

Discussion Paper:

Review of Council Rural Community Outreach

April 2018¹

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1 Introduction

In February 2018, the Council was asked by the public to revisit the ways that they conduct outreach to rural Alaskan communities and Alaska Native populations. This request was in the context of a Council ecosystem workshop, wherein attendees described concepts of co-production of knowledge, and updates at the Council's Ecosystem Committee on the development of the Bering Sea Fishery Ecosystem Plan (FEP), which also considers integration of Local and Traditional Knowledge (LTK) into Council decision-making processes. The discussion at the ecosystem workshop, Ecosystem Committee, and during the Council meeting, itself, resulted in two requests from the Council: (1) to review existing outreach protocols and consider additional steps for general outreach, and (2) a motion for the Bering Sea FEP Team to develop an approach for a community engagement plan and structured process to integrate traditional knowledge in the Council process. Because general outreach strategies are likely to affect how the Bering Sea FEP Team considers their outreach strategy, this discussion paper focuses on the Council's general outreach strategies and presents additional steps that could be considered. The Council's motion specific to the Bering Sea FEP is not addressed in this discussion paper. Rather, the Bering Sea FEP Team will address their outreach plans in the draft FEP scheduled for Council review in October 2018. Any decisions made as a result of this paper, however, are likely to affect the Bering Sea FEP team's outreach discussion.

2 Background on the Council's outreach program

In 2008, the Council convened a workgroup to review and recommend potential approaches to expand general communication and project-specific communication to rural Alaskan and Alaskan Native communities. One of the recommendations from the workgroup that was adopted by the Council was creation of a standing Rural Outreach Committee (ROC) to provide input to the Council on ways to improve outreach to rural Alaskan communities and Alaskan Native entities. It was specifically noted by the workgroup that the standing committee would not provide the Council with community input on particular actions or conduct outreach, rather it would provide the Council with recommendations on how to improve its overall outreach efforts and make recommendations about whether specific actions may

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need a more targeted outreach effort in rural Alaska. Additional recommendations from the workgroup included establishing a running calendar of regional meetings that would allow efficient communications with a broad cross-section of stakeholders, and review of other potential outreach strategies with recommendations from the committee provided to the Council.

The committee was convened in June 2009, and was tasked by the Council with three objectives:

1. To advise the Council on how to provide opportunities for better understanding and participation from Alaska Native and rural communities;
2. To provide feedback on community impacts sections of specific analyses, if requested; and
3. To provide recommendations regarding which proposed Council actions need a specific outreach plan and prioritize multiple actions, when necessary.

The ROC met four times between August 2009 and September 2011. In August 2009, the ROC reiterated the role of the Committee and the differences between Council outreach and NOAA's responsibility for tribal consultation. The ROC made a number of recommendations to the Council, including: development of a three-tier approach to outreach that includes statewide (e.g., educational and website tools, audio broadcast of Council meetings), regional (e.g., MOUs, partnerships/mentoring), and project specific (e.g., direct community engagement) tools; redesigning the Council website with rural communities issues identified separately; development of a targeted outreach plan for the chum salmon bycatch action before the Council at the time; developing regional partnerships with key contacts in each Alaskan region; and development of a calendar of regional meetings.

In November 2009, updates were provided on the recommended actions from the ROC, but most of the meeting was devoted to developing an outreach plan for the chum salmon bycatch action before the Council. The ROC supported an approach that was modeled after an outreach plan for the previously completed Chinook bycatch issue. The outreach plan consisted of three elements: direct mailings, regional outreach meetings, and documentation and presentation of results to the Council.

The ROC advised the Council that staff and Council members should attend the Department of Interior, FWS Regional Advisory Council meetings in the Seward Peninsula, Eastern Interior, Western Interior, Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta, and Bristol Bay, and should also attend the Association of Village Council Presidents, Tanana Chiefs Conference, and Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association annual meetings. The ROC also recommended that the Council schedule a statewide teleconference to inform stakeholders of the options, and present project-specific information at booths at the Alaska Federation of Natives annual meeting and press releases to media at regional hub communities.

In February 2010, the ROC again received updates on their recommended actions. The ROC also discussed the roles of the Council and NMFS in tribal consultation. The ROC recommended that NMFS provide an annual report to the Council regarding tribal consultations, and that NMFS' tribal consultations occur early in any process to inform Council decision-making. The ROC again reviewed the draft chum salmon bycatch outreach plan, with most of the discussion focused on a statewide teleconference. The ROC agreed that the purpose of the call was informational; to provide information so the public understood the purpose of the action and the alternatives proposed. The ROC also discussed the concept of regional partnerships and recommended that the Council identify key contacts in each region to help facilitate communication in those regions.

The last meeting of the ROC occurred in September 2011, to address a request from the Council that the ROC determine whether and what type of additional outreach was necessary on the chum salmon bycatch action. The ROC recommended a second statewide teleconference to inform the public of revised

alternatives. That call took place in February 2012. The ROC also recommended that the outreach plan developed for the chum salmon action would serve as a good model for Chinook salmon bycatch and the Northern Bering Sea Research Plan actions that were scheduled at the Council. The ROC also reiterated their recommendation that the Council coordinate communication with the Federal Subsistence Regional Advisory Councils in order to reach a broad array of stakeholders in each region.

2.1 Application to Chum Salmon bycatch outreach

Based on the recommendations from the ROC, the Council initiated the three-tier approach, including direct mailings, attendance at regional meetings, and direct report to the Council for the Council's chum salmon bycatch action. The Council sent three mailings in 2009, 2010, and 2011 to more than 600 stakeholders, including community governments, regional and village Native Corporations, regional non-profit Native corporations, tribal entities, Federal Subsistence Regional Advisory Councils coordinators, Community Development Quota corporations, ADF&G Regional Coordinators, and other community or native entities. The first mailing on September 18, 2009 included flyers providing a brief summary of the issue, including bycatch trends, and solicited input from potentially affected stakeholders. A second mailing on March 31, 2010 notified the public of the first Statewide teleconference that was held on May 4, 2010, and also notified the public of the action scheduled for the Council in June 2010. A third mailing in May 2011 informed the public of the suite of alternatives and the range of impacts analyzed, the schedule for final action, and solicited input on the selection of a preliminary preferred alternative.

Council staff hosted a statewide teleconference on May 4, 2010 to inform the public of the suite of alternatives that the Council was considering to ensure that people understood the alternatives and ways to provide formal input to the Council (e.g., written and oral testimony) before the June 2010 meeting. Opportunity for public comment was also provided to allow public input on the suite of alternatives before the Council.

Two Council members and two Council staff analysts attended meetings of the Yukon River Panel, Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association, Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta Regional Advisory Council, Western Interior Regional Advisory Council, Eastern Interior Regional Advisory Council, Bristol Bay Regional Advisory Council, and Tanana Chiefs Conference. At each meeting, Council staff provided a 30- to 45-minute presentation on the Council process, outreach efforts, a review of the Council's previous action on Bering Sea Chinook salmon bycatch, and the proposed action on chum salmon bycatch reduction measures. Council staff and Council members also answered questions.

Summaries of the statewide teleconference, the regional meetings, and the mailings were presented to the Council in June 2011.

Although the chum salmon bycatch action was completed in 2011, and the ROC has not met formally since September 2011, several projects have benefitted from the ROC recommendations for coordinated outreach. For example, an outreach action plan was completed for the 2015 Chinook salmon bycatch action. Council members and staff traveled to four communities (Nome, Naknek, Bethel, and Fairbanks) to attend public and Federal Subsistence Regional Advisory Council meetings and hosted a statewide teleconference to present information about the alternatives that were considered by the Council; all actions that were recommended by the ROC. The Federal Regional Advisory Council coordinators reported that attendance by the Council members and staff at their local meetings was well received by

the RACs, and reports were submitted by all RACs for inclusion in the outreach report presented to the Council in April 2015.²

After the successful RAC meetings in 2015, the FWS Council Coordination Division Chief at the Office of Subsistence Management requested that representatives of the NPFMC attend a meeting in March 2016 of all the Regional Advisory Councils to present information about Chinook salmon bycatch in the BSAI and GOA and other Council issues that were of interest to rural stakeholders. Three Council staff members attended the Joint RAC meeting and presented information and updates on Bering Sea and Gulf of Alaska salmon bycatch reduction programs. In February 2018, two Council staff members attended the annual meeting of the Western Interior RAC, at request of their chairman, to provide updates on the Council's salmon bycatch reduction programs in the Bering Sea.

3 Options for additional outreach

The Council's outreach efforts are, at the recommendation of the ROC, project specific. The ROC recognized that some projects will require additional outreach to affected communities, while other projects will not require outreach to rural communities. At the recommendation of the ROC, Council staff and Council members have attended regional or statewide meetings of USFWS Regional Advisory Councils to present information on several projects in recent years, generally concerning bycatch of salmon and halibut. Several RACs have formally thanked the Council for the presentations and requested that Council staff return to their annual meetings to provide updates.

At recent Council and Ecosystem Committee meetings, members of the public have advocated for additional outreach efforts from the Council. The intention, as described by public testimony, is to increase opportunity for direct, two-way communications between the Council and members of communities who may not otherwise be able to attend Council meetings due to cost or other logistic difficulties. Suggestions from the public include direct visits to communities, attendance by Council members or staff at regional Alaska Native Organization meetings, attendance by Council or staff at statewide conferences that Alaska Native Organizations regularly attend (Alaska Federation of Natives, Alaska Forum on the Environment, etc.), and placement of representatives of rural communities or Alaska Native Organizations on Council committees or the Council. Council staff have, in the past, attended the Alaska Forum on the Environment to provide an overview of the Council and inform attendees of actions the Council was considering in the next year. Recently Council staff and one Council member attended a series of meetings on St. Paul Island, Alaska. The report from that trip was presented to the Council in October, 2017³. Attendance at statewide conferences and Council visits to rural communities serve very different purposes and have different costs. Not all Council actions or processes are appropriate for these sorts of outreach efforts. It is critical to carefully consider what objectives for outreach are before deciding on additional outreach processes.

The Council is now considering more general, programmatic initiatives (e.g., Bering Sea Fishery Ecosystem Plan, abundance-based halibut management) for which additional outreach measures could be considered. Programmatic initiatives like the Bering Sea Fishery Ecosystem Plan or abundance-based halibut management may not have specific actions or alternatives for which an outreach plan like those the Council has employed recently could be developed; describing the effect of a fishery ecosystem plan is very different from describing alternatives to establish bycatch caps. In these cases, a teleconference or presentation describing alternatives may not be the best way to facilitate two-way communication

² (<http://npfmc.legistar.com/gateway.aspx?M=F&ID=f7cbd9f2-06ed-4040-a2f1-2cfe2674c0e4.pdf>)

³ (<http://npfmc.legistar.com/gateway.aspx?M=F&ID=174591bf-260f-4026-bae0-29007556937d.pdf>)

between rural or Native Alaskan communities and the Council. Following is a list of outreach tools that were recommended by the ROC for specific Council actions:

- Direct mailings to stakeholders
- Statewide teleconferences
- NMFS annual report re: tribal consultation
- Investigate regional partnerships with tribal / village / regional corporations
- Regional meetings with USFWS Subsistence Regional Advisory Councils
- Attendance at statewide conferences
- Conduct tribal consultation early in the process
- Coordinate communications with USFWS Subsistence Regional Advisory Council

Staff recommends that if new or alternative outreach methods are desired by the Council, the Council should enlist those with expertise in rural communications to develop alternatives. Possibilities include re-establishing the standing ROC or a temporary, ad-hoc committee to provide advice to the Council.

3.1 Traditional knowledge and Co-production of knowledge

The Bering Sea Fishery Ecosystem Plan Team has been considering not only general outreach, but also how to integrate knowledge from outside the western science paradigm into the FEP. Traditional Knowledge, as defined by Raymond-Yakoubian et al. (2017), is a living body of knowledge which pertains to explaining and understanding the universe that is acquired and utilized by indigenous communities and individuals. Co-production of knowledge is a process to engage both traditional knowledge and conventional scientific approaches to develop novel questions and document and interpret observations based on two ways of knowing (Johnson et al. 2016). It is a process for sharing information, values, and ideas; it is not a data point, and cannot be distilled into a single deliverable research product⁴. These are both concepts that are very different from community outreach as considered above. Developing the proper relationships and trust to develop and document traditional knowledge, or a co-production paradigm can take years to decades. The Council has identified a specific action module for the Bering Sea FEP to consider how to approach this issue.

3.2 Social Science Planning Team

The Council has recently established a Social Science Planning Team (SSPT) to facilitate and enhance the use of social science data in the Council's management process. The SSPT will support the collection and aggregation of social science data in a manner that cuts across Fishery Management Plans and specific management programs within the North Pacific. The SSPT will meet in May 2018 to review a first iteration of a social science data "gap analysis" that identifies areas of need, existing sources that are underutilized, and pathways to incorporate new and existing information into the Council's management process. It is likely that the SSPT will have the expertise to review and advise the Council on integration of traditional knowledge and co-production of knowledge. The Bering Sea FEP Team intends to interact with the SSPT as it develops its LTK module.

4 Conclusion and Recommendation

The Council's project-specific outreach program has been successful, and improved communication between the Council and rural communities, particularly through presentations at regional and statewide

⁴ Information from the co-production of knowledge workshop. Inuit Circumpolar Council, January 2018.

meetings of the USFWS Regional Advisory Councils. Council members and Council staff have also participated in Statewide conferences that are attended by rural and Alaska Native Organizations (Alaska Forum on the Environment) and visited communities specifically to discuss ecosystem concerns with community members and organizations.

The Council's Rural Outreach Committee has been inactive since 2011, although recommendations from the ROC continue to be applied for several recent projects that benefitted from focused rural outreach. The Council could consider reconvening the standing ROC or convening an ad-hoc committee with the appropriate expertise to develop recommendations for additional outreach programs or strategies. Either alternative would require a new call for membership.

There does not appear to be compelling reason to alter the outreach methods recommended by the ROC for projects, like measures to reduce bycatch, that have discrete alternatives. However, as the Council develops programmatic initiatives like the Bering Sea Fishery Ecosystem Plan and abundance-based halibut management that do not have discrete alternatives, it may be necessary to consider longer-term outreach and communication strategies. If the Council chooses to reconvene the standing ROC or convene an ad-hoc committee, as discussed above, the Council also has the opportunity to change the terms of reference for either committee to address programmatic initiatives rather than making action-specific recommendations. Alternately, the Bering Sea FEP team, with Ecosystem Committee input, is developing plans to address public outreach and considering ways to address and incorporate LTK and co-production of knowledge. The Bering Sea FEP Team will have the benefit of the Social Sciences Planning Team as they develop their outreach and LTK/Co-production strategies. The Council may choose to defer any decisions until after the Bering Sea FEP Team has developed their plan and the LTK module. This may allow for a more developed set of priorities to be developed for programmatic initiatives such as these. However the Council chooses to proceed, it is staff's recommendation that the Council enlist those with expertise in rural communications to advise the Council as they move forward.

5 References

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- Raymond-Yakoubian, J., B. Raymond-Yakoubian, C. Moncrieff. 2017. The incorporation of traditional knowledge into Alaska federal fisheries management. *Marine Policy* 78:132-142.