



Fish News

April 9, 2012

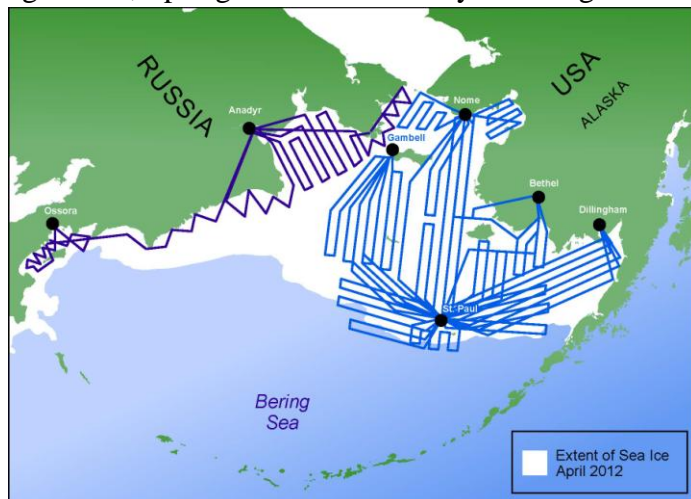
U.S. and Russia Team Up to Begin Largest Survey Ever on Abundance of Ice Seals



This week, a team of researchers from the U.S. and Russia will jointly kick-off the largest survey effort ever to estimate how many ice-associated seals live in the Bering Sea region.

This large scale, springtime aerial survey will begin this

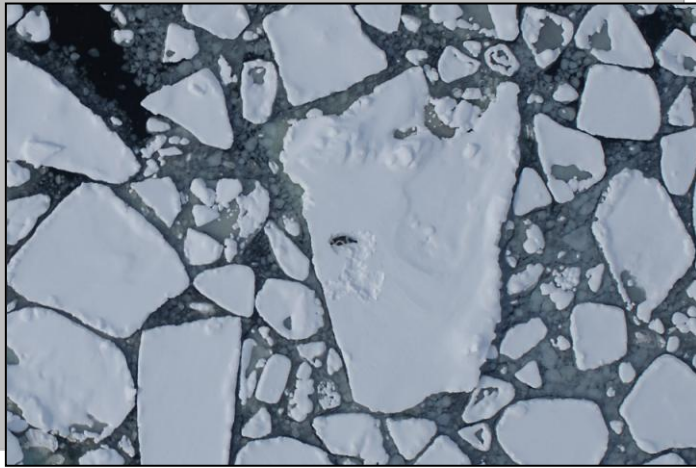
week from Nome. Scientists will use advanced imaging systems and modern statistical techniques to provide the first comprehensive estimates of abundance for the four species of ice-associated seals found in the Bering Sea: ribbon seals, spotted seals, bearded seals and ringed seals. Survey flights will also originate from Bethel, Dillingham and St. Paul. Each flight will typically last between



This map shows the planned survey track lines for the joint U.S./Russia ice seal survey. Courtesy: NOAA.

five and seven hours.

Aerial surveys are the best way to study ice-associated seals in their natural environment while covering large areas in a relatively short amount of time. Spring is the best time to survey because the seals concentrate within the Bering Sea ice pack and spend more time on the ice (where they can be seen and counted) while they have pups, breed and molt.



**Aerial survey photo of an adult male ribbon seal in the Bering Sea.
Photo courtesy: NOAA.**

In the U.S. surveys, two types of aircraft will be used: a NOAA-owned and operated Dehavilland Twin Otter aircraft and a chartered long-range Aero-Commander 690.

Because the aircraft will be flying at an altitude of 1,000 feet, too high for the human eye to identify species, high-resolution digital cameras will capture images to be analyzed back in the lab for species identification. Thermal sensors will be used in tandem with the digital cameras to pinpoint the seals, thus reducing the number of images that will need analyzing.

“The most novel thing about the survey is the pairing of two devices that have already been used to survey other marine mammals,” said Peter Boveng, one of the principal investigators of the survey, along with Michael Cameron and Erin Moreland. “Thermal or infrared cameras are good at detecting seals on ice, which are very warm relative to their surroundings, but not good at revealing the species of seals. High-resolution digital photos are good for species identification, but very labor intensive for detecting and counting seals. Putting the two together creates a more efficient system in which the thermal camera finds the seals and the photo camera allows us to identify the seal species.”

The planned survey will include nearly 19,000 nautical miles of track lines over U.S. waters and 11,000 nautical miles over Russian waters, and will last into May. Another spring survey is planned for 2013.



**A Spotted seal rests on sea ice in the Bering Sea.
Photo courtesy: John K. Jansen/NOAA.**

Springtime in the Bering Sea is important not only for seals, but for many other species and the Alaska coastal communities that depend upon them. The seal survey team will be communicating regularly with Alaska Native villages to ensure that the surveys do not conflict with subsistence hunting activities, particularly bowhead whaling around the communities on St. Lawrence Island and in the Bering Strait.

The results of this study will contribute to the scientific understanding of these unique marine mammals and will be used to identify, evaluate and resolve conservation concerns as required by the Marine Mammal Protection Act. The results will also help to assess the risk posed by loss of sea-ice habitat that may occur due to ongoing and anticipated warming of the Arctic climate, a key concern addressed in status reviews that NOAA has conducted on all four species under the Endangered Species Act.

Studying seals in the Bering Sea and Arctic waters pose many challenges that limit the ability for scientists to learn about these special animals. The Bering Sea's remote location, along with the cold and unpredictable weather, limits scientists' ability to study these animals in their natural habitat. Figuring out how to efficiently and safely survey the region for seals has been a focus for scientists at the NOAA Alaska Fisheries Science Center and a multi-agency team of Russian collaborators for several years.

Updates from the surveys will be available on this website after survey completion.

For more information go to: <http://www.afsc.noaa.gov/nmml/polar/>

News from the NPFMC

Chum Bycatch:

The North Pacific Fishery Management Council (NPFMC or Council) recently took public comments on measures to reduce the number of chum salmon caught incidentally by the pollock trawl fleet in the Bering Sea.

During the meeting, information from genetic studies was revealed which could change the direction the Council ultimately takes on this issue. The genetic stock composition (GSC) analysis demonstrates that a large percentage of those chums from the Bering Sea may have been bound for hatcheries in Japan and Russia, rather than rivers in western Alaska.



Information from genetic studies of chum was shared at a recent Council meeting.

Genetic Stock Composition Analysis:

1048 samples were taken in 2010 from the Bering Sea.

East Asian	38%
North Asian	26%
Western Alaska	14%
E. Gulf/Pacific NW	13%
Upper/Mid Yukon	7%

The Council ended up deciding to send the issue back for further analysis. Chris Oliver, executive director of the Council, said the matter will probably be on the agenda for the October meeting in Anchorage. If a final decision is made then, it would then go to the U.S. Department of Commerce for approval. It's likely the issue won't be resolved until 2014.

Fish Up – Halibut Shares for Area 4B:

At the March-April 2012 NPFMC meeting, the Council took final action to allow a fish up provision for the IPHC halibut area 4B. Owners of D category IFQ will be able to use this quota on C class vessels. D class vessels are 35' and under, and C class refers to vessels 60' – 36' in length. The fish up provision was previously allowed for areas 3B and 4C back in 2004. Area 4A (including Akutan and Dutch) does not have a fish up provision. Safety is the main reason advocates gave for moving the 4B fish up provision forward. Opponents believe the fish up provision deteriorates entry level opportunities. The Advisory Panel to the NPFMC has been divided on this issue. APICDA has been a constant advocate for the 4B fish up provision.

ROFR Committee Disbanded:

The Bering Sea Aleutian Island Crab Community provisions workgroup, also known as the ROFR (Right of First Refusal) Committee, has been disbanded. The Council followed the Advisory Panel's lead on this agenda item and accepted the workgroup's report as the FINAL product of the group. The group found they had thoroughly worked through the issues, but could not reach further agreement, basically agreeing to disagree.

Further decision points are now left to the Council. The only question is whether the issue will come up for initial review in June, October or December.

GOA Pacific cod A season dates:

A discussion paper on changing the GOA Pacific cod A-season dates has continued to be an important issue for AEB fishermen. Since the implementation of the sector split at the beginning of 2012, many area fishermen have been dissatisfied with how the fishery is prosecuted. The AEB had some good testimony at the recent NPFMC meeting in support of moving this analysis forward. Aleutians East Borough Assembly Member Paul Gronholdt and Natural Resources Director Ernie Weiss opened up public testimony on the topic of GOA P. cod A-season Opening Dates. The Peninsula Fisherman's Coalition spokesperson, Beth Stewart, finished up testimony on the agenda item, virtually bookending all opposing testimony. The Council, however, voted to take no action at this time. This is still the first year of the sector. This issue is expected to resurface again in the future.

Halibut Bycatch Workshop Scheduled for April 24th – 25th in Seattle



A public workshop on halibut bycatch is planned for April 24th – 25th in Seattle.

A public workshop to examine several issues related to Pacific halibut bycatch and life history is planned for April 24 - 25, 2012 in Seattle, Washington. The two-day workshop is jointly sponsored by the International Pacific Halibut Commission (IPHC) and the North Pacific Fishery Management Council (NPFMC). The first day will consist of a series of presentations by staffs of IPHC, the U.S. National Marine Fisheries Service, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, and independent scientists and fishing industry representatives on topics related to bycatch estimation, management, and its effects on halibut harvest strategy, as well as halibut growth and migration. The second day will consist of discussions of the previous day's topics by a science panel, including audience participation.

For more information, click [here](#).



Western Alaska Salmon Stock Identification Project (WASSIP) Informational meeting

10AM Friday June 1, 2012, in Sand Point, Alaska

Video-conference to King Cove, audio link to other participating
Aleutians East Borough (AEB) Communities
Akutan, Cold Bay, False Pass, Nelson Lagoon

A Young Fishers Program presentation by the AEB Natural Resources Department
In cooperation with the Aleutians East Borough School District (AEBSD)
And the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G)

ADF&G is coordinating with WASSIP signatory groups to organize informational meetings in the various fishing regions to re-introduce the WASSIP program in anticipation of reports that will be released in September 2012. WASSIP signatories include Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Aleut Corporation, Aleutians East Borough, Association of Village Council Presidents, Bering Sea Fishermen's Association, Bristol Bay Native Association, Concerned Area M Fishermen, Kawerak, Lake and Peninsula Borough, Tanana Chiefs Conference, and Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association.

WASSIP is a comprehensive program to sample commercial and subsistence chum and sockeye salmon fisheries in coastal marine areas of western Alaska, from 2006 through 2009. This unprecedented genetic sampling study includes salmon fisheries from Chignik Bay to Kotzebue Sound, stretching over 3,000 km of shoreline. During the four years of fishery sampling, approximately 320,000 samples were collected and some 156,000 samples will have been analyzed by the ADF&G Gene Conservation Laboratory to detail stock composition of fishery harvests.

The Young Fishers Program is a collaborative effort of the AEBSD Career & Technical Education program and the AEB Natural Resources Department. Earlier this year, as part of the AEB Young Fishers program, the AEB sponsored two students and an AEBSD teacher/chaperone to attend the Alaska Sea Grant Young Fishermen's Summit in Juneau. The Summit covered topics of interest to Alaska fishermen, including methods for participating in fisheries regulatory and legislative processes. AEBSD video and audio links to AEB communities for this informational meeting in Sand Point is a continuation of the effort to involve young fishers in the fisheries regulatory process.

Following the WASSIP informational meeting, Alaska Peninsula Salmon Fishery Manager Aaron Poetter will hold the 2012 AEB June Salmon Pre-season informational meeting, and will also be available to answer questions about the AEB/ADF&G Southeast District Mainland (SEDM) genetic salmon sampling study. Other area fisheries consultants and processing representatives have been invited and may attend the meeting. The meeting will be held in Sand Point at the AEB offices, video linked to the school in King Cove. Other site locations will be announced when determined.

For more information www.aebfish.org or contact Ernie Weiss at eweiss@aeboro.org, 907-274-7557.

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