

Community Engagement Committee: Background

March 20, 2019

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1 Introduction

In June 2018 the Council authorized the creation of an ad-hoc committee to develop recommendations on strategies for the Council to improve its engagement with rural Alaskan and Alaskan Native communities. The Community Engagement Committee was established and a call for nominations published in the Council newsletter. Committee membership was announced in October 2018: Council chairman, Simon Kineen, and Councilmember Theresa Peterson were announced as co-chairmen of the committee. Membership includes Mellisa Heflin, Jennifer Hooper, Robert Keith, Nicole Kimball, Marissa Mercurieff, Tom Panamaroff, Becca Robins Gisclair, and Rob Sanderson. Steve MacLean is Council staff for this committee.

When the committee was authorized, the following charter was authorized by the Council:

The North Pacific Fishery Management Council's Community Engagement Committee is established to identify and recommend strategies for the Council and Council staff to enact processes that provide effective community engagement with rural and Alaska Native Communities. Effective community engagement may involve two-way communication between the Council and communities at additional stages of the Council process or a project and allow for community concerns, information, perspectives, and priorities to be shared clearly with the Council, whether part of an active Council action or not.

The committee was identified as an ad-hoc committee with a specific task. At the first meeting on 20 March 2019, the committee will discuss the terms of reference for the committee, identify steps necessary to achieve the task, and begin the process of recommending strategies for the Council to consider to foster engagement with rural and Alaska Native communities.

2 Background on the Council's Rural Outreach Committee

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. The objective of the ROC was to provide recommendations on how to improve the overall outreach efforts and make recommendations about whether any specific actions may benefit from a more targeted outreach effort. The ROC 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;

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2. To provide feedback on community impacts sections of specific analysis, 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 between 2009 and 2011 and developed an outreach protocol that was implemented by Council staff for several projects, primarily concerning salmon bycatch in Bering Sea fisheries. The ROC also recommended that Council staff attend or update the USFWS Subsistence Regional Advisory Councils on commercial fishery issues as requested by the RACs, or as necessary. Council staff have met several times with the RACs (latest meeting 3/13/19) and are on the agendas for several RACs for the fall 2019 meetings.

The Council's project-specific outreach program has been successful and has improved communications between the Council and rural communities, particularly through presentations at regional and statewide meetings of the USFWS RACs. There does not appear to be compelling reasons to alter the outreach methods recommended by the ROC for projects that have discrete alternatives. However, as the Council develops programmatic initiatives like the Bering Sea Fishery Ecosystem Plan (BSFEP), it may be necessary to consider longer-term community engagement strategies.

3 Opportunities for Community Engagement

3.1 Existing Council opportunities

The Council is advised by a number of advisory bodies, committees, and teams established by the Council that present opportunities for public comment and engagement through the Council decision-making process. Existing bodies include:

- The Advisory Panel composed of members that represent major fishing industry segments, subsistence users, consumers, environmental organizations and recreational fishers.
- Issue-specific committees such as the Charter Halibut Management Committee, Ecosystem Committee, Electronic Monitoring Workgroup, IFQ Committee, Observer Advisory Committee, Pacific Northwest Crab Industry Advisory Committee, and Recreational Quota Entity Committee.
- Fishery Management Plan Teams.
- Social Science Planning Team, and
- Bering Sea Fishery Ecosystem Plan Team.

3.2 Opportunities to expand community engagement

The Council is now developing more general, programmatic initiatives including the Bering Sea Fishery Ecosystem Plan, Abundance Based Management for prohibited species, etc. These initiatives may not have specific actions or alternatives for which the Council's traditional outreach plan is designed. Recognizing this, the Council is interested in developing strategies that facilitate engagement with rural and Alaska Native communities to facilitate their participation in the processes to develop and refine programmatic initiatives. The Community Engagement Committee is established to review and recommend strategies that the Council may enact to expand the Council's community engagement efforts, and increase its efficacy.

4 Next steps

At the March 20 meeting, the Community Engagement Committee will review the terms of reference and charter for the committee, review previous Council decisions and practices for community outreach, and determine next steps for developing recommendations to the Council. A draft schedule of upcoming meetings will be prepared for presentation to the Council at the April meeting.