

Ecosystem Committee Minutes

Tuesday, October 3, 2006 2pm-3:15pm
TELECONFERENCE – (907) 586-7060

Committee: Stephanie Madsen (chair), Doug DeMaster, David Benton, Jon Kurland, Diana Evans (staff)

Others participating included: Chris Oliver, David Witherell, Bill Wilson, Sue Salveson, Joe McCabe, Melanie Brown, Kristin Mabry, Lenny Corin, Dave Fraser, Kristy Despars, Janis Searles, Jon Warrenchuk, Kate Wynne, Clem Tillion, Peggy Murphy

The Committee worked through their agenda, and also discussed some informational items at the end of the meeting. At this time, the Committee does not plan to have a meeting in December, and anticipates its next meeting will be just before the February, 2007, Council meeting.

Alaska Marine Ecosystem Forum

The Committee received the draft meeting summary from the first Alaska Marine Ecosystem Forum meeting, which took place in September. The Council has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with ten Federal and four State agencies, creating the Alaska Marine Ecosystem Forum. This is the culmination of the Committee's initiative begun in early 2005, to examine the practicability of ocean councils and alternative ways to achieve interagency collaborations on ocean issues.

National Ocean Research Priorities Report

Ms Evans provided an overview of the recently issued Joint Subcommittee on Ocean Science and Technology report, *Charting the Course for Ocean Science in the United States: Research Priorities for the Next Decade*. The comment deadline is October 20, and the Committee discussed whether it would be advisable for the Council to provide comments. **The Committee recommends the Council write a comment letter to support NOAA funding for research days at sea**, which is critical to understanding the impacts of changes in the North Pacific, such as loss of sea ice and climate change.

Aleutian Islands Fishery Ecosystem Plan

The Committee received the September meeting report from the Aleutian Islands Ecosystem Team, describing their planned approach for developing the Fishery Ecosystem Plan. The Committee concurs generally with the Team's approach and proposed schedule, although noting that the schedule is ambitious. Consequently, **the Committee recommends that the Council approve the Team's suggestion of a two-phase approach to developing the FEP**. The Team will provide a first version of the FEP by June 2007, and will provide recommendations about what analyses should be initiated for the second phase (to be completed on a longer time frame).

The Team proposes to seek input and consultation from the communities that fall within the boundary of the AI ecosystem, as identified in the FEP: Adak and Atka. **The Committee recommends that the Council concur with this proposal, and expand the list of communities for outreach more broadly to those in the Aleutian Islands, specifically adding Nikolski and Unalaska.**

Finally, the Committee acknowledges the Team's efforts to keep the FEP concise and non-duplicative, and encourages the Team to persist with this principle as they proceed to the writing of the document.

Other items

Dr Fluharty appointed Chair of NOAA Science Advisory Board: The Committee congratulated Dr Fluharty on his appointment as Chair of the NOAA Science Advisory Board.

NOAA's External Ecosystem Task Team (EETT) report approved: Dr Fluharty provided a written update to note that the EETT report was approved by the NOAA Science Advisory Board in July, and will be sent to VADM Lautenbacher this week. The EETT, whose membership included David Fluharty, Stephanie Madsen, and Terry Quinn, was tasked to provide advice to NOAA on its science and research programs relating to NOAA's ecosystem goal. Dr Fluharty noted that the Ecosystem Committee's feedback to the EETT at previous meetings was helpful, and consequently the EETT report recommendations reflect opportunities for indigenous regional approaches and encourage regionally-distinct approaches toward implementing Integrated Ecosystem Assessments.

NPRB Bering Sea Integrated Ecosystem Research Program: Mr Benton reported that the North Pacific Research Board recently allocated \$14 million for a six-year, vertically-integrated ecosystem research plan for the Bering Sea, which would study physical oceanography, levels of the food web, higher trophic levels, and human beings as part of the ecosystem. The Board also authorized the NPRB's Executive Director to work with the National Science Foundation to partner in this initiative. NSF would bring about \$21 million to the program, which makes this an exciting opportunity to create a legacy study for the Bering Sea. A request for proposals for this program has been issued.

NOAA's initiative to define Alaska as a single Large Marine Ecosystem (LME): Mr Benton and Dr Demaster described NOAA's initiative to define programs around LMEs, and that Alaska has been defined as one LME complex by NOAA. According to the scientific literature on LMEs, there are four in Alaska: the Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands, the Gulf of Alaska, the Beaufort Sea, and the Chukchi Sea. For logistical reasons, and due to similarities between the regions and their management, the Beaufort and the Chukchi Seas have for some time been combined as a single Arctic LME. However, NOAA has recently decided to further combine the LMEs in Alaska into one LME complex, despite the fact that the remaining ecosystems are significantly different. The first adverse implication has recently emerged, a decision to divide national ocean observing system funding equally among LMEs. If funding continues to be distributed on this basis, Alaska will continually be disadvantaged under the single LME complex identification. **The Committee recommends that the Council write to NOAA, objecting to the Alaska LME classification, and requesting that it be reversed.**