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July 2005

Currents

A Quarterly Newsletter of the Marine Conservation Alliance

WELCOME...

Welcome to the first edition of the *MCA Currents*, a quarterly newsletter to update sponsors of the Marine Conservation Alliance on the work that is being done to promote sustainable fisheries in the North Pacific. It's a chance to highlight the work of your organization, and talk about the challenges that lie ahead.

In recent months MCA has successfully launched efforts on several fronts, all designed to support continued credible fishery management such as we experience in the North Pacific. Our media campaign has successfully gotten out the good story on fishery management so that the North Pacific is now recognized as a

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MCA Stresses Science in MSA Reauthorization Seeks to Maintain Council Structure, Strengthen Scientific Decision-Making

With Congress poised to act on reauthorization of the landmark Magnuson Stevens Act (MSA), the MCA is pushing to retain the successful Regional Council structure while strengthening its science-based provisions. The U.S. House Fisheries Subcommittee has hearings on the MSA reauthorization in Ketchikan July 6 and Kodiak July 8, and MCA will be an active participant.

"There's no doubt that the Council process works and that its management process here in Alaska has been a model for the rest of the nation," said Executive Director Dave Benton, himself a former chairman of the NPFMC. "The MCA's testimony will focus on retaining the balanced make-up of the Council and its committee structure while strengthening provisions that ensure that science takes the lead role in decision making."

Steps the MCA supports to strengthen the already successful Council process include:

- Mandate that all Regional Councils follow scientifically-based catch recommendations. This is the successful policy of the North Pacific, and it can go a long way to counter attacks on the regional council system.

- Strengthen the MSA's language to make it the functional equivalent of the National Environmental Policy Act or NEPA. This can streamline the regulatory process and eliminate a lot of frivolous lawsuits.

- Authorize councils to implement quota-based or cooperative rights-based management systems to improve conservation, reduce bycatch and discards, increase utilization of the resource, reduce overcapacity and increase safety at sea.

- Fund more science to better understand our fisheries and the marine ecosystem. Better science means better management. The U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy recommended a doubling of national funding for these scientific inquiries and MCA believes that would be a good start.

Now almost 30 years old, the Magnuson Stevens Act has served as the primary legal framework to conserve and manage fisheries in the United State's Exclusive Economic Zone through the use of eight regional councils. Numerous other issues are involved in MSA reauthorization. For a complete briefing on MCA's position, go to our webpage:

www.marineconservationalliance.org

promoting sustainable fisheries to feed the world



**Marine Conservation
Alliance**

Welcome...

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successful model especially as it relates to reauthorization of the Magnuson-Stevens Act. MCA is also poised to play a critical role in understanding how ecosystem-based fishery management will affect our fisheries by supporting and participating in several scientific panels and symposium on the subject. Marine mammal and endangered species issues are an on-going challenge and MCA continues to focus on marine mammals and has hired scientific

and legal experts to provide advice on endangered and threatened species including Steller sea lions, North Pacific right whales, seabirds, sea otters and fur seals, all of which have implications for our fisheries. MCA is also ready set to address upcoming Congressional action on the Marine Mammal Protection Act and the Endangered Species Act when Congress takes them up later this year. Finally, MCA continues to play a critical role in the North Pacific Council process as it tackles complex conservation issues such as recent action taken on Essential Fish Habitat.

The seafood industry in Alaska is remarkably fortunate, in that we have robust fish stocks and a long and successful record of producing healthy seafood on a long-term sustainable basis. Alaska produces roughly half of the nation's commercial fisheries landings by volume. Fisheries account for about 35,000 jobs in Alaska, and are valued at over \$1.5 billion dollars in value.

This success story hinges on the regional fishery management council system embodied in the Magnuson Stevens Act (MSA). MCA believes that this system has

all the characteristics that are required for developing and implementing science driven, conservation oriented management programs while at the same time providing the industry, the public, affected user groups, communities, academics, scientists, and other interested parties with unprecedented access to the decision making process.

Yet this system is under attack by interest groups that want to water down, or remove entirely, the decision making authority of the regional councils. Some would have management placed in the hands of "ecosystem councils" and manage our fisheries not on the best science available, but on theory and conjecture. MCA's task is to counter these attacks by representing the successes of the regional system, and make sure that fisheries are managed based on facts and science, not rhetoric and speculation.

We hope you find this newsletter helpful, and informative. We welcome your thoughts and comments.

*David Benton
Executive Director*

Habitat Actions Underscore Success of Council Process

MCA an Active Participant in Decision

Over the past three years, MCA played a critical role in the designation of Essential Fish Habitat that culminated in recent decisions by the North Pacific Fishery Management Council (NPFMC) to set aside large areas off Alaska as Essential Fish Habitat without closing traditional fishing grounds. MCA hired scientific and legal experts to assist in the development of detailed comments and testimony that paid off in development of practical solutions that won the support of industry and environmentalists.

"MCA's input directly helped shape the final draft so that it closely adhered to the scientific recommendations to protect fish habitat," said Dave Benton. "In doing so the Council was able to effectively meet the requirements of the court order while not unduly disrupting our fisheries."

The NPFMC's action in February tripled the amount of area closed to bottom trawling off the Alaska coast to a total of 388,000 square miles, mostly

off the Aleutian Islands. MCA's EFH committee fostered a united effort by industry to come up with workable solutions. We were able to design EFH designations and mitigation measures that allowed fisheries to continue and yet protects important habitat.

The NPFMC action was mirrored in June by the Pacific Fishery Management Council which set aside almost 200,000

square miles of ocean off California, Oregon and Washington.

Both actions were taken to protect essential fish habitat such as fragile sub-sea coral beds. These actions were supported by fishermen and environmentalists alike and were passed unanimously by their respective councils. MCA points to these actions as evidence that the council

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MCA Communications Plan: Getting the Good Story to the Public

We know the North Pacific fisheries are well managed, sustainable, an important part of the economy, and provide the nation with a healthy, sustainable source of protein. Unfortunately, most of the public has only heard about problems with fishery management and the state of ocean resources. Getting a balanced and accurate story to the public is part of MCA's job and is especially important as national leaders consider such matters as reauthorization of the Magnuson Stevens Act.

Working with the strategic communication firm Brown Lloyd James (BLJ), MCA has scored some major successes in recent months telling the public about the positive record of fishery management in the North Pacific. Even Council detractors like the Marine Fish Conservation Network now cite the North Pacific Fishery Management Council as a "case study to strengthen scientific basis for fisheries management". This is a major turn around, but much work remains to be done.

When the President established a cabinet level Committee on Oceans Policy, BLJ got MCA in front of the curve by helping place op-eds in the Boston Globe and Washington Times, and arranging interviews with several news outlets, including a joint press conference with the National Fisheries Institute.

MCA was well represented in the national press following the Council action in February on Essential Fish Habitat. This was a newsworthy story and since BLJ helped us proactively plan for the event, our efforts paid off with positive coverage in the press.

Additionally, we were prepared and effective in quickly responding to the fishery management recommendations the

US Commission on Ocean Policy as well as President Bush's Ocean Action Plan. As part of our efforts to build constructive relations with the press, we have met with editors from the Anchorage Daily News, the Washington Post, the Seattle Post-Intelligencer and Seattle Times and with reporters from Anchorage Daily News, Juneau Empire, UPI, AP in New Orleans, Gannet, the LA Times, and several other papers. MCA has been featured in stories broadcast on NPR and the Alaska Public Radio Network, and we are now linked to Laine Welch's Fish Radio out of Kodiak through our website. It remains a high priority for MCA to continue cultivating relationships with national and local media.

MCA is continuing to work with BLJ on the short-tailed albatross issue: a positive story about the fishing industry taking the lead to conserve an endangered species but so far the media have been slow to respond. MCA is going to continue to work on this issue with longline groups to get coverage. It's a great story, and has implications for other efforts by industry to address conservation issues proactively. We want the American public to know that the Alaska seafood industry is a good corporate neighbor.

Additionally, MCA has developed a media packet including several handouts which are available on our website and will be updated as necessary. We also have a professional display for conferences and tradeshows which was premiered at Kodiak's ComFish earlier this year. You will be able to see it in September when MCA will sponsor a session on North Pacific fisheries at the annual meeting of the American Fisheries Society in Anchorage and at Fish Expo in Seattle in November.

Clean-Up Targets Marine Debris on St. Paul Island

MCA also has a companion organization, the MCA Foundation, that is working on developing a cooperative science program to help industry solve important fishery management problems, and a public education program about fisheries and the marine environment. One of our chief programs is our marine debris clean-up effort. MCAF hired Ron Clarke to be the Project Coordinator for the marine debris clean-up program.

The Pribilof Islands have long been a magnet for anything adrift on the Bering Sea, but the local beaches are a little cleaner thanks to the work of the MCA Foundation and the Aleut Community of St. Paul Island Tribal Government Ecosystem Conservation Office.

"Tribal ECO's coordinators told me that their clean-up workers in June removed 31 pick-up truck loads of marine debris, enough to fill the one container van available and they



31 truckloads of old nets, floats, line and pallets were cleared off St. Paul beaches in June in a program coordinated by the MCA Foundation

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Habitat

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process is responsive to scientific recommendations and public concern, and that industry has an important role in helping design practical solutions to address these concerns.

In addition to the trawl closures, the North Pacific Council also formally adopted areas of essential fish habitat, identified habitat areas of special concern, and instituted programs for future research and monitoring.

The agency determined that fishery impacts to habitat in the Bering Sea were minimal and did not require mitigation. Nonetheless, NPFMC deferred action on Bering Sea EFH mitigation to consider proactive measures in the future. MCA has formed a subcommittee of interested Bering Sea participants to focus on this issue as it proceeds through the council process.



Photo by Ken Krieger, AFSC

MCA Takes Lead on Right Whales

Following a recent court order that the government either designate a swath of the Bering Sea as critical habitat for the endangered northern right whale - or explain why it shouldn't take that step - the Marine Conservation Alliance is taking the lead to ensure that actions taken are not detrimental to an industry with no record of conflict with the marine mammal.

"There have been no reports of fishing vessel strikes of right whales in the Bering Sea, nor any reports of entanglements in crab lines," noted MCA's Dave Benton. "Our industry has repeatedly stepped up to the plate to support conservation when there was clear scientific evidence of need. We want to ensure that any actions to protect right whales are scientifically valid and do not unduly affect an industry that is not impacting their populations."

The June order came in a long running dispute over how to protect the world's most endangered large whale. Once believed to number more than 10,000,

the slow-swimming right whales were hunted nearly to extinction in the 1800s. Even after they received international protection in 1931, their population numbers never rebounded and are now believed to number just a few hundred animals. A few right whales, perhaps as many as twenty five including a calf, have been sighted in the Bering Sea in recent years, with most reports confined to a small area east of the Pribilofs and between Cape Newenham and Port Moller.

The Center for Biological Diversity (CBD) petitioned the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) to protect a portion of the whales' range by designating it critical habitat. The agency responded that it didn't have enough information about the whale's migration to know what areas were most important to their survival. MCA provided detailed comments supporting the NMFS' determination that there wasn't enough data to support designation of critical habitat.

The CBD then took the issue to court, and on June 14, a federal judge in San Francisco ruled in their favor and gave NMFS until October to publish a proposed rule to either designate a swath or explain why one was not necessary. The judge also required that the final rule be published by June 30, 2006.

MCA recently formed an industry committee that will continue to work this issue as NMFS responds to the court order. In the meantime, Bering Sea skippers are encouraged to take steps to avoid any conflicts with right whales and report any sightings to help better identify their range. Right whales are large, rotund, black, baleen-feeders with large heads, long rostrums, and no dorsal fins. They can grow up to 53 feet long and are distinguished by the callosities or callused bumps on their heads.

Supporting Science-Driven Decision-Making

In an effort to support good science, MCA has funded and participated in several science symposiums and panels designed to grapple with the most complex conservation issues we face today. Some of these include several panels designed to better understand ecosystem-based fishery management and effective Steller sea lion protection measures including panels at UW School of Fisheries, AAAS annual meeting in DC, and the AFS annual meeting in Anchorage this September. MCA is also working with the PSMC to assemble a distinguished panel that will recommend ways in which the role of science might better be integrated into the fishery management process. Additionally, Dave Benton was appointed to the North Pacific Council's Ecosystem Committee which will make recommendations on how to best incorporate and coordinate efforts to protect the marine environment for sustained use by multiple users.

Clean-Up ...

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probably could have filled three more," said MCAF coordinator Ron Clarke.

The debris included tons of old nets, synthetic line and plastic floats. Workers pulled four truckloads of wooden pallets off the beaches. Plastic soda and water bottles are quickly becoming the newest and most common form of flotsam found on area beaches.

The annual marine debris clean up program involved considerable work by MCAF to secure National Environmental Policy Act clearance and Alaska Coastal Management Plan approvals. In the end, the project left the island a little cleaner and safer for the hundreds of thousands of northern fur seals and millions of seabirds that return every summer.

MCAF has also contacted numerous state and federal agencies as well as about a dozen coastal communities to see about additional projects elsewhere in Alaska. We hope to mount two or three more projects before the winter closes in.

Scientific and Legal Experts Hired on Key Issues

Seeking the best information and representation on key issues facing the industry, the MCA has hired a biologist to work on marine mammal issues and two Washington DC-based attorneys to work on issues related to the Marine Mammals Protection Act (MMPA) and Endangered Species Act (ESA).

Former congressional staffer George Mannina is focusing on MMPA reauthorization and has already also provided comments on the MMPA's List of Fisheries after NOAA proposed changing several trawl, longline, and some pot fisheries in the Bering Sea and Gulf of Alaska to more restrictive categories. MCA also hired a noted scientist to review the basic science behind the NOAA proposal and provide technical help in developing these comments. NOAA is preparing additional analysis and an Environmental Assessment on the proposed listings, and MCA is prepared to address these proposals further when the documents are released.

Eldon Greenberg, meanwhile, developed recommendations for MCA on dealing with Stellar sea lion/ESA issues related to the Board of Fisheries' proposals to open state waters inside critical habitat. He has also outlined potential strategies for addressing the right whale and seabird issues. In addition, Eldon has assisted MCA in developing recommendations on a number of other issues including how to resolve the conflicts between NEPA and the Magnuson Stevens Act.

CALENDAR 2005

July 6	US House, Resources Committee, Fisheries & Oceans Subcommittee: Field Hearing Ketchikan at 1100. State of Alaska MSA Reauthorization Stakeholder Input Meeting, 9-1030AM. Both meeting at Ted Ferry Civic Center.	August 29-30	NPFMC/BOF State Water Pollock/SSL, Anchorage
July 8	US house, Resources Committee, Fisheries & Oceans Subcommittee: Field Hearing Kodiak. State of Alaska MSA Reauthorization Stakeholder Input Meeting, time TBD, before or after Field hearing, location TBD.	September 11-15	American Fisheries Society 135th Annual Meeting, Anchorage. http://wdafs.org/Anchorage2005/
July 12-14	NOAA Science Advisory Board, Seattle, WA www.sab.noaa.gov/Meetings/meetings.html	September 12-14	22nd Lowell Wakefield Fisheries Symposium, Biology, Assessment, and Management of North Pacific Rockfishes, Anchorage. www.uaf.edu/seagrant/Conferences/symposia.html#rockfish
July 14	NPFMC/BOF State Water Pollock/SSL, Anchorage. www.fakr.noaa.gov/npfmc/Cmteemtg.htm	September 14-16	Pribilof Island Collaborative meeting on halibut and crab and the economic stability and development of the Pribilof Islands, Anchorage.
August 1	Comments due: Amendment 79 to the FMP for BSAI. www.fakr.noaa.gov/prules/70fr32287.pdf	September 19-21	BSAI/GOA Groundfish Plan Team Meeting. www.fakr.noaa.gov/npfmc/membership/plan_teams/plan_teams.htm Agenda. www.fakr.noaa.gov/npfmc/membership/plan_teams/905Agenda.pdf
August 8-9	NOAA Science Advisory Board, Seattle. www.sab.noaa.gov/Meetings/meetings.html	September 20-21	NPRB. Advisory Panel. www.nprb.org/meetings/index.htm
August 17-20	Aleutian Life Forum. Unalaska, AK. A look back at the Selendang Ayu Oil Spill. www.aleutianlifeforum.org/	September 22-23	NPRB. www.nprb.org/meetings/index.htm
August 21-24	Pacific States Marine Fishery Commission, Girdwood, AK. www.psmfc.org/meetings/future_ann_mtg_dates.pdf	September 27-29	American Association for the Advancement of Science: Arctic Division. Kodiak. Great science for people of the North! Scheduled: Seafood Products in 2015, Regime Shifts, Aquaculture, Post Processing Trends, Volcanoes & Tsunamis. Contact Dr. Scott Smiley, Director, Fisheries Industrial Technology
August 22	Comments due on National Standard One Guidelines. Proposed Guidelines. www.regulations.gov/fredpdfs/05-11978.pdf		
August 22-23	NPRB Science panel. www.nprb.org/meetings/index.htm		



Marine Conservation Alliance

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The MCA is an Alaska non-profit organization formed by conservation minded Alaska and North Pacific coastal residents, communities, fishermen, vessel owners and crew, seafood processors, fishing organizations, CDQ groups, support industries, consumers, and others who are directly and indirectly involved in the North Pacific groundfish fisheries.

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