or organization

Development of Structured Hierarchies

- Raw responses were sorted using keywords and consolidated to eliminate redundancies. Some responses were shifted to more appropriate themes. Suggestions outside the scope of the project were set aside.
- Within each theme, unique research and information unique were grouped under common objectives and sub-objectives
- The structured hierarchy includes seven themes, 27 objectives, 23 sub-objectives, and 308 unique research and information needs.

Prioritizing Research & Information Needs

- A 2-day workshop was convened with an expert panel of representative stakeholders
- The AHP was used to integrate expert judgments in regarding the relative importance of research and information needs for the *Stewardship*, and *Marine Transportation*, and *Ecosystem Health* themes.
- Email and teleconferences will be used to form integrated expert judgments for the four remaining themes.

Expert Panel

Josh Boyle (USCG), Reid Brewer (AKSG MAP), Vernon Byrd (USFWS), Dave Carlisle (ADF&G), Dave Christie (NOAA/NURP), Heather Coletti (Nat'l Park Service), Bubba Cook (WWF), Keith Criddle (UAF), Diana Evans (NPFMC), Frank Kelty (City of Unalaska), Sandra Lowe (NMFS ASFC), Stephanie Madsen (At-Sea Processor Assoc), John Olson (NMFS AKR), Nancy Sonafrank (AK DEC), Beth Stewart (Aleutians East Borough), Clem Tillion (Adak Fisheries), John Warrenchuck (Oceana), Bruce Wright (Aleutian Pribilof Is. Assoc)

Facilitator: Peggy Merritt (Resource Decision Support)

Prioritization Criteria—selected by panel

- The lack of information jeopardizes the ability to ensure sustainable development, management, or use of the resource.
- Feasibility and cost effectiveness.
- Probability that research will successfully address a need.
- Information aids a broad swath of people.
- There is a sequential order, where one need must be addressed before research can begin on another.
- There is a potential for synergy; that is, research projects will address multiple missions and encompass multiple disciplines.

Stewardship of Natural and Cultural Ocean Resources

Objectives

- Ensure accurate assessment & sustainable use of marine resources through examination of alternative management paradigms
- Foster vital communities through greater understanding of factors that impact socioeconomics
- Foster resilient communities through greater understanding of factors that impact culture & human activities
- Promote communication between agencies & communities

Ensure accurate assessment & sustainable use of marine resources through examination of alternative management paradigms

Sub-Objectives

- Stock assessment methods (e.g., improve abundance estimates)
- Stock status & population trends
- Harvest & use
- Management paradigms

Stock assessment methods (e.g., improve abundance estimates)

Research and Information Needs

- Collect spatially explicit data for managing localized stocks (e.g. rockfish) in the A.I.
- Collect life history information for harvested species & better integrate into stock assessment models.
- Determine if there are genetically distinct groundfish stocks in the A.I. region.
- Develop effective survey techniques for the A.I.
- Develop better survey design to improve abundance estimates of Atka mackerel, rockfish & crab.
- Improve abundance & stock structure estimates of currently harvested species.

Scoring of Objectives, Sub-Objectives, and Research and Information Needs

- (1) Slight importance
- (3) Moderate importance
- (5) Strong importance
- (7) Very strong importance
- (9) Extreme importance

Each panelist provided a separate judgment for each objective, sub-objective, and research and information need. Panelists were encouraged to discuss the basis for their judgment and to change their scores.

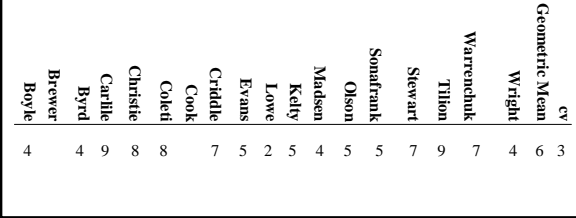
Ensure accurate assessment & sustainable use of marine resources through examination of alternative management paradigms

Geometric Mean	CV
Wright	9
Warrenchuk	9
Tihon	9
Stewart	9
Sonarfrank	9
Olson	9
Madsen	9
Kelly	9
Lowe	9
Eyans	9
Chiddle	9
Cook	9
Colef	9
Christie	9
Carille	9
Byrd	9
Brewer	9
Boyle	9

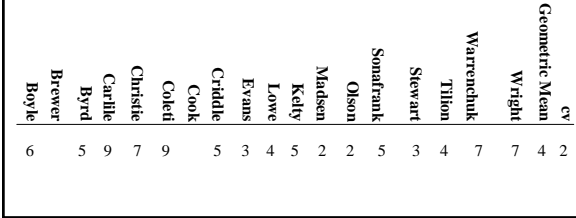
Foster vital communities through greater understanding of factors that impact socioeconomics

Geometric Mean	CV
Wright	7
Warrenchuk	7
Tihon	5
Stewart	3
Sonarfrank	9
Olson	5
Madsen	9
Kelly	7
Lowe	7
Eyans	7
Chiddle	7
Cook	7
Colef	9
Christie	8
Carille	9
Byrd	9
Brewer	9
Boyle	7

Foster resilient communities through greater understanding of factors that impact culture & human activities



Promote communication between agencies & communities

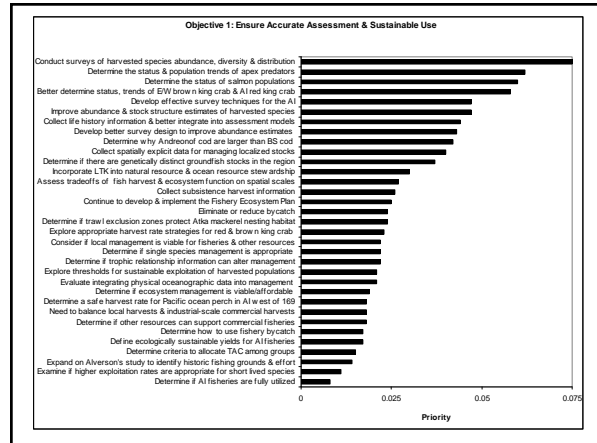


Prioritization of Research and Information Needs

The total score for each research or information need was calculated by adding the weighted proportions over all objectives within each theme:

$$T_m = \sum_{k=1}^d W_k p_{k,m}$$

Where T_m is the total weighted score for research or information need m , W_k is the weight for objective k , $p_{k,m}$ is the weighted proportion of the total score for need m addressing objective k and d is the number of research or information needs.



Completion Plan

- Summer 2009
 - Complete prioritization of research and information needs for remaining themes
- Fall 2009
 - Release draft report to stakeholders who participated in survey and on expert panel
- Spring 2010
 - Revise and disseminate the draft report