



B1 Executive Director's Report

December 2025

Action Memo

Updated 12/2/2025, see footnotes

NOAA Fisheries VIP Delegation

We are fortunate to have leadership from NOAA Fisheries headquarters joining us at the December Council meeting. Our visitors include:

- Mr. Eugenio Piñero Soler, Assistant Administrator for Fisheries¹
- Dr. Evan Howell, Acting Director of Scientific Programs and Chief Science Advisor

We welcome you to Alaska to visit with the North Pacific Council!

Impact of the Government Shutdown

The lapse in Federal appropriations from October 1 - November 12, 2025, has impacted the Council's December meeting in several ways, primarily relating to the groundfish harvest specifications agenda item. Federal stock assessment authors did not have the time to complete new groundfish assessments as planned, and as a result, the Council's Groundfish Plan Teams did not convene in November to review stock assessments and provide their recommendations on harvest specifications. Additionally, the preparation of other contextual information typically presented in support of groundfish specifications has been delayed, including the year-end inseason management reports, ecosystem status reports, and economic and community indicator reports. In response, Council staff have worked with NMFS, SSC, and Council leadership to identify what information is available this year, and to explain the process for how to apply available information for final 2026-2027 groundfish specification decisions in a manner that remains consistent with the typical Council process, the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA), including National Standard 2, as well as the Administrative Procedure Act (APA) and other federal requirements.

Extension of public comment period on EO 14276²

NMFS has reopened the public comment period for Executive Order 14276 'Restoring American Seafood Competitiveness'. Additional comments will be accepted until December 15th, given the previous comment period overlapped with the lapse in appropriations and Government shutdown. You can access the notice [here](#).

Once the public comment period has concluded, NMFS will evaluate and summarize the comments received.

¹ Mr. Sam Rauch originally planned to attend the Council meeting also.

² This section was added in the 12/1/2025 update.

SSC and AP appointments

The Council will review nominations for SSC and AP membership during Executive Session, and the Chair will announce these appointments at the end of the meeting. Nomination materials for AP seats, including letters of interest and resume, are here: <https://meetings.npfmc.org/Meeting/Details/3100>. In June, the Council noted that due to budget contingencies, the Council may consider suspending AP stipends in 2026, and/or may choose not to fill all vacancies.

There were 21 members on the AP for most of 2025. Ten AP seats have terms that are expiring at the end of the year. Two of those seats are associated with departing members, the remaining members are all eligible to be reappointed and are requesting reappointment.

SSC members are appointed for one year, and may be reappointed at the pleasure of the Council. All current SSC members are requesting reappointment, with the exception of Dr. Mike Downs and Dr. Pat Sullivan, who will step down from the SSC at the end of the year.

Rick Lauber

Former Council member and Council Chair Rick Lauber passed away on September 6, 2025. Rick was involved in the Council process for 24 years, culminating as the Council's Chair from 1991-2000. He began as an AP member in 1976, and was also a judge in district court, and served on various seafood association boards. As Chair, Lauber encouraged thoughtful Council debate and public input. His obituary is posted here: <https://obituaries.nationalcremation.com/obituaries/clearwater-fl/richard-b-rick-lauber-12512507>

BS pollock report on 2026 dynamic spatial closures

In June 2025, the Council [requested](#) the Bering Sea pollock industry develop dynamic spatial closures for the 2026 A season to protect Bristol Bay red king crab, based on the new surveys, tagging data, and other recent data sources. The Council indicated that salmon bycatch should continue to be the highest priority for avoidance; thus, the measures should include mechanisms to consider salmon bycatch (e.g., rate-based exclusion) that would override identified closures. The Council requested industry report back at this meeting during B reports. This presentation has been scheduled under B9.

Changes on Council Staff

David Witherell retired as Executive Director for the Council on October 31st, after 33 years working for the Council. He joined the Council staff in 1992, and initially served as the GOA Groundfish Plan Coordinator and as an analyst working on plan and regulatory amendments covering bycatch reduction, habitat conservation, Steller sea lion protection, and ecosystem-based management issues. He was promoted to Deputy Director in 2002, and subsequently to Executive Director in 2017, where he was responsible for overseeing all operations of the Council, including all associated fishery management, fiscal, and administrative responsibilities. During his career, David published over 20 peer-reviewed scientific articles, and dozens of glossy informational summaries and brochures to assist the public in understanding the overall status of North Pacific fisheries and the Council's management programs.

We wish you all the best in your retirement, David!

The Council has also hired a new temporary technical assistant, **Kai Grady**, to help with audio-visual duties at the Council meetings. You will see her training with our administrative team at this meeting.

Recent Staff and Council member activities

- Sara Cleaver and several Council and AP members participated in Marine Resources Education Program Steering Committee virtual planning sessions for the 2026 workshop.
- Anita Kroska participated in two Alaska Resource Education outreach events, an Association of Career and Technical Education conference speed networking event (October 14th) to help teachers learn about career paths/opportunities for students, and a speed networking/mentoring event (November 14th) as part of their Academies of Anchorage work to help freshman students learn about local career opportunities and to talk about our career paths.
- Dr. Kate Haapala gave a presentation and participated at a workshop for the Arctic Council's Protection of the Arctic Marine Environment (PAME) Working Group in Tromsø, Norway on October 21-23. The workshop was convened by PAME's Ecosystem Approach Expert Group. The workshop's purpose was to understand diverse values across the Arctic's Large Marine Ecosystems, methods to identify these values, and potential pathways to incorporate them into different governance processes. Kate's talk focused on the work of the Council's Local Knowledge, Traditional Knowledge, and Subsistence Taskforce.
- Brian Ritchie and Sara Cleaver participated in the National MREP Steering Committee meeting, on October 28-29th.
- Sara Cleaver and Dr. Diana Stram provided a presentation on NPFMC Pacific cod management at the State of Alaska Board of Fish meeting on October 30th.
- Several Council staff reviewed abstracts for the Alaska Marine Science Symposium, and participated in an Abstract Review Committee meeting on November 13th to select oral presentations for the January 2026 meeting.
- Anita Kroska co-authored a new open-access journal [article](#) that was published online on Oct. 6th in the Journal of Experimental Biology: "*Mechanisms underlying thermally induced growth plasticity in juvenile Pacific halibut*", led by authors at the IPHC, and in collaboration with the FAST Lab at APU, UW, and the NOAA Hatfield Marine Science Center.

Planned activities that were canceled or postponed due to the lapse in Federal appropriations:

- The Council canceled the November 10-14th BSAI and GOA Groundfish Plan Team meetings, as Federal workers on furlough and did not have the time to complete new groundfish assessments as planned.
- The Council Coordination Committee (CCC) that had been scheduled for October 15-16 was canceled as NOAA Fisheries were unable to participate.
- Council members and staff were unable to virtually participate in the canceled Bristol Bay Regional Advisory Council's (RAC) October meeting, to continue outreach and engagement efforts on the Bering Sea chum salmon bycatch action. The RAC meeting has not yet been rescheduled, although dates in January 2026 are being considered.
- The CIE review of the new NOAA FIMS model, at which Dr. Curry Cunningham intended to represent the NPFMC SSC, was canceled and has been rescheduled for April 2026.
- A NOAA Science Advisory Board external task team, with the purpose of examining the fishery independent stock assessment program at NMFS, was slated to receive input from Nicole Kimball in mid-October. The meeting has not yet been rescheduled.

Committee and Plan Team Meetings

The following Committee and Plan Team meetings have occurred since the October meeting:

- The Executive/Finance Committee met at various times to manage the hiring process for the Executive Director, and also on December 3, to discuss Council finances. A short report will be provided under Agenda E Staff Tasking.

- The Crab Plan Team met virtually November 6, report under Agenda C6.
- The Charter Halibut Management Committee met virtually on October 23, and in-person on December 3, reports under Agenda C7.

Other Meetings or Events this Week

The Council will meet in **Executive Session** on Friday, December 5 at 3pm to discuss AP/SSC appointments, review the Council audit, and discuss other administrative matters.

Dr. Ian Stewart hosted a question-and-answer session on the IPHC **halibut stock assessment** on Wednesday, December 3rd at lunch (targeting 12pm-1pm) in the AP Room at the Egan Center.

There will be a **community reception** on Thursday, December 4th from 6:00 – 8:00 pm at 49th State, and we will take this opportunity to say farewell and thank you to retired Council member Bill Tweit and Executive Director David Witherell. A flyer is posted to the eAgenda.

Council Written Comment Policy

It has been our practice to report publicly to the Council on any comments removed from the commenting system, and the rationale for removal, so that we can monitor and revise the process as needed to address unanticipated events. The December meeting comment period was open from November 5-28, and no comments were removed. As we have not had need to report any concerns nor make any process changes for several years, in future we will include this section in the Executive Director's report only if it is necessary to document a staff response to a violation of the written comment policy.