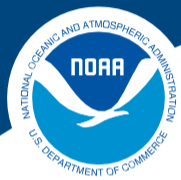


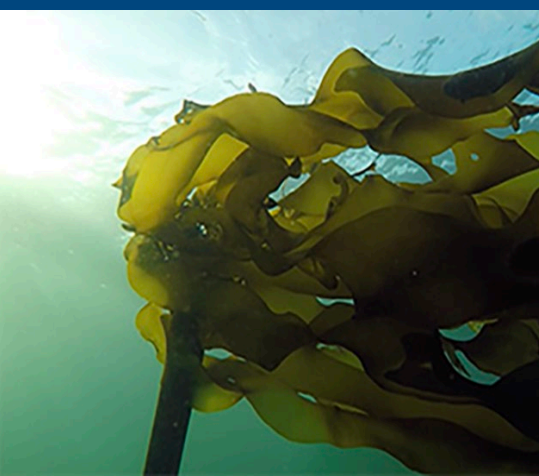
Alaska Region

# FY 2024 Priorities

September 2023



## NOAA FISHERIES



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## Message from the Regional Administrator

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Dear Alaska Region Colleagues,

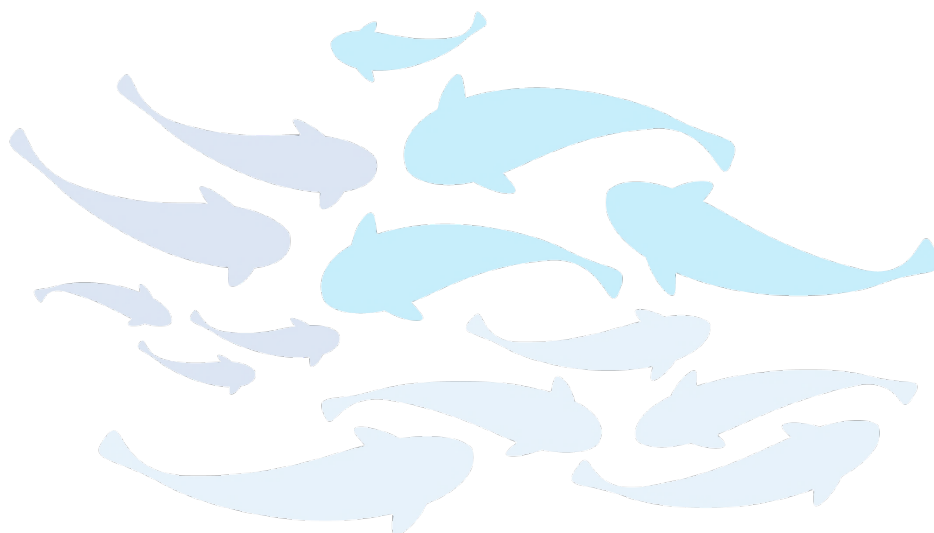
This is the second annual compilation of top priorities for NOAA Fisheries' Alaska Region, supporting our mission to provide science-based stewardship of Alaska's marine resources and their habitats in the Gulf of Alaska, eastern Bering Sea, and Arctic oceans. We are guided by strategic plans that set multi-year goals and objectives, and we have for many years identified milestones to track our progress on some major activities each quarter. Laying out our top priorities for FY24 in this document is an additional step and a way to make clear to Alaska Region staff, other parts of NOAA Fisheries, and our partners and stakeholders the top things we aim to accomplish this fiscal year. Given that we have limited resources, it's useful to remind ourselves about what needs to come first, while of course recognizing that priorities sometimes must shift in response to changes around us.

This document identifies our priorities based on the [Alaska Region 2022-2027 Strategic Plan](#), higher-level strategic plans, and our 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 our 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. This document strives to capture must-do priorities at the level of the Alaska Region as a whole. I'm deeply grateful for the excellent work of all our amazing Alaska Region personnel and affiliates!



A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Jon Kurland'.

**Jon Kurland**  
Regional Administrator



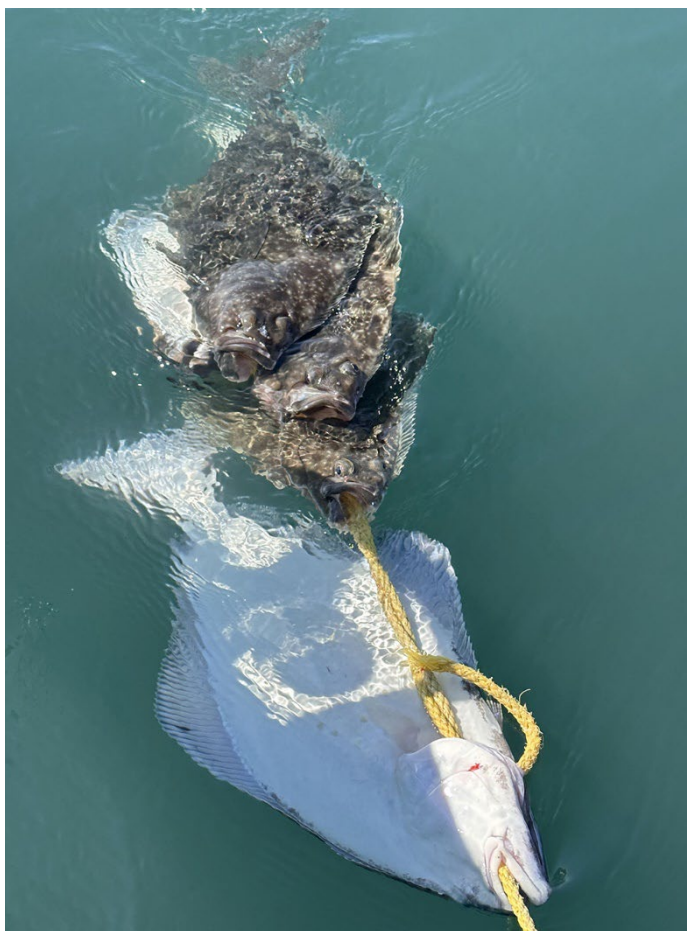
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## ***Goal 1 - Manage Fisheries for Sustainability and Economic Competitiveness.***

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### 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.
- Manage the Alaska groundfish fisheries to avoid exceeding Annual Catch Limits and to minimize Prohibited Species Catch.
- Conduct Endangered Species Act section 7 consultation for the Gulf of Alaska and Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands groundfish fisheries to ensure sustainability and continued legal compliance.
- Implement new fishery management programs, focusing on the new Pacific Cod Trawl Cooperative (PCTC) program, abundance-based management of halibut bycatch, and electronic monitoring of trawl fisheries.
- Develop and implement a Secretarial amendment to the Salmon Fishery Management Plan (FMP) to provide for management of the salmon fishery in the federal waters of Cook Inlet in compliance with applicable judicial rulings.
- Develop a new Endangered Species Act Biological Opinion and National Environmental Policy Act analysis for the Southeast Alaska salmon troll fisheries in compliance with applicable judicial rulings.



- Respond effectively to litigation challenging the 2023 annual harvest specifications for the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands groundfish fisheries.
- Support the North Pacific Fishery Management Council in developing an environmental impact statement (EIS) analyzing new measures to minimize chum salmon bycatch in the Bering Sea pollock fishery and initiating a programmatic EIS for all the fisheries we manage in Alaska.
- Develop regulations to implement North Pacific Fishery Management Council priority actions: the Recreational Quota Entity for the halibut charter fishery, pelagic trawl gear definitions and performance standard, and Bristol Bay red king crab savings area changes.
- Develop and implement a new approach for coordinating and supporting Essential Fish Habitat research for Alaska fisheries in collaboration with the Alaska Fisheries Science Center.
- Complete interagency consultations and provide conservation recommendations for federal actions that may adversely affect Essential Fish Habitat.
- Facilitate marine invasive species monitoring and prevention, focusing on the response to invasive green crabs.



## Provide Exceptional Customer Service to Seafood Industry Stakeholders

- Improve customer service by advancing the Integrated Fisheries Applications project, focusing on more efficient intake and processing of fisheries permitting applications and implementation of the new PCTC program.
- Update the Alaska Region catch accounting system to meet information needs for management of the North Pacific groundfish and Cook Inlet salmon fisheries.
- Complete the Annual Deployment Plan for partial coverage observers and electronic monitoring in the Alaska groundfish and halibut fisheries.
- Initiate a targeted outreach and training program 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.
- 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 (including training and support for reporting of Cook Inlet salmon), and shellfish landings to multiple management agencies.
- Approve Vessel Monitoring Plans for fixed gear and trawl vessels that opt into Electronic Monitoring programs.
- Facilitate marine aquaculture production by participating in planning and siting initiatives and promoting streamlined permitting processes in coordination with the State of Alaska.
- Ensure through grant processes that Fisheries Disaster funds are used for activities that restore the fishery or prevent a similar failure in the future and assist fishing communities affected by such failure.



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## ***Goal 2 - Promote Conservation and Recovery of Protected Species.***

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### Advance High-Priority Conservation Actions for Protected Species

- Complete timely Endangered Species Act consultations, including developing Biological Opinions for the Southeast Alaska and Cook Inlet salmon fisheries, Gulf of Alaska and Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands groundfish fisheries, oil and gas development in Cook Inlet, military firing exercises adjacent to Cook Inlet, and Port of Alaska improvements.
- Issue a final listing determination for sunflower sea stars under the Endangered Species Act.
- Respond effectively to litigation challenging the decision not to delist Arctic ringed seals under the Endangered Species Act.
- Complete Endangered Species Act 5-year reviews for ringed and bearded seals and North Pacific right whales.
- Begin developing a revised critical habitat designation for North Pacific right whales in preparation to publish a proposed rule in FY25.
- Complete a revised Marine Mammal Protection Act conservation plan for northern fur seals.
- Implement the Species in the Spotlight Action Plan for 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.





## Engage Partners to Enhance Conservation of Marine Mammals

- Advance co-management of subsistence use of marine mammals by Alaska Natives, focusing on potential revisions to subsistence harvest regulations for northern fur seals, hunter-developed management plans for harvests of western Alaska belugas, and the feasibility of a new co-management organization for harbor seals.
- 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.

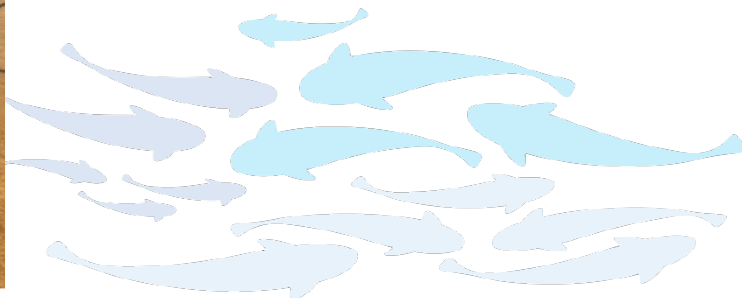


## Goal 3 - Ensure Organizational Excellence.

### Build Improved Structures for Organizational Planning and Management



- Advance actions and measure progress under the Alaska Region 2022-2027 Strategic Plan.
- Update Business Plans for each division in the Alaska Region to align budget and staffing with organizational priorities.
- Implement the new business approach for Alaska Region priority-based resourcing decisions.
- 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.
- Adopt new processes to enhance working relationships with the Alaska Department of Fish & Game.





## Provide Outstanding Human Resources Support for Alaska Region Employees



- Fill high-priority vacancies to ensure adequate staffing and implement the new Alaska Region onboarding process.
- Support opportunities for personal and professional learning and growth for employees.
- Provide opportunities that improve diversity and inclusion in our workforce.
- Provide training and resources for employee wellness best practices and maintain a culture supportive of employee self-care.





Secretary of Commerce  
**Gina M. Raimondo**

Under 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**

September 2023

[www.fisheries.noaa.gov](http://www.fisheries.noaa.gov)

**OFFICIAL BUSINESS**

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