

alternatives for conducting and funding fisheries and ecosystem research activities as the primary Federal action. Additionally, in the Draft SPEA, NMFS evaluates a related action—also called a “connected action” under 40 CFR 1508.25 of the Council on Environmental Quality’s regulations for implementing the procedural provisions of NEPA (42 U.S.C. 4321 *et seq.*)—which is the proposed promulgation of regulations and authorization of the take of marine mammal incidental to the fisheries research under the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA). Additionally, because the proposed research activities occur in areas inhabited by species of marine mammals, birds, sea turtles and fish listed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) as threatened or endangered, this Draft SPEA evaluates activities that could result in unintentional takes of ESA-listed marine species.

The following two alternatives are currently evaluated in the Draft SPEA:

- Alternative 1—Continue current fisheries and ecosystem research (Status Quo/no action) as described in the 2019 AFSC PEA.
- Alternative 2—Conduct current research with some modifications as well as new research activities that are planned for the future (*i.e.*, 2024–2029). New future research proposed under Alternative 2 was not previously analyzed in the 2019 PEA.

The alternatives include a program of fisheries and ecosystem research projects conducted or funded by the AFSC as the primary Federal action. Because this primary action is connected to a secondary Federal action, to consider authorizing incidental take of marine mammals under the MMPA, NMFS must identify as part of this evaluation “(t)he means of effecting the least practicable adverse impact on the species or stock and its habitat.” (section 101(a)(5)(A) of the MMPA [16 U.S.C. 1361 *et seq.*]) NMFS must therefore identify and evaluate a reasonable range of mitigation measures to minimize impacts to protected species that occur in AFSC research areas. These mitigation measures are considered as part of the identified alternatives in order to evaluate their effectiveness to minimize potential adverse environmental impacts. The two action alternatives also include mitigation measures intended to minimize potentially adverse interaction with other protected species that occur within the action area. Protected species include all marine mammals, which are covered under the MMPA, all species listed under the

ESA, and bird species protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act.

Potential direct and indirect effects on the environment are evaluated under each alternative in the Draft SPEA. The environmental effects on the following resources are considered: physical environment, special resource areas, fish, marine mammals, birds, sea turtles, invertebrates, and the social and economic environment. Cumulative effects of external actions and the contribution of fisheries research activities to the overall cumulative impact on the aforementioned resources is also evaluated in the Draft SPEA for the geographic regions in which AFSC surveys are conducted.

NMFS requests comments on the Draft SPEA for Fisheries Research Conducted and Funded by the National Marine Fisheries Service, Alaska Fisheries Science Center. Please include, with your comments, any supporting data or literature citations that may be informative in substantiating your comment.

Dated: March 29, 2024.

Robert Foy,

Science and Research Director, Alaska Fisheries Science Center, National Marine Fisheries Service.

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

[RTID 0648–XD884]

North Pacific Fishery Management Council; Public Meeting

AGENCY: National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Commerce.

ACTION: Notice of public meeting.

SUMMARY: The Center of Independent Experts (CIE) review of the Gulf of Alaska walleye pollock stock assessment will be held in May, in Seattle, WA.

DATES: The meeting will be held on Tuesday, May 7, 2024 through Thursday, May 9, 2024, from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., Pacific Time.

ADDRESSES:

Meeting address: The meeting will be in-person only and will be held in Room 2079 on Tuesday, May 7, 2024 and in Room 2143 on May 8–9, 2024, at the Alaska Fishery Science Center, Sand Point Way NE, Building 4, Seattle, WA 98115.

If you plan to attend, you need to notify Cole Monnahan (cole.monnahan@noaa.gov) at least 2 days prior to the meeting (or 2 weeks prior if you are a foreign national). You will also need a valid U.S. Identification Card.

Council address: North Pacific Fishery Management Council, 1007 W 3rd Ave., Anchorage, AK 99501–2252; telephone: (907) 271–2809.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Cole Monnahan, Alaska Fishery Science Center staff; phone: (206) 526–4224; email: cole.monnahan@noaa.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Agenda

Tuesday, May 7, 2024 Through Thursday, May 9, 2024

The CIE will review the Gulf of Alaska walleye pollock stock assessment input data and model. The agenda is subject to change, and the latest version will be posted at https://apps-afsc.fisheries.noaa.gov/Plan_Team/2024_GOA_pollock_cie/ prior to the meeting, along with meeting materials.

Authority: 16 U.S.C. 1801 *et seq.*

Dated: April 16, 2024.

Key Israel Marquez,

Acting Deputy Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries, National Marine Fisheries Service.

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

[RTID 0648–XD882]

Atlantic Highly Migratory Species; Meeting of the Atlantic Highly Migratory Species Advisory Panel

AGENCY: National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Commerce.

ACTION: Notice of public meeting and webinar/conference call.

SUMMARY: NMFS will hold a 3-day Atlantic Highly Migratory Species (HMS) Advisory Panel (AP) meeting in May 2024. The intent of the meeting is to consider options for the conservation and management of Atlantic HMS. The meeting is open to the public.

DATES: The AP meeting and webinar will be held on Tuesday, May 14, from 9:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. ET; Wednesday, May 15, from 9:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. ET; and Thursday, May 16, from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. ET.