

Purpose of Travel: North Pacific Fishery Management Council meetings (247<sup>th</sup> Plenary Session), December 2 – 10, 2019. Also in session were the Scientific and Statistical Committee, Advisory Panel, Community Engagement Committee, Charter Halibut Management Committee and the Enforcement Committee.

Due to prior commitments, I was in attendance for sessions from December 4 - 10.

The NPFMC met in Anchorage, Alaska to discuss the following topics: Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands Groundfish Specifications, Gulf of Alaska Groundfish Specifications, Charter Halibut Management Measures for Areas 2C and 3A, Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands Parallel Waters, Crab Partial Deliveries, St. Matthew Blue King Crab Rebuilding Plan, Central Gulf of Alaska Rockfish reauthorization, Non-Guided Halibut Rental Boat Registration, Sablefish Discards, Aleutian Islands Community Follow-up.

BSAI Groundfish.

Council set to take final action on catch limits on groundfish species for the 2020 and 2021 fisheries.

The ecosystem status reports a second winter of low sea ice and the subsequent impacts to fish distributions; low abundance of large copepods; unusual mortality events of birds, seals, whales. Pollock recruitment could be on the rise in the northern Bering Sea. Need to review if pollock should be moved from a Tier 1 stock to a Tier 3 stock (no stock/recruit relationship).

Climate trend will be continued warming, and due to the changes in fish distributions, a spacial analysis by NMFS survey is recommended (space-time modeling of survey data).

EBS pollock outlook: Spawning biomass is on the decline. Likely to see upward trend in about 3 years.

EBS Pacific cod outlook: At a higher risk due to environmental considerations (mortality events of grey whales, shearwaters). Pacific cod are expanding their range into the Northern Bering Sea.

Sablefish outlook: Harvester sectors testified a need to reduce the recommended TAC of sablefish due to trade issues and market glut. Council shows concerns with the changes in the climate and how it is affecting the ecosystem, and is expecting to use this in consideration of model development. The Northern Bering Sea surveys in recent years will

add to the complex model in hypothesis 2, therefore a new base model is recommended to calculate maximum ABCs and OFLs.

Final Council action adopted the planning team's recommendations (Stock Assessment and Fishery Evaluation report) for all groundfish fisheries TAC for 2020 and 2021, with the exception of sablefish. Sablefish was reduced slightly, with the difference in allocation going to skates.

Sablefish discards. An IFQ fleet initiative to allow for sablefish small fish discards within the fishery. Currently, the quota allowance does not allow for any discards, until the quota has been reached, at that time all sablefish must be released. No TAC set-asides for discards in the IFQ fishery, so TAC would have to be reduced to account for these discards. Council action was for further analysis of small fish discards (release) in the IFQ sablefish fisheries.

Aleutian Islands Community. Council consideration of a community allocation for the Aleutian Islands Pacific cod fishery.

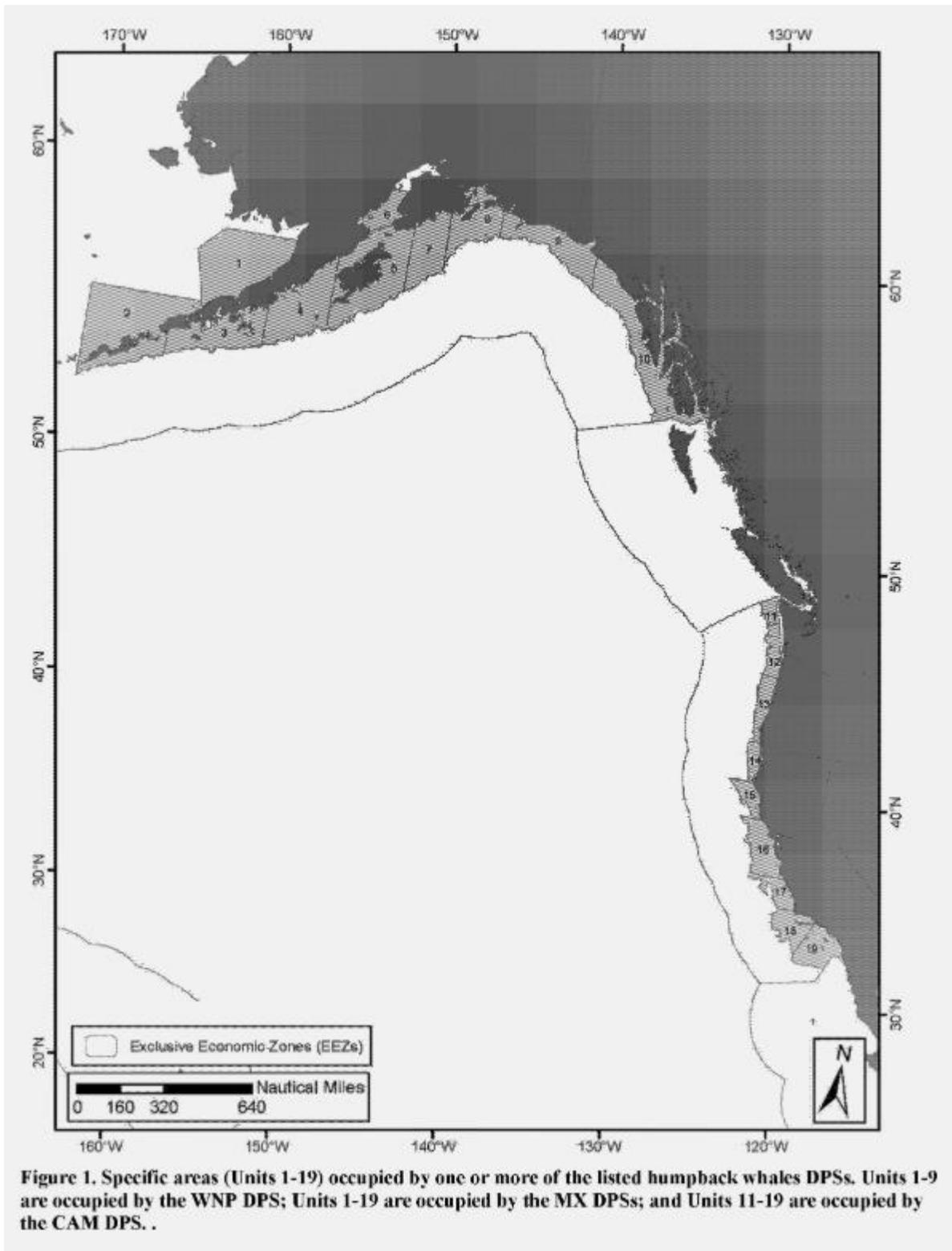
The initial action was taken in 2015 to prioritize a portion of the AI P.cod TAC for access by C/Vs delivering their AI P.cod catch to shorephants in the western Aleutian Islands. The action was struck down by the US District Court, in that implementing Amendment 113 was not consistent with National Standard 4 and 8. New language needs to demonstrate giving fishing privileges to promote conservation. Other options include a trawl C/V cod cooperative program and multiple variations in a Limited Access Privilege Program.

Council took no action and will move forward with developing the comprehensive plan of rationalizing the cod fisheries (LAPP).

An informal meeting was hosted by NOAA to present the current status of establishing the humpback whale critical habitat.

The critical habitat designation for humpback whales includes the endangered Western North Pacific DPS (distinct population segment), endangered Central America DPS, and the threatened Mexico DPS. The proposed rule was entered into the Federal Register in October 2019. The humpback whales that migrate to Alaska waters are species classified under the Endangered Species Act, and therefore must have areas designated critical habitat based on "the best scientific data available...taking into consideration the economic impact, the impact on national security, and any other relevant impact of specifying any particular area as critical habitat." Units 1, 2, 3, and 5 in the Figure below are proposed critical

habitat designations. This includes the waters of the eastern Aleutian Islands (including Amaknak and Unalaska Islands).



Activities in our area that could be affected by this designation would be Federal fisheries, alternative energy development, in-water construction (i.e. dredging), vessel traffic (shipping lanes), aquaculture, military activities, space vehical and missile lanuches, Clean Water Act permits, inland activities (power plant operations, NPDES permitting). The key component is that private and non-Federal entities will be affected if a Federal permit is required for the activity.

The comment period closed December 9, 2019. A public hearing was held in Anchorage Tuesday evening, but I was unaware of the event and did not attend.