



**North Pacific Research Board
Spring 2023 Meeting Summary
April 25-26, 2023**

The North Pacific Research Board met in the conference room, April 25-26, 2023 in Anchorage, AK. The meeting was attended by Board members: Ragnar Alstrom, Matt Alward, Forrest Bowers, Katrina Hoffman, Tyler Janowski, Kristie Balovich, Andy Mezirow, Tara Riemer, Cheryl Rosa, Annika Saltman, Emily Shroyer, Brad Smith, Connor Sullivan, Dee Williams, and Krystyna Wolniakowski. Bradley Moran (Board nominee) attended as an observer. Board members Shannon Carroll and Becca Robbins Gisclair were excused. Becca Robbins Gisclair joined the meeting remotely on April 26. Rex Rock was absent. The Science Panel Chair, Brad Harris, and Advisory Panel Chair, Caitlin Yeager, were present. Attending staff: Matthew Baker, Danielle Dickson, Lily Frey, Jo-Ann Mellish, Lynn Palensky (Executive Director), Brendan Smith and Kayla Wagenfehr (April 25 only).

Call to Order/Approve Agenda

Chair Andy Mezirow called the meeting to order at 9:02 am after determining a quorum was present. Lynn Palensky, Executive Director, welcomed everyone and initiated a round of introductions. After a logistics and safety briefing from Administrative Assistant, Lily Frey, Lynn Palensky walked through the two-day agenda, highlighting decision points.

Board leadership (Chair and Vice Chair) seats were nominated and elected as required at the first regular Board meeting each year.

MOTION: Elect Andy Mezirow Chair for 2023.

Action: Motion passed with no objections.

MOTION: Elect Matt Alward Vice Chair for 2023.

Action: Motion passed with no objections.

MOTION: Approve the spring 2023 meeting agenda.

Action: Motion passed with no objections.

MOTION: Approve the fall 2022 meeting summary.

Action: Motion passed with no objections.

Science Panel Chair Brad Harris provided a summary of the spring 2023 Science Panel (SP) meeting. Several new members joined the SP, and all contributed positively. The SP enjoyed meeting again in Seattle again for the first time since the COVID pandemic began in spring 2020.

Advisory Panel Chair Caitlin Yeager shared a summary of the spring 2023 Advisory Panel (AP) meeting. She noted that three AP members' terms expired at the end of the spring meeting and new members will need to be oriented ahead of fall 2023 meeting.

Executive Director's Report

Executive Director (ED) Palensky provided a report that included personnel updates; announcements soliciting nominations for the AP; follow up to the Board's training by the First Alaskans Institute; addressing the NPRB administrative cap; an update on the recently signed MOU for the North Pacific Marine Research Institute (NPMRI); and plans for an upcoming visit to Washington, D.C. The ED highlighted major accomplishments by staff since the fall board meeting.

A Board member recommended that NPRB consider meeting with the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) and National Environmental Education Foundation (EPA) while in Washington, D.C. because they might represent potential partners for the IERP.

Richard Taylor provided an update from the Office of Natural Resources Revenue (ONRR). ONRR is responsible for investing the funds of the Environmental Improvement and Restoration Fund (EIRF). The Board for the EIRF includes Robert Winter (Program Manager), Ruth Welch, and Howard Cantor. In FY 2000, the value of the EIRF was \$896.6 M and the current principal is \$1.59 billion as of December 2022. The current strategy of the EIRF Board is to invest in shorter-term notes to maximize returns as interest rates rise.

Staff explained that the legislation that created the NPRB limits spending on administration to 15% of each grant and administrative expenses exceed this amount now that sustained low interest rates have caused NPRB's funding to decline. The Executive Committee has advised staff to speak with the Alaska Delegation about the possibility of legislative action to increase or remove the administrative cap. A Board member suggested NPRB approach the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to explore a change in the cap (like DOI would request a facilities adjustment) to avoid opening the legislation.

The Chair pointed out that the time may be right to address the legislation with the Alaska Delegation. Matt Robinson, former NPRB Board member, is the fisheries staffer for Senator Murkowski and he has a good relationship with Eric Elam on Senator Sullivan's staff. Representative Peltola is also supportive of Alaska fisheries issues.

Emily Shroyer suggested NPRB consider applying for a grant to address the administration shortfall.

The NPRB audit is not yet complete. KPMG is wrestling with NPRB's identity again as the format of the audit document has changed. There have been no findings during the audit.

Staff reminded the Board of the "seamount" strategy for allocating funds to the various research programs that NPRB supports. Staff showed a graph illustrating the timeline for the allocation of funds to each program.

Science Director's Report

Matt Baker provided a Science Director's report that focused largely on a summary of the 2023 Alaska Marine Science Symposium (AMSS), the 30-year anniversary of the event. The event was held in person for the first time since the COVID pandemic began in 2020, and the event was well-attended. Dr. Clarence Pautzke, former NPRB Executive Director, gave a keynote presentation on "Perspectives on a 30-Year Career in Alaska Marine Science and Fisheries Management". Other highlights of the symposium and additional metrics were presented. The report also highlighted research priorities and marine science issues, including the collapse of Bering Sea crab and Yukon-Kuskokwim salmon, shifts in the

northern Bering Sea, and efforts to better integrate IK/LTK in management processes. A Board member asked if NPRB has metrics identifying who AMSS registrants are and where they come from.

Core Program

Jo-Ann Mellish presented metrics on the submission of proposals under the rolling submissions process. She reminded the Board of the funding targets published in the 2023 RFP and noted that the focus of the meeting time would be the funding decisions on the eight proposals under consideration for the first installment of the 2023 RFP.

The Board considered the eight proposals ranked Tier E (1), Tier 1 (2), and Tier 2 (5) by the Science Panel (SP). Four of these proposals were awarded stars by the AP. The Board heard summaries of all Tier E, Tier 1 and Tier 2 proposals. Tier 3 proposals are not eligible for funding.

MOTION: Fund proposals ranked Tier E and Tier 1 (proposals 2113, 2125, and 2129).

Action: [Motion replaced by the one below that includes the proposals added by amendment.]

AMENDMENT: Add 2122.

Action: The amendment passed with no objections.

AMENDMENT: Add 2118.

Action: The amendment passed with no objections.

MOTION: Fund proposals 2113, 2118, 2125, 2129, and 2122.

Action: The amendment passed with no objections.

The Board did not hold any eligible proposals over until the fall meeting.

Staff presented the history of the Focus Section in the Core RFP in preparation for the upcoming fall release. The Focus Section had not been included during COVID and instead the Flex Grants were initiated. Staff also recommended that the Flex Grants be transitioned to a permanent category rather than a temporary replacement for the Focus Section. The Board agreed that the Focus Section has not successfully attracted strong proposals and because proposals on a given topic could be welcomed under the other categories of the RFP as a topic of particular interest, the Focus Section is not necessarily warranted.

The Board directed staff to not to develop a focus section for the Core Program RFP and to include the flex grants as a regular category in the RFP until further notice.

Staff explained that to facilitate the launch of the new IERP as directed by the Seamount funding plan, there would be some changes to the Core RFP process in the upcoming RFP years. The 2025 RFP (released in October 2024) will have a deadline of February 2025 for all categories except Flex Grants. Decisions will be made by September 2025. The 2026 RFP (released in October 2025) will accept Flex Grants only. The 2027 RFP (released in October 2026) will return to including the main research categories and will incorporate any changes the Board wishes to implement. The timeline and details will be published in the upcoming RFPs, be detailed on the NPRB website, and be included in the

proposal submission system to allow PIs to have extended notice and to plan accordingly. This will also allow Core Program funding to better align with NOAA grant timelines.

Communication & Outreach

Brendan Smith presented a summary of the funding allocated to outreach for Core Program projects and described the process for the submission and review of outreach proposals. The Board considered three outreach proposals. The SP and AP Chairs shared comments from their respective Panels in support of the proposals.

One board member suggested NPRB reach out to the Bellingham Northwest Tribal College to make them aware of the opportunity for funding via NPRB. Another member wondered if NPRB works with ANSEP to create internship opportunities, for example.

MOTION: Fund all three outreach proposals.

Action: The motion passed with no objections.

It is encouraging to see strong outreach proposals now coming to NPRB for consideration.

The Board supported changes to the outreach RFP proposed by staff and endorsed by the Panels. The outreach RFP will include a single deadline each year in February, allowing the applicants more time to prepare their proposals, and the Panels and Board will consider all outreach proposals at once. The RFP total target will be increased to \$140,000 from \$130,000. The resubmission period will be shortened to six months. The minimum requirement will be removed from the RFP language. Staff explained that the Board has the option to change the timeline to review outreach proposals in the fall instead of the spring. The Board did not recommend any changes to the RFP language.

MOTION: Approve the 2023 Outreach RFP as drafted.

Action: The motion passed with no objections.

Krystyna asked for the rationale for the deadline in February as opposed to a deadline that would align the Board decision with the fall meeting.

The ED suggested the outreach review process include a small pool of peer reviewers that NPRB could use on a regular basis to add to the Communications and Outreach Director (COD) reviews. This would more closely mirror the review process of the other programs and still allow peer review in the rare case where there may be a perception of a conflict of interest with an applicant. The Board directed staff to pursue the establishment of a peer reviewer pool for outreach proposals and consider implementing the new process for the 2024 Outreach RFP.

A summary of current outreach initiatives was provided. The NPRB website was recently optimized for use on mobile devices and in locations with low bandwidth. The Core Program project search tool on the website was also updated. NPRB staff are negotiating an MOU with the Anchorage Museum to develop an Arctic marine science exhibit that would be on display beginning in fall 2025. Staff are also working with a Core Program project to pilot the use of virtual reality headsets for the museum exhibit and also modules of the exhibit that could travel to remote communities.

Since the fall meeting, NPRB completed the production of five films about the Arctic IERP, and the films have been featured at numerous events, including the Alaska Marine Science Symposium, Alaska Eskimo

Whaling Commission, North Pacific Fishery Management Council, Indigenous People's Council for Marine Mammals, Alaska Forum on the Environment, Ice Seal Committee, and Alaska Tribal Conference on Environmental Management. The 2021-2022 Biennial Report marked the 20th anniversary of the organization. The 2023 calendar was a best-of compilation, and the mechanism for producing the calendar in future years will be discussed at the fall meeting.

One board member suggested that Brendan Smith could give a presentation at a venue like the National Science Teachers Association (NSTA).

Graduate Student Research Awards

Jo-Ann Mellish, the Senior Program Manager, presented a brief review of the 2023 GSRA applicants (total 29, 12 master's and 17 Doctoral level) and the evaluation process for the meeting.

The Board considered the ten applications highlighted by the SP that included five at the master's level (2136, 2144, 2152, 2158, 2162) and five at the Doctoral level (2138, 2143, 2153, 2154, 2157). Six of these proposals were also starred by the AP (2136, 2152, 2143, 2153, 2154, 2157). Board members also asked to hear summaries of proposals 2163 and 2159.

MOTION: Fund GSRA proposals 2136, 2152, 2143, 2153, 2154, 2157.

Action: The motion passed with no objections.

AMENDMENT: Add proposals 2144, 2138, and 2159.

Action: The amendment passed with no objections.

The Board noted an interest in hearing presentations from GSRA awardees during future meetings.

Governance

The ED explained that the revised MOU for the North Pacific Marine Research Institute (NPMRI or Institute) was signed in November 2022. The Institute allows for the acceptance of funds that originate from sources other than the EIRF. The MOU clarifies the roles of the three signatories and omits the requirement that awards be approved by the Secretary of Commerce so long as the funded work furthers our mission.

The SOPPs include outdated language that needs to be updated. The SOPPs also need to include language about how the Board will deal with unexcused absences. The ED proposed developing draft revised language for the SOPPs that the Board will review in the fall. The Board directed staff to do so. The ED requested renewal of the micro-purchase policy.

MOTION: Readopt the micro-purchase policy

Action: The motion passed with no objections.

The Board discussed that one of the main points made at the training the Board received from the First Alaskans Institute in fall 2022, was increasing the involvement of Alaskan Natives in NPRB decision making. The Chair suggested the Board direct staff to discuss possible amendment to the legislation to create an additional tribal government seat (in addition to the existing Alaska seat representing Native Interests) on the Board that would be filled in a process like the Fishing Industry representative. That is, nominations come to the Board for decision on top candidates to consider and appoint by the Board. The typical NPRB process relies on the Governor of the State of Alaska to identify the individual and

NPRB feels a different mechanism that allows the Board to vet candidates who have demonstrated support from tribes. One member asked if it would be possible to redesignate an existing seat to avoid changing the composition of the Board and amending the legislation, but that would still require amending the legislation.

Another question was related to the Special Fishing Industry seat. The Board would like to have the possibility of a second term for the individual in the fishing industry seat. The one-term limit was specified by the Dept. of Commerce and not in the enabling legislation. A change might be able to be addressed via NOAA instead of opening the legislation to amendment.

The Chair suggested that staff seek input from the Delegation during their upcoming visit to D.C. about a range of items, including options for increasing or eliminating the administrative cap in the NPRB budget, and the possibility of requesting an earmark to fill the administrative gap. There is precedence from NPRB's early years for receiving an earmark. An earmark could also help to fill the gap in the administrative budget (temporarily) until the increase in interest rates results in a budget increase via the EIRF. Board members expressed support for staff discussing these issues with the Delegation and suggested a written statement is necessary to justify the ask. Staff are preparing such a document.

MOTION: Staff should discuss the possible addition of an Alaska tribal government seat on the Board with the Alaska congressional delegation.

Action: The motion passed with no objections.

One member noted that such request is consistent with current directives from the White House.

The ED summarized the current NPRB working groups and their membership and invited Board members to volunteer for service. Caitlin Yeager will replace Ruth Christiansen as the AP Chair on some working groups. Staff asked for authorization to continue to include Mike Miller (former Board member with nine years of service to NPRB) in the Human Dimensions working group.

MOTION: Approve the continued service of Mike Miller to the Human Dimensions working group until such time as he wishes to step down.

Action: The motion passed with no objections

Integrated Ecosystem Research Program

Danielle Dickson and Matt Baker provided an update on the progress of the two Arctic IERP Synthesis projects. The project "Seas the change: A Sea-scale effort to assess sensitivity to change in nutrients and ecosystems within the Pacific Arctic" hosted a workshop in association with the Alaska Marine Science Symposium in January 2023 to share information about the project and welcome collaboration. The project "Pelagic-benthic decoupling? Ecosystem restructuring in the Northern Bering and Chukchi Seas" hosted a workshop in mid-April where the PIs worked to connect the work being done under separate modules of the project and worked towards developing conceptual models. Danielle Dickson participated in each workshop. NPRB staff have established a plan for virtual coordination meetings with the PIs of both synthesis projects three times per year and speak regularly with the Lead PIs individually.

The second Arctic IERP Special Issue has concluded and was published in January 2023; the 25 manuscripts in this issue are now available online and archived on the NPRB website [here](#). A third Special Issue is anticipated to be launched in January 2024 to support the Arctic Synthesis Program.

NPRB also funded a proposal entitled “Diversity and hybridization of whitefish in Beringia and implications for resilience of subsistence-harvested species.” The project is making steady progress. Interviews with state biologists are complete and interviews with subsistence fishers are ongoing.

An extensive background on the status of the development of the new northern Bering Sea IERP was presented in advance of discussion by the Board.

Discussion and Input for Planning the Northern Bering Sea IERP

Staff presented:

- (1) a summary of efforts to gather input to inform the NBS IERP;
- (2) an outline of research priorities solicited from various partners and forums related to the NBS;
- (3) an approach to facilitate full proposal development with Indigenous partners;
- (4) a draft timeline for the development of the NBS IERP; and
- (5) an outline of broad research categories under which pre-proposals would be solicited in an RFP.

MOTION: Task staff with examining the timeline to see if efficiencies can be found to get ships in the water in 2026 given the risk-benefit analysis of community urgency and shifting baseline.

Action: Motion passed with no objections.

Amendment: Delegate decision making to the Ex Comm once the staff has completed the timeline review.

Action: Motion passed with no objections.

MOTION: Direct Staff to create a pre-proposal RFP for the NBS IERP.

Action: Motion passed with no objections.

MOTION: The Board endorses the idea of \$10,000 additional funding to proposals invited to submit full proposals.

Action: Motion passed with no objections.

The Board authorized staff to begin communicating publicly about the anticipated timeline for the release of the pre-proposal RFP, the research categories under which pre-proposals will be solicited, the anticipated amount of total funding available, and the proposal caps. Staff may also communicate about the Board’s intent to make funds available at the full proposal stage to develop full proposals with the involvement of Indigenous Co-Investigators.

Partnerships

Matthew Baker provided an overview of how NPRB approaches partnerships and identified current partners with active MOUs, including the Oil Spill Recovery Institute (OSRI), Bering Sea Fisheries Research Foundation (BSFRF), and Pollock Conservation Cooperative Research Center (PCCRC). PCCRC, OSRI, and BSFRF reviewed the current proposal pool for the Core Program but did not identify any appropriate proposals for co-funding. Staff also highlighted NPRB work with the Indigenous Sentinels Network, the International Year of the Salmon (IYOS) initiative, and contributions to the development of the science plan for the Basin Events to Coastal Impacts (BECI) initiative funded as a contribution to the UN Decade on Ocean Science.

Board member comments:

- The State of Alaska has talked about how crab disaster dollars could be issued through the NPRB to leverage the rigorous review process of the NPRB. The NPMRI might offer a mechanism for accomplishing that.
- The Gravel to Gravel initiative led by USFWS that involves DOI agencies might be a good partnership.
- The Bering Sea Task Force Tribal Advisory Council Chaired by NOAA, DOI, and USCG would be a good point of contact for the IERP and they are meeting regularly now. The NOAA, DOI, and USCG Board members would be well-positioned to introduce NPRB staff to the task force to suggest a conversation.
- Is BECI a potential grantee or a partner for NPRB? NPRB staff have been providing in-kind support and it is useful for NPRB to be aware of what others are planning that could be relevant to or leveraged by NPRB. There are synergies with projects that have evolved as an outgrowth of the Gulf of Alaska IERP like the GOACLIM modeling project funded under the Core Program.

Nominations

Matt Baker reminded the Board of recent efforts to solicit AP members and presented candidates for the Board's consideration. Recent solicitations included expectations for active participation, reference to the NPRB conflict of interest policy, required attributes, and selection criteria.

MOTION: Reappoint Gary Freitag to the AP in a Gulf of Alaska seat.

Action: Motion passed with no objections

MOTION: Appoint Martin Edwardsen to the AP in an Arctic seat; appoint Cory Lescher to the AP in a Bering Sea seat; and appoint Charlotte Levy to the AP in a Gulf of Alaska seat.

Action: Motion passed with no objections.

The Board directed staff to solicit nominations for the AP for a Gulf of Alaska and an at-large seat.

Other Matters

The fall meeting will be September 18-22, 2023, in Anchorage.

The spring 2024 meeting will be April 22-26, 2024, in Anchorage.

MOTION: Schedule the fall Board meeting for the week of September 18, 2023 and the spring meeting the week of April 22, 2024. Plan for three days Tuesday-Thursday.

Long-Term Monitoring

Staff reminded the board that at the Fall 2022 meeting, staff were directed to prepare options for the next cycle of the Long-Term Monitoring Program to allow for new proposals for an additional project. The Board requested that staff present these options during the Fall 2023 meeting. Given the other tasking assigned to staff with respect to the IERP, the Board was asked if this remains a priority for the Fall 2023 meeting. The Board agreed that it may not be feasible to address both the LTM and IERP at the Fall meeting and agreed that the IERP should take priority.

The meeting adjourned at 4:19 pm.