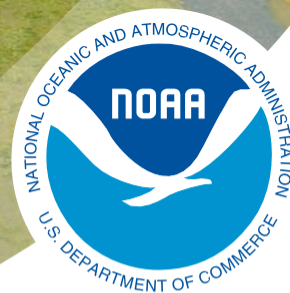




NOAA Fisheries Alaska Region Fiscal Year 2023 Priorities



NOAA
FISHERIES

Message from the Regional Administrator

Dear Alaska Region Colleagues,

NOAA Fisheries' Alaska Region has a clear mission to provide science-based stewardship of Alaska's marine resources and their habitats in the Gulf of Alaska, eastern Bering Sea, and Arctic oceans. We are guided by strategic plans that set multi-year goals and objectives, and we have for many years identified milestones to track our progress on some major activities each quarter, but the Alaska Region has never before laid out our top priorities on an annual basis. Doing so is a way to make clear to Alaska Region staff, other parts of NOAA Fisheries, and our partners and stakeholders the top things we aim to accomplish this fiscal year. Given that we have limited resources, it's useful to remind ourselves about what needs to come first, while of course recognizing that priorities sometimes must shift in response to changes around us.



This document identifies our priorities for FY23 based on the [Alaska Region 2022-2027 Strategic Plan](#), higher level strategic plans, and our Senior Leadership Team's view of the most pressing things we need to do this year to meet our legal mandates, address the expectations of our stakeholders, and support our staff. Although we're issuing this first-ever annual priorities document at the beginning of the second quarter of FY23, in the future we'll strive to articulate our annual priorities in October at the start of each fiscal year. Thanks to all of our amazing Alaska Region personnel and affiliates for your great work!

Sincerely,

Jon Kurland

Regional Administrator

Goal 1 - Manage Fisheries for Sustainability and Economic Competitiveness

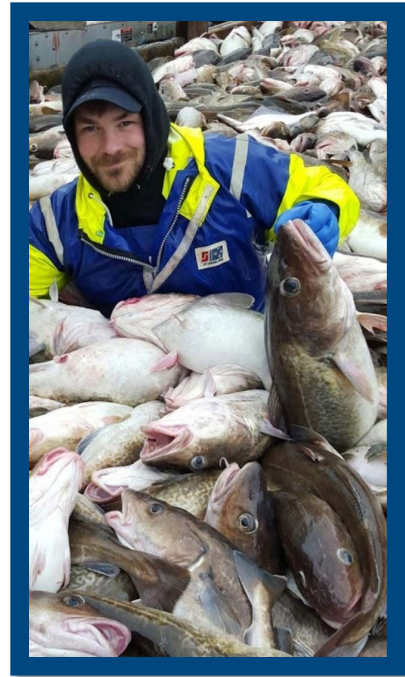
Support Ecosystem-Based Fishery Management

- Manage the Alaska groundfish fisheries to avoid exceeding Annual Catch Limits and to minimize Prohibited Species Catch.
- Initiate Endangered Species Act section 7 consultation for the Gulf of Alaska and Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands groundfish fisheries to ensure sustainability and continued legal compliance.
- Complete a 5-year review of the Essential Fish Habitat components of Alaska Fishery Management Plans to ensure habitat information is updated to support ecosystem-based fishery management.
- Develop effective regulations for new fishery management programs, focusing on the new Pacific cod trawl cooperative program, abundance-based management of halibut bycatch, and electronic monitoring of trawl fisheries.
- Respond effectively to litigation challenging the salmon fisheries in Southeast Alaska (ensuring compliance with the Endangered Species Act) and in Cook Inlet (ensuring compliance with the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act).
- Develop and implement an effective rebuilding plan for snow crab.
- Complete interagency consultations and provide conservation recommendations for federal actions that may adversely affect Essential Fish Habitat.
- Facilitate marine invasive species monitoring and prevention, focusing on the response to invasive green crabs.



Provide Exceptional Customer Service to Seafood Industry Stakeholders

- Improve customer service by advancing the Integrated Fisheries Applications project, focusing on more efficient intake and processing of fisheries permitting applications and implementation of the new Pacific Cod Trawl Cooperative (PCTC) program.
- Update the Alaska Region catch accounting system to meet information needs for management of the North Pacific groundfish fisheries.
- Complete the 2024 Annual Deployment Plan for observer and electronic monitoring in the Alaska groundfish and halibut fisheries.
- Inspect and approve shoreside processor catch monitoring plans and approve at-sea processor scales so that catch estimates are accurate and harvests of Alaska crab, Pacific halibut, and groundfish are consistent with allocations of total allowable catch.
- Initiate a targeted outreach and training program to educate and inform the Alaska fishing industry and tribal and coastal communities about fisheries programs, associated permitting processes, and regulatory requirements.
- Conduct industry training and user support of the Interagency Electronic Reporting System to provide the Alaska fishing industry with a consolidated means of electronically reporting halibut and sablefish individual fishing quota, groundfish, salmon, and shellfish landings to multiple management agencies.



- Implement a modern call center telephone system to better support customers seeking assistance with fishery permitting, quota management, and associated services.
- Approve Vessel Monitoring Plans for fixed gear and trawl vessels that opt into Electronic Monitoring programs.
- Facilitate marine aquaculture production by participating in planning and siting initiatives and promoting streamlined permitting processes.
- Ensure through grant processes that Fisheries Disaster funds are used for activities that restore the fishery or prevent a similar failure in the future and assist fishing communities affected by such failure.

Goal 2 - Promote Conservation and Recovery of Protected Species

Advance High-Priority Conservation Actions for Protected Species

- Complete timely and effective Endangered Species Act consultations, including developing Biological Opinions for the Southeast Alaska salmon fisheries, Gulf of Alaska groundfish fisheries, Lease Sale 258 in Cook Inlet, petroleum pipeline replacement in Cook Inlet, military firing exercises adjacent to Cook Inlet, oil and gas exploration in Harrison Bay, Port of Alaska improvements, and cruise ship terminal construction in Seward and Whittier.
- Issue a 12-month finding on a petition to list sunflower sea stars under the Endangered Species Act and determine whether listing is warranted.
- Issue a 90-day finding on whether a petition to list bull kelp under the Endangered Species Act presents substantial information indicating that listing may be warranted.
- Respond effectively to litigation challenging the decision not to delist Arctic ringed seals under the Endangered Species Act.
- Complete Endangered Species Act 5-year reviews for ringed seals and North Pacific right whales.
- Complete a 12-month finding to determine whether to revise the critical habitat designation for North Pacific right whales.
- Complete a revised Marine Mammal Protection Act conservation plan for northern fur seals.
- Implement the Species in the Spotlight Action Plan for Cook Inlet beluga whales: coordinate recovery actions with stakeholders via the Cook Inlet Beluga Whale Recovery Implementation Task Force, continue citizen science monitoring of beluga presence in key habitats, continue photo-identification work to assess beluga population characteristics, and implement the annual Belugas Count! outreach and citizen science event to promote awareness of recovery efforts.



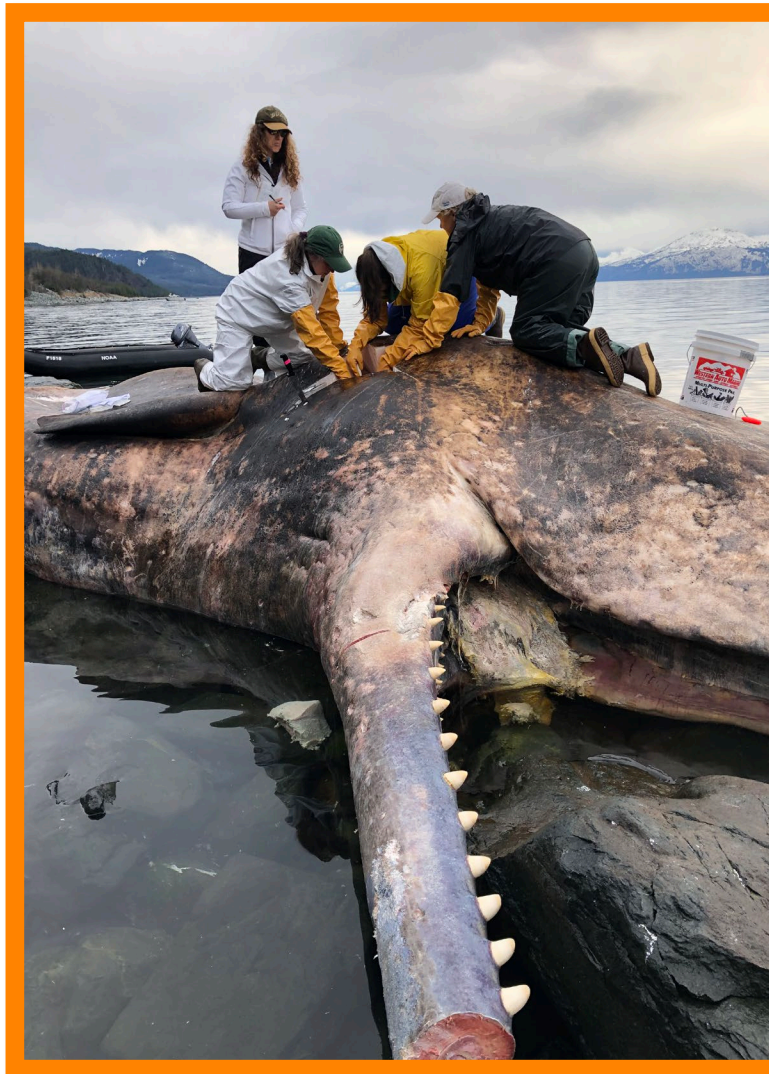
Engage Partners to Enhance Conservation of Marine Mammals

- Advance co-management of subsistence use of marine mammals by Alaska Natives, focusing on potential revisions to subsistence harvest regulations for northern fur

seals, hunter-developed management plans for harvests of western Alaska belugas, and the feasibility of a new co-management organization for harbor seals.

- Minimize harassment and illegal takes of marine mammals and support sustainable wildlife viewing by working collaboratively with tourism businesses and the general public.

- Provide technical support and coordination for trained responses to marine mammal stranding events by volunteer members of the Alaska Marine Mammal Stranding Network.



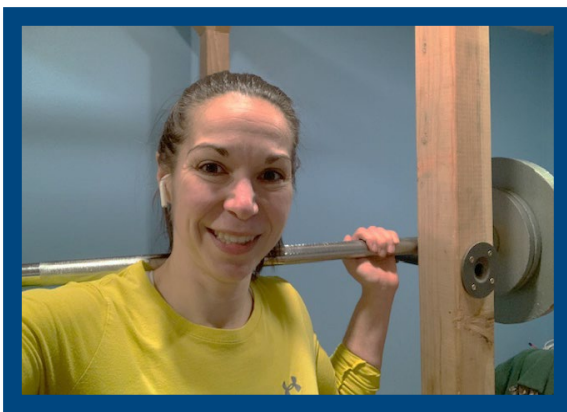
Goal 3 - Ensure Organizational Excellence

Build Improved Structures for Organizational Planning and Management

- Advance actions and measure progress under the [Alaska Region 2022-2027 Strategic Plan](#).
- Develop Business Plans for each division in the Alaska Region to align budget and staffing with organizational priorities.
- Create a new approach for Alaska Region priority-based resourcing decisions.
- Hire a tribal liaison, launch a Tribal Engagement Team, and expand coordination with Alaska Native tribes and organizations to advance mission priorities.
- Adopt new processes to enhance working relationships with the Alaska Department of Fish & Game.



Provide Outstanding Human Resources Support for Alaska Region Employees



- Fill high-priority vacancies to ensure adequate staffing.
- Expand opportunities for personal and professional learning and growth for employees.
- Provide training and resources for employee wellness best practices and develop a culture supportive of employee self-care.
- Provide opportunities to improve diversity and inclusion for our workforce.



U.S. Secretary of Commerce
Gina M. Raimondo

Under Secretary of Commerce for
Oceans and Atmosphere, NOAA
Administrator
Richard W. Spinrad

Assistant Administrator for Fisheries
Janet L. Coit

Regional Administrator, Alaska Regional Office
Jon Kurland

January 2023

www.fisheries.noaa.gov

OFFICIAL BUSINESS

**National Marine
Fisheries Service**
Alaska Regional Office
Juneau, AK 99802

