

**Sitka Fish and Game Advisory Board**  
**Meeting Minutes**  
**Date of Meeting: March 15, 2017**  
**Location: Sitka Sound Science Center**

- I. Meeting called to order at 7:00pm by Chair Jon Martin
- II. Minutes approved motion by Randy G, 2<sup>nd</sup> by Brian Massey; approved unanimously
- III. Roll call:
  - a. Members present
    - i. John Murray
    - ii. Joel Markis
    - iii. Chris Whitehead
    - iv. Jon Martin
    - v. Luke Bastian
    - vi. Tad Fujioka
    - vii. Randy Gluth
    - viii. Brian Massey
    - ix. Andrew Thoms
  - b. Members absent
    - i. Jeff Feldpauch, alternate
    - ii. Karen Johnson, at large
    - iii. Moe Johnson
    - iv. Eric Jordan
    - v. Wayne Unger
    - vi. Bradley Shaffer
    - vii. Dick Curren
  - c. List of User Groups Present: Shellfish, Charter, Resident Sport Fish, Guide, trapping, conservation, power troll, hunting,
  - d. Audience
    - i.
- IV. Approve of Agenda: approved without vote
- V. Fish and Game Staff Present: Tad Tydingco, Steve Bethune, Eric Coonrad, Mike Vaughn, Grant Hagerman, Rhea Ehresmann
- VI. Guests Present: Dr. Michael Navarro (UAS Professor), Ellie Schmidt, Lee House, Lauren Bell (Sitka Sound Science Center), Marty Becker (forest Service)
- VII. Old Business: none
- VIII. New Businesses:
  - 1. Lauren Bell gave a short presentation on Abalone Monitoring project; partnership between Sitka Sound Science Center, ADFG, University of Santa Cruz. Abalone have gone through boom and bust. Lots of abalone in intertidal when sea otters were not present. Now talk of

how abalone have disappeared. Commercial fishery that peaked in the 70s dropped off into the 80s. Fishery was closed in 1996. Recreational fishery—freedive fishery; Alaska is the only place on West Coast USA where there is a personal use fishery for pinto abalone. There has never been a full stock estimate or density assessments on Pinto Abalone. Fishery has been managed on catch effort surveys and commercial diver surveys during other dive fisheries (cucumbers and geoducks). There has been discussion of making pinto abalone an endangered species. No ruling has been made because there is no baseline data in Alaska. Survey has various classes of sites where transects are done and there are also Abalone hotel blocks to assess recruitment of abalone. Study started in 2015. Surveys surveyed at the beginning and end of summers. Preliminary data suggest numbers of abalone above density needed for successful spawning and good recruitment of young. Initial results seem to show that the population is good for a typical standard population curve. Survey will expand beyond Sitka Sound and use their methodology in other places including Ketchikan and Sea Otter Sound off POW.

- a. Brian Massey asked what % are sub-legal. Answer: about 85%
  - b. Jon Martin asked about considerations in WA state for endangered species status: Lauren said that populations across various geographical areas are highly variable with much less populations in L48
  - c. John Murray asked about abalone in BC and if there are otters: answer: yes
  - d. Joel Markis asked about genetic variability: Lauren said there isn't much research or hasn't seen data indicating genetic variability.
2. Chris Whitehead from Sitka Tribe of Alaska talks about Sitka Tribe work on PSP and Ocean Acidification monitoring. Chris is a shellfish biologist with experience managing fisheries and also starting up aquaculture facilities and with tribes around country. Chris helped start up program in SE AK when he found that there is no testing of shellfish and that turn-around is 8-10 weeks. Identified the need to do a testing facility. Raised funds and started a lab in Sitka to test shellfish to assess if they can be eaten safely. All tribes across SE are represented except Angoon currently but they are being recruited to work with the program. Harris Air brings samples from 28 sites; lab processes the sample and the test will indicate if the PSP levels are safe; also expanded into Kachemak bay and into Kodiak for weekly sampling; samples are on a 2 day flight and that works to get to the Sitka Lab; the lab has opened opportunities for subsistence and personal use across SE AK. Lab can also test samples that the public brings in.
  - a. Also funding from BIA for monitoring ocean acidification across the entire network that was set up for the PSP monitoring program; buoy set up and also a continuous monitoring sampler from the harbor at the lab. Ocean acidification data is being collected in open ocean but very little near-shore studies; STA and SSSC are taking this on and doing that near shore monitoring.
  - b. Opportunities in the future for fishermen to take samples during their travels to assess ocean acidification levels
  - c. Luke asked how long the beach is safe after the sample: answer: standard is 8 days as per geoduck testing.

- d. Jon asked what species have highest concentration: butter clams can hold toxins for up to 2 years to clean it out of their system; blue mussels on the other hand get the toxins out of their system much faster; little necks and cockles get the toxins out medium; lab has species ID tool on their website.
3. ADFG Staff introductions
- a. Steve Bethune – Area Biologist; previously on POW; very interested in mountain ungulates; likes to hunt rams
    - i. Steve reports that the mountain goat population is very good and is getting back to historically high levels after crashes from severe winters in the past and a low point in 2012. Estimate of 1457 goats on the island. Hunters have been good in selecting billies over nannies. This year only 1 nanny killed. That conscientiousness amongst hunters has given options for management. Steve is going to divide the island into 31 different zones rather than just 9. 27 zones will be open. New areas that will be open include Blue Lake, Clarence Kramer, Mt. Katlian. Medivije and Bear mountain will be closed.
    - ii. Brian Massey asked about this year's snowfall and if it will be significant for goat mortality. Steve says that he doesn't think this winter so far is significant yet.
    - iii. Jon Martin offered positive feedback on this new divisions of the island and that he sees a lot of value in this approach. Steve says that this is directly a result of GPS data from collars and insights on subpopulations.
    - iv. Tad asked about the changes in the boundary changes and likes that the rivers are boundaries rather than the ridge tops.
    - v. Jon Martin asked about any changes for hunting regs in unit 4. Only change is the 2<sup>nd</sup> degree of kindred regs which start this year in the spring hunt.
    - vi. John Murray asked about how Steve sees his role on bear safety in the community; he is giving a talk this coming week. Steve talked about hearing different views from the community on bears and says he is in the middle of the road; reports that the city attorney and police are cleaning up the laws on people leaving out their garbage and he is working with them. Public needs to take care of garbage so that bears don't become habituated to human food and then don't become problem bears which pose a threat to human safety and a burden for law enforcement.
4. Eric Coonradt—Seine area biologist: On herring, GHF is very similar to last year. Change this year is that they are not using their winter weights as part of the model.
- i. John Murray asked for a breakdown on ages: majority of population is 5 years; 4 yo are 6%
  - ii. Jon Martin asked how old herring can get: have been seen at 14 yo but more typical is that they don't get much older than 8 yo
  - iii. John Murray asked about if most of the herring are in the sound. Eric doesn't know—kestrel gets here with the sonar on Friday.

5. Mike Vaughn – Ground fish area biologist-- Outlined the fish he manages; not so involved in sable fish
  - a. Working the smallest quote ever in Chatham in 2016 for sablefish. Is seeing recruitment and foresees a small increase in the quota in 2017; are seeing many juveniles and is feeling good about recruitment
  - b. Reported on pot fishing being allowed for sablefish; all pots need tags; limit of 120 pots/vessel; will be required to retain legal halibut if they get into the pots; fishermen must take their pots with them when they go back to port to deliver their fish; regulation that says if they have pots deployed, they need to remove them within 5 days and actively fish them;
    - i. Brian Massey asked about conversion rates of vessels: Mike isn't sure, has heard that guys in town are planning on converting
    - ii. Mike reported conflicts between Orcas and long-liners in Clarence Strait which has led them to go to pot fisheries; expects to see proposals for pots in Chatham.
    - iii. Randy asked how big the pots are: Mike said about 7 feet across
    - iv. Randy asked what kind of level of pot loss there is: Mike doesn't know the rate of pot loss; definitely a concern
  - c. Chatham fishery: 78 permit holders; quota is equally divided;
    - i. Jon asked why the Chatham stocks are low: Mike said quotas were historically very high and that was part of it. also there were age classes that were carrying the fishery and not a lot of recruitment so as those age classes progressed or were harvested, overall pop lowers. Current good indicators of recruitment is good news.
    - ii. Randy said that he heard of tagged Black cod from Chatham found far away on the outside and asked about viability of setting quote in one geographical area as a stock when there is so much movement. Mike said they tag between 6000 and 8000 fish every other year and use these fish for catch/recapture surveys
    - iii. John asked about the 2014 1 year olds that were common around the sound and Mike feels that this is a good indicator of recruitment and that those will be growing into commercial stocks
  - d. Mike is available for help if anyone wants to make a ground fish proposal
6. Grant Hagerman—Regional Troll Biologist; replaces Patty Skanes; was her assistant for 6 years previous; also brought his assistant Rhea Ehresmann; Current totals of king salmon are 12,591 out of 45,000 total allowed this year;
  - a. Abundance is down; Columbia stocks are down. Coast-wide abundance is down. We are going to be seeing a smaller quota this year. Restrictions in winter and spring fishery for Alaska wild stock conservation. Production is down in local stocks too so conservation measures are being taken beginning in April to reduce harvest of wild fish—this will mean certain areas are going to be closed to protect wild stocks. Of 36 fisheries areas for kings, 17 will be restricted.

- b. Local stock assessments: medivije is forecast a 39% reduction from last year. All of SE 12% decrease from last year. Hatchery fish are declining as well as wild fish.  
Ocean conditions
  - c. Nothing to talk about for summer until abundance assessment comes out.
  - d. This summer there will also be a limited mark fishery... adipose clipped fish can be retained during certain times. Watch for regs.
    - i. Brian Massey asked how many fish are clipped: Grant said 1 in 5 on average
    - ii. Brian Massey asked on the mark/select during Coho if there were lower coho catch overall and higher king catch: grant said that they didn't see that and that they monitored pretty close
    - iii. Brian Massey said that the whole mark/select approach makes him nervous
    - iv. Jon said that he has heard that mortality is higher because fisherman are handling fish more looking for clipped fin: Grant said that there are no studies on that but that he believes it is likely there is more mortality because of increased handling.
    - v. John Murray: said that he doesn't pull those aboard and pulls up and looks and then keeps or shakes--- didn't see anyone bringing them aboard.
- 7. Troy Tydingo—SportFish Area Biologist-- Rockfish is the biggest concern this coming season. Changes in pelagic and non pelagic. For pelagic—decrease in Sitka area from 5 to 3. They have seen a very dramatic increase in pelagic harvest of black rockfish. Need to reduce the level to closer to what was harvest levels around 2012. There is no stock assessment and a stock assessment may get underway. For non-pelagic: reduce limit to 1 for all of SE AK and will close the outside waters for a portion of the summer for first 3 weeks of August. This is to meet allocation for sport which has been over in the last couple years.
  - a. King Salmon--- looking at closures across SE AK in inside waters; don't have Abundance Index yet so can't speak to what that means for us for sport limits. AI should come out end of march/beginning of april
  - b. Joel Markis asked where the pressure on the rockfish is coming from: Troy is guessing it comes from charter anglers that are targeting these—likely because of reductions in halibut/king salmon
- 8. Mike Navarro—Professor of Marine Fisheries UAS Juneau—spoke on market squid. Has studied climate change and specifically the environment changing over time. Market squid are hard to catch until they are spawning/dying; they are hard to find and are used to being located with sonar so they can hide from it well. They live 4-9 months total. They migrate. Adults eat krill. It would be surprising that they eat salmon fry. When they come to surface they are spawning and don't eat. They are cannibalistic. They eat crustaceans.
  - i. \$70M ex vessel value in West Coast
  - ii. Sardine fishery crashed and then the squid fishery came in
  - iii. The normal range of this species is baja to Vancouver. However, during warm water years especially el nino, the range has extended up to Sitka.
    - 1. In the past they extended but then they didn't take—didn't stay
    - 2. This year they have extended all the way up to Kodiak Island

- iv. Squid migrate from very deep waters to shallow waters for spawning
  - v. Mike wants reports on people seeing egg cases
9. Tim Hall/ Kyle Ferguson Alaska State Wildlife Troopers—squid are not addressed in regs so they fall under misc shellfish. You can fish for squid with 2 hooks. A single squid jig is 1 hook. You are allowed 2 hooks. You are not allowed artificial light. There is no allowance for that in the regs. Artificial light is not allowed. Under personal use you can have more than 2 hooks. There are not commercial squid regs. Artificial light is not addressed in the regs so they have to interpret. If they see a boat that is shining down into the water to attract squid that is an artificial light to attract squid. You cannot use nets. No cast nets or dip nets.
    - a. Tim Hall says that the AC could propose regs for squid
    - b. From an enforcement standpoint, regs specific for squid would be great
    - c. AC discussed proposing regs on squid fishery and defining allowable fishing types such as nets, lights, etc.
    - d. AC asked State Wildlife Troopers to put out PSAs on specific regs for squid fishing
    - e. 5-AC-75-35 is the reg on squid.
    - f. Brian Massey is going to write a proposal for regs on squid fishing. Get in touch with Brian if you want to work with him on it.
  10. Marty Becker—Forest Service – Shelikof Restoration Kruzof Island—Marty is the watershed biologist and has been on the Tongass since 1995; Marty reported that activity from logging on central kruzof in the 70s and 80s did damage to salmon streams. Streams at that time were actually used as roads for removing timber. Damage to salmon streams in that area. Kruzof and Iris/Shelikof was ranked as high priority watershed and also was ranked by the community as high priority area. In 2012/2013 field work was conducted and a plan for habitat restoration was developed that deal with riparian areas, pipes that block fish passage, sedimentation, etc. 2014 the Iris/Shelikof watershed was put at the top of the list on the Tongass. In 2014/2105 Forest Service did stream work to increase habitat. In 2016 the big component of the project was implemented which was the main stem of Iris/Shelikof to improve habitat. The Nature Conservancy raised \$140,000 from Alaska Sustainable Salmon Fund, \$140,000 from Fish and Wildlife Foundation, National Forest Foundation and others. Sitka Conservation Society put in \$25,000. Total project was about \$500,000. Local contractor TM Construction did the heavy equipment work. Columbia helicopter did work placing large trees. Project will diversify habitat and create more pool habitat which is needed by Coho for staging on spawning in fall. Next stage of work is fixing road to twin lakes especially stream crossing, taking out blocked stream channels, and areas with high sedimentation input. Work is planned for 2017 and 2018 and the watershed will be taken off the priority watershed list. Next watersheds where work is needed is Katlian, Nakawasina, Fish Bay, St. Johns, etc moving North.
    - a. Video on project: <https://vimeo.com/183072694>
  11. Discussion on HB40 a piece of legislation that would prohibit traps near trails; report from local representative the bill is not moving in the state legislature this session. Don't worry

12. Discussion on letter from BOF on Title 16 standards and the need to define statutes concerning protection of salmon and salmon habitat that were never defined in the constitution. Legislation is supposed to be introduced this session to deal with this.

Brian Massey moved to adjourn

Tad seconded

Meeting closes 9:38pm