

SCOMM

147:18

Let's call the meeting to order

Let the record reflect that it is 8:30 a.m. on Wednesday, February 13th, 2008

Present are:

Representative Johnson ✓

Representative LeDoux ✓

Representative Wilson

Representative Johansen

Representative Holmes

Representative Edgmon ✓

And myself, Representative Seaton ✓

At this time I would like to remind everyone to turn off their cell phones and address questions through the chair.

Today we will hear

A presentation by the ADF&G scallop biometrician Gregg Rosencrantz who flew from Kodiak yesterday to give this presentation on camera sled mapping of seafloor habitat and stock assessment.

Friday we will have an overview on mariculture permitting and discuss a CS to HB 257 TRANSFER AQUATIC FARMING TO DNR that deals only with apply the Alaska Grown label to mariculture products

Talking Points for HB 16 - Scallops

John Hilsinger January 30, 2008

1. Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) supported the vessel based limited entry system for scallops and Korean hair crab when it was adopted in 2004 because it provided conservation benefits, both for scallops and for crabs, that were not provided by an individual based limited entry system (9 scallop boats versus at least 27; 18 hair crab boats versus 47). We continue to support the vessel-based limited entry system because it is an effective way to limit the number of vessels and provide for a sustainable fishery.
2. The vessel-based limited entry program works together with the guideline harvest ranges, observer data, other sampling, closed areas, seasons, and gear limitations to provide a sustainable management program for scallops.
3. If the vessel-based limited entry system goes away as of December 31, 2008, there will be no limit on the number of boats that can fish for scallops in state waters unless the Commercial Fisheries Entry Commission conducts another study and implements a different form of limited entry.
4. Fishing in federal waters, (outside three miles) will continue to be subject to the federal license limitation program. At the current time, the Department cannot make a good estimate of how many vessels may decide to fish in state waters if those waters are open to entry.
5. However, in anticipation that HB 16 may not pass, the Department asked the Alaska Board of Fisheries to consider changes to scallop management in state waters. Those changes will be considered during the March 3 – 9, 2008, meeting in Anchorage.
 - a. ADF&G approach developed by shellfish management and research staff statewide.
 - b. Besides ADF&G proposals, the public may also submit ideas for management to the Board.
 - c. The difficulty in managing the state waters fishery under an open-entry scenario stems from the fact that boundary line cuts across three of the centrally located scallop beds (Shelikof Strait, Kayak Is., and Yakutat). This will require the state to essentially manage each of these areas as two separate scallop beds.
6. Anticipated management for open-entry fishery under state proposals.
 - a. No changes to 5 AAC 38.076 Alaska Scallop Fishery Management Plan. This is the basic statewide scallop management plan that provides the ability to require observers and set bycatch limits. This plan also sets dredge size and number limitations, crew member limits, and requires hand shucking. We will continue to set and manage for Guideline Harvest Levels by area.

- b. ADF&G will propose regional management plans. There may end up being some regional differences among these plans, but all the regions are in agreement on these basic concepts:
 - i. Registration year: April 1 through March 31
 - ii. Registration deadline on April 1
 - 1. Deadline required for two reasons
 - a. give staff opportunity to assess effort to determine if a fishery can be opened or not.
 - b. give staff time to work with observer contractors to identify and train adequate number of observers (one for each boat plus spares). To do this requires identifying and approving available observers and then giving them the scallop training, which takes about 2 weeks.
 - iii. Vessels will register for state or federal waters and must fish in those waters for which they are registered. A vessel would, for example, register for the state waters of the Shelikof District or they could register for the federal waters of the Shelikof District, if they have a federal permit.
 - iv. Set separate GHGs for state and federal waters. Manage separately; close areas separately when GHGs are reached.
 - 1. initially, GHGs will be based on historical catch distribution in for Shelikof Strait and Yakutat. For Kayak Island, the separate GHGs could be based on dredge survey data. Eventually, we anticipate being able to use stock assessment data to set GHGs for state and federal waters in all regions.
 - v. Set separate crab bycatch limits for state and federal waters based on information from crab surveys where available.
 - vi. Vessel can change registration with 12 hours notice. Vessel would be required to shuck and weigh all scallops on board, make out fish ticket, and report catch to department before fishing the other side of boundary line.
 - vii. Daily reporting if necessary (catch, bycatch, other information). We anticipate starting with daily reporting and then relaxing that if it turns out not to be necessary.
 - viii. VMS requirement using NMFS approved equipment.
 - ix. Adjustments to closed waters if necessary.

Scallop background information:

1. At the current time there are 9 scallop vessels licensed in both state and federal waters. Four of those boats actually fish. (Six of the boats have formed a voluntary co-operative and usually three of those six boats fish).
2. Scallops are long lived slow growing animals that are not non-migratory as adults. Scallops are known to live to 20+ years of age, but are in prime condition for market when they are 6 – 10 years of age.
3. Once the location of a scallop bed is identified, the same bed is fished year after year. Occasionally, new beds are discovered. Population estimates exist for only 2 of the 9 registration areas. Therefore, management must be precautionary and harvest rates must be kept very low to prevent over fishing. Harvests are kept well below estimated MSY levels.
4. King and tanner crabs are intermixed with scallops and some scallop beds are closed to protect depressed crab populations. Areas open to scallop fishing have crab bycatch limits because mortality of crabs caught in scallop dredges is high.
5. Guideline harvest levels for the scallops are developed from observer data, catch per unit effort, and catch sampling. Observers also monitor crab bycatch and fisheries may be closed if crab bycatch limits are met. Because of the limited number of boats fishing and the bycatch data collected, the vessels have been able to reduce crab bycatch and avoid premature closures.
6. Recent average scallop harvests for the state are somewhat less than 500,000 pounds of meats per year. Approximately 30%, or about 145,000 pounds, are estimated to come from state waters. These harvests are lower than they were in the late 1990s because the department is lowering guideline harvest levels in order to sustain the stocks.

Department of Fish and Game
Division of Commercial Fisheries
FY09 Operating Budget Increment

Title: Statewide Scallop Stock Assessment
Location: HQ and Marine Regions
Components: HQ Fisheries Management
Contact: Doug Woodby
Total Amount Requested: \$150
Funding Source: GF

Brief Summary and Statement of Need for this Increment:

ADF&G's statewide scallop biometrics program has developed a towed underwater machine vision camera system that is a major step forward in scallop stock assessment and benthic habitat mapping. The system allows ADF&G to accurately monitor scallop abundance and recruitment and enhances our ability to manage the fishery for the highest possible sustainable yields. The system creates a georeferenced digital image archive of benthic habitat along a track covering tens of miles per day with resolution on the scale of millimeters. Current funding provides for a single survey covering one or two management areas per year and does not adequately fund equipment, replacement parts, and maintenance. The requested increment would allow surveys in additional areas each year, provide salary for a seasonal Research Analyst or Fishery Biologist to assist with data collection and analysis, and provide funds to maintain and upgrade the equipment inventory.

***List new staff required to conduct the work funded by this increment:
(Provide Job Title and Position Type—Fulltime, Part-time, Seasonal)***

Research Analyst I or Fishery Biologist I, Seasonal (11 mo)

If no new staff is needed, please list current staff that would be expected to conduct the work funded by this increment. Please describe how the new assignments of current staff would affect their performance of their existing duties. Are some existing duties being terminated, transferred to other staff, etc.?

N/A

How does this increment enhance the division's ability to manage for high abundance and increase opportunities for the public to use the state's fisheries resources? Please identify specific new or improved opportunities that might be created?

This increment will help ADF&G obtain precise scallop abundance estimates and monitor and understand scallop recruitment processes so that higher harvests may be

taken when biomass is high and populations are able to withstand the removals. The system's low impact habitat mapping capabilities will allow us to explore and identify areas currently closed to scallop dredging that could be opened with minimal impact on habitat and on other commercially important species.

Describe how this increment might otherwise—besides better harvest opportunities—improve divisional operations in a manner that is beneficial to the public? (For example: better science/increased understanding of factors affecting biological productivity, increased or improved information services, expedited/user friendly permitting services, or improved reporting procedures, better use of technology.)

Our camera system employs cutting-edge technology that represents a significant step forward in fishery science. ADF&G staff—and the public—can now observe species we manage such as scallops, Tanner crabs, and flatfish, as they occur in their natural habitat. Our system has a light footprint on the bottom compared to alternative sampling devices (trawls and dredges) regularly deployed by ADF&G that may in fact damage habitat in areas that are currently closed to fishing. Our system creates a georeferenced digital image archive that will allow fine-scale monitoring of changes to state-managed habitat over time. The system is also likely to be a useful tool in assessment and life history studies of other benthic species such as Tanner crabs—we have barely begun to explore the possibilities.

Describe the benefits to the Division of Commercial Fisheries and the Department of Fish and Game that will result from this increment. For example, will this increment improve organizational effectiveness, address work force development issues, or foster leadership, career, and professional development opportunities for staff?

This increment provides ADF&G an opportunity to embrace technology while employing the best possible science in management of Alaska's marine fishery resources. Substantial benefits to the department are possible through 1) more efficient use of ADF&G resources, 2) partnerships within and outside ADF&G, and 3) workforce development and public relations.

Efficient use of ADF&G resources. Our camera sled technology provides a viable low-impact, cost-effective alternative to expensive dredge and trawl surveys currently conducted by ADF&G research vessels. Particularly in waters that are closed to commercial fishing due to conservation concerns, the ability to directly observe, count, and map the distribution of species such as scallops and Tanner crabs greatly improves our ability to effectively manage fisheries and monitor habitat.

Partnerships within and outside ADF&G. Camera sled surveys conducted in waters around the state will bring ADF&G staff from different regions together and allow them to work with cutting edge technology that fosters a better understanding of the species and habitats they manage. Day trips planned outside Homer for equipment testing and

fine tuning will involve Kachemak Bay Research Reserve (part of the Division of Sport Fish) personnel and allow them to take part in collection of benthic habitat data inside the reserve. Our camera system was developed with the help of scientists from the HabCam project (<http://habcam.who.edu>) in Wood's Hole, Massachusetts. These researchers are currently developing software for automated processing of data collected by camera systems such as ours and will begin working with ADF&G image data in FY08. The HabCam team is excited to collaborate with ADF&G and ready to develop cooperative grant proposals that promote use of this technology in Alaska.

Workforce development and public relations. ADF&G is at the technological forefront with this innovative applied fisheries research. The database, Geographic Information System, and statistical skills needed to analyze and understand data sets collected with our camera system are the same skills needed elsewhere in the department; ADF&G can use this project to recruit technologically savvy researchers who are interested in new ways of doing fisheries science. Kachemak Bay Research Reserve personnel who will work cooperatively with Commercial Fisheries staff in FY08 are also interested in promoting this project to the public through their new visitor's center in Homer. Public comments to date indicate that this research will find strong support from the fishing industry as well as conservation groups.

List the core services and performance measures addressed by this increment:

Missions & Measures: A1. Ensure the conservation of natural stocks of fish, shellfish, and aquatic plants based on scientifically sound assessments.

Core Service: 1 **Stock Assessment & Applied Research:**

Maintain ongoing programs for the enumeration, assessment, and understanding of salmon, herring, groundfish, and shellfish stocks.