

**NOAA
FISHERIES**

Alaska Region FY 2025 Priorities

September 2024



Message from the Regional Administrator

Dear Alaska Region Colleagues,

I'm very happy to share this third annual compilation of top priorities for NOAA Fisheries Alaska Region, supporting our 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. In 2024, your Senior Leadership Team also started identifying top priority cross-division projects on a quarterly basis as a way to promote alignment across divisions and shared ownership for the successful and timely completion of those projects. Laying out the Alaska Region's overall priorities for FY25 in this document is an additional step and a way to make clear to our staff, other parts of NOAA Fisheries, and our partners and stakeholders the top things we aim to accomplish this fiscal year. Given limited resources, it's useful to remind ourselves about what needs to come first, while recognizing that priorities sometimes must shift in response to changes around us.

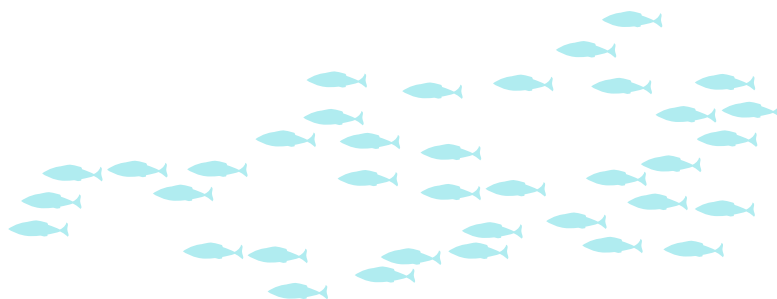
This document identifies our FY25 priorities based on the [Alaska Region 2022-2027 Strategic Plan](#), higher level strategic plans, and your Senior Leadership Team's view of the most pressing things we need to do this year to meet our legal mandates, address the expectations of stakeholders, and support our staff. The Alaska Region accomplishes many other important tasks over the course of a year that are priorities for various NOAA Fisheries programs, but this document strives to capture our must-do priorities at the level of the Alaska Region as a whole. I continue to be inspired by the excellent work of our amazing Alaska Region personnel and affiliates, and I'm grateful for your energy and professionalism.

Sincerely,



Jon Kurland

Regional Administrator



Goal 1 - Manage Fisheries for Sustainability and Economic Competitiveness.

Support Ecosystem-Based Fishery Management (EBFM)

- Integrate EBFM into management decisions to account for tradeoffs among and between fisheries (commercial, recreational, and subsistence), aquaculture, protected species, biodiversity, and habitats.
- Monitor and manage the Alaska groundfish fisheries to avoid exceeding Annual Catch Limits and to minimize Prohibited Species Catch.
- Complete Endangered Species Act section 7 consultations for the Gulf of Alaska and Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands groundfish fisheries to ensure sustainability and continued legal compliance.
- Support the North Pacific Fishery Management Council (NPFMC) in developing new measures to minimize chum salmon bycatch in the Bering Sea pollock fishery.
- Support the NPFMC in developing a programmatic Environmental Impact Statement to advance EBFM and increase resilience to the effects of climate change for all the fisheries we manage in Alaska.
- Refine processes for developing the annual Stock Assessment and Fishery Evaluation report for the Cook Inlet Exclusive Economic Zone salmon fishery and conducting inseason management of that fishery.
- Respond effectively to lawsuits challenging the 2023 and 2024 annual harvest specifications for the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands groundfish fisheries, the 2024 Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) amendments to Fishery Management Plans, halibut abundance-based bycatch management measures, and the Cook Inlet salmon fishery.
- Enhance coordination with action agencies to complete consultations and provide conservation recommendations for federal actions that may adversely affect EFH.
- Coordinate and collaborate with the Alaska Fisheries Science Center and partners to advance habitat science products to support EFH and EBFM.
- Facilitate marine invasive species monitoring and prevention, focusing on the response to invasive green crabs.



Provide Exceptional Customer Service to Seafood Industry Stakeholders

- Develop the information technology infrastructure, customer support model, fee collection and funding mechanism, and rulemaking to implement the halibut Recreational Quota Entity Program fee collection, enabling charter halibut operators to purchase quota shares from participants in the commercial halibut fisheries.
- Improve customer service by advancing the Integrated Fisheries Application project, focusing on completion of new capabilities for permitting, quota management, and cost recovery support for the Rockfish Program, Amendment 80 Program, and Halibut/Sablefish Program, and begin implementing capabilities for industry members to initiate transactions.
- Consult effectively with Alaska Native tribes in Cook Inlet to evaluate options for establishing a tribal salmon fishery in federal waters.
- Complete the Annual Deployment Plan for partial coverage observers and electronic monitoring in the Alaska groundfish and halibut fisheries.
- Conduct targeted outreach and training to educate and inform the Alaska fishing industry and tribal and coastal communities about fisheries programs, associated permitting processes, and regulatory requirements.
- 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.
- Approve Vessel Monitoring Plans for fixed gear and trawl vessels that opt into electronic monitoring programs.
- 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.



- Update the Alaska Region's catch accounting system to increase efficient data sharing with partners and the public.
- Facilitate marine aquaculture production by proposing Aquaculture Opportunity Areas for public comment in partnership with the State of Alaska.
- Ensure through grant processes that fisheries disaster funds are used for activities that restore the affected fishery or prevent a similar failure in the future and assist affected fishing communities.
- Promote equity and environmental justice through targeted outreach to underserved communities and incorporate EEJ practices in the Alaska Region's workflows.
- Clarify and streamline the Alaska Region's Freedom of Information Act process to enhance our responsiveness to the public.

Goal 2 - Promote Conservation and Recovery of Protected Species.

Advance High-Priority Conservation Actions for Protected Species

- Complete timely Endangered Species Act consultations, including developing Biological Opinions for the Gulf of Alaska and Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands groundfish fisheries, NOAA Fisheries research, and major Cook Inlet projects including oil and gas exploration and development, port construction, wastewater discharge, and military activities.
- Develop recovery plans for threatened Arctic ringed seals and Beringia bearded seals.
- Complete Endangered Species Act 5-year status reviews for Beringia bearded seals and Western Distinct Population Segment Steller sea lions.
- Develop a proposed rule to revise the critical habitat designation for endangered North Pacific right whales.
- Complete a 12-month finding on whether to propose listing Gulf of Alaska Chinook salmon as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act.
- Pursue new efficiencies for Endangered Species Act section 7 consultations, such as streamlined template documents, new programmatic consultations, and more efficient ways for action agencies to submit consultation requests.
- Implement the Species in the Spotlight Action Plan for endangered 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.
- Respond effectively to petitions to 1) revise the subsistence harvest regulations for northern fur seals and 2) implement new habitat protection measures for endangered Cook Inlet beluga whales.
- Respond effectively to lawsuits, including those challenging the designation of critical habitat for Arctic ringed seals and Beringia bearded seals, the denial of a petition to delist Arctic ringed seals as a threatened species, and specific Endangered Species Act section 7 consultations.



Engage Partners to Enhance Conservation of Marine Mammals

- Advance co-management of subsistence use of marine mammals by Alaska Natives, focusing on revisions to the subsistence harvest regulations for northern fur seals, support for Alaska Native partners' consideration of forming a new co-management organization for harbor seals, and concerns regarding vessel traffic in areas used for subsistence harvest.
- 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.
- Implement a new internet-accessible database of Alaska marine mammal strandings and entanglements to make such data more easily available to conservation and management partners.



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](#).
- Increase and enhance communication between the Senior Leadership Team, first-line supervisors, and staff.
- Use FY25 Business Plans for each division in the Alaska Region to guide strategic decisions and align budget and staffing with organizational priorities.
- Expand coordination and engagement with Alaska Native tribes and organizations regarding regulatory and management actions, NOAA Fisheries grant opportunities, and a new protocol for tribal consultation.
- Continue to enhance our partnership with the Alaska Department of Fish & Game.
- Develop an outreach strategy for improving Alaska Region communications with user groups.

Provide Outstanding Human Resources Support for Alaska Region Employees

- Fill high-priority vacancies as efficiently as possible to ensure adequate staffing.
- Implement a consistent and effective onboarding process to orient new employees to the Alaska Region's workplace culture and business processes.
- Support strategic opportunities for personal and professional learning and growth for employees.
- Provide training and resources for employee wellness best practices and maintain a culture supportive of employee self-care.





Secretary of Commerce
[Gina M. Raimondo](#)

U.S. 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](#)

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www.fisheries.noaa.gov

OFFICIAL BUSINESS

National Marine
Fisheries Service
Alaska Regional Office
Juneau, AK 99802

