

C9 Bering Sea Canyons Motion – North Pacific Fishery Management Council
April 13, 2014

The Council adopts the following statement of purpose and need:

The purpose of this action is to determine whether and how the Council should recommend amendment of the BSAI Groundfish and Crab FMPs to protect known, significant concentrations of deep-sea corals in the Pribilof Canyon and the adjacent slope from fishing impacts under the appropriate authorities of the MSA.

This action may identify a discrete area or areas of significant abundance of deep sea corals in, and directly adjacent to, the Pribilof canyon, assess the potential for fishing impacts on the identified area or areas of significant coral abundance, evaluate the historical and current patterns of fishing effort and fish removals in and adjacent to the Pribilof Canyon, consider the types of management measures that would be appropriate to conserve discrete areas of significant coral abundance while minimizing impacts on established fishing activity, and identify the appropriate authority under which the Council may take action.

The North Pacific Fishery Management Council has taken significant steps to protect coral and coral habitats in the Aleutian Islands and Gulf of Alaska. Recent models and data have shown that Pribilof Canyon and some areas along the Bering Sea slope may also contain deep sea coral. Results of surveys planned for summer 2014 will provide additional data to further refine our understanding of coral occurrence within the canyons and slope habitats, and this information will be useful in refining alternatives developed in response to this purpose and need. There is historical fishing activity that occurs within and around the Pribilof Canyon.

Deep sea corals may be important habitat for several commercially important fish species managed by the Council, and may provide important ecosystem services for the maintenance of healthy Bering Sea ecosystems. Consistent with the Council's adopted policy for incorporating the Ecosystem Approach to fisheries management and the authorities of the MSA, the Council intends to initiate action to investigate where and how to protect coral in the Pribilof Canyon and directly adjacent slope.