



**North Pacific Research Board
Spring 2024 Meeting Summary
April 23 – 24, 2024**

The North Pacific Research Board met April 23-24, 2024 in Anchorage, AK. The meeting was attended by Board members: Ragnar Alstrom (virtual), Matt Alward (Vice Chair), Forrest Bowers, Becca Gisclair, Katrina Hoffman, Andy Mezirow (Chair), Brad Moran, Jamal Moss, Cheryl Rosa (virtual, alternate for David Kennedy), Annika Saltman (virtual), Emily Shroyer, Brad Smith, Reid Wiegles, Dee Williams (virtual), Krystyna Wolniakowski, and Wei Ying Wong. Nicole Kimball attended as an observer. 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), and Brendan Smith.

Call to Order/Approve Agenda

Chair Andy Mezirow called the meeting to order at 9:01 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 Lily Frey, Administrative Assistant, 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: Nominate Andy Mezirow as Board Chair and Matt Alward as Vice Chair.

Action: Motion passed with no objections.

MOTION: Approve the agenda for the Spring 2024 meeting.

Action: Motion passed with no objections.

MOTION: Approve the minutes of the Fall 2023 meeting.

Action: Motion passed with no objections.

Science Panel Chair Brad Harris summarized the spring 2024 Science Panel (SP) meeting, noting that fourteen members were present and five were excused. Four SP members' terms are expiring ahead of the fall meeting and the SP looks forward to the outcome of the nominations process.

Advisory Panel Chair Caitlin Yeager noted that the spring Advisory Panel (AP) meeting was lightly attended, and she looks forward to welcoming two new members following the nominations process.

Executive Director Report

Lynn Palensky, Executive Director, provided the report to the Board.

Executive Committee (EC) Actions Since the Fall 2023 Meeting

- The EC directed staff to enter into an agreement with the Alaska Department of Fish & Game to provide review services for the Crab Disaster Funding Program.

- The EC approved the revised NPRB Employee Manual with an effective date of April 1, 2024.
- The EC approved the \$50,000 micro-purchase threshold as part of the annual certification process.
- The EC members are taking actions to fill the open board seats.

Departures

- Chair Andy Mezirow's term on the Board ends in August 2024.
- Tara Riemer's resigned from the Board in March 2024.
- Kayla Wagenfehr accepted other employment and left the NPRB in March 2024.

Recent Accomplishments

- The Northern Bering Sea Integrated Ecosystem Research Program (NBS IERP) Pre-proposal RFP was released in October 2023.
- The North Pacific Research Board Enhancement Act was introduced to the Senate in March 2024. This bill would provide administrative relief to NPRB, add an Alaska Native seat, and increase the Fishing Industry seat to two possible terms.
- NPRB is moving forward on planning to assist ADF&G with the review of proposals under the Crab Disaster Funding spend plans.
- An application was submitted by staff for Congressional Directed Spending to augment the NPRB funding for the NBS IERP.

Outside Engagement

Lynn summarized various engagement activities of NPRB staff since the fall meeting in forums that include the North Pacific Fishery Management Council, Pacific Arctic Group, Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission, and others. Individual conversations occurred with several potential funding partners for the NBS IERP that will be discussed in more detail later in the meeting.

Budget Report

Richard Taylor of the Office of Natural Resources Revenue (ONRR) provided an overview of the investment strategy for new Board members and an update on the NPRB budget. The investment strategy ONRR is employing now balances risk to avoid large sums of money maturing and needing to be reinvested at a lower interest rate. ONRR transfers funds in August of a given year on paper but they arrive at NOAA in November. The money is held by NOAA for one year before transferring to NPRB. NPRB and ONRR are exploring options for short-term investing during that time.

Lynn provided a graph illustrating the NPRB budget projections through 2030 (Grant 14). NPRB's funds lag ONRR projections by two years. NPRB's budget is now projected to be increasing.

Science Director Report

Dr. Matthew Baker, Science Director, provided a report highlighting efforts to support cooperative research with industry and a special issue dedicated to the topic; coordination with the Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission on salmon research; coordination on research priorities with the North Pacific Fishery Management Council; and the outcomes of the 2024 Alaska Marine Science Symposium (AMSS).

A member asked about a broader (national) advertisement of AMSS and recommended advertising to the National Science Teachers Association (NSTA). They also suggested a national-level popular science advertisement of NPRB-funded research would be beneficial. Staff noted a preference for letting each science project communicate the impacts of their own research, with support from NPRB as desired.

A member asked about metrics to directly correlate how NPRB research dollars result in products related to addressing research priorities relevant to pressing fishery management questions. They noted it is important for the Board to consider the time lag between funding research, project completion, and resulting applicable products. They stated the importance of looking into the future and funding research that addresses the broader scale environmental drivers that are likely to be relevant to multiple fisheries. The SP Chair explained that the SP review process does consider this when developing requests for proposals and reviewing proposals.

A member asked the SP Chair if the Panel considers the geopolitical landscape and how it may influence research. The SP Chair explained that the SP's role is to consider the merits of science and the Board's role is to consider the broader landscape unless the SP is further directed by the Board.

A member asked how the Council's timing to address research priorities this April affects how NPRB solicits research priorities in June. Staff explained that NPRB communicates with NPFMC staff, receives input from the broader community, and has other avenues for gathering information about opportunities to contribute to addressing research needs.

A member appreciated that NPRB is taking a forward-thinking approach to funding science and asked how NPRB can think about reacting to ecosystem change to determine the next research area to allocate funds. The SP Chair noted that individuals working with NPRB are also involved in organizations like the Council and other entities who are also working to determine future research needs.

Partnerships

The Science Director discussed the mechanisms NPRB has used to enter into partnerships with other institutions and provided an update on recent partnership conversations with other entities.

The Oil Spill Recovery Institute (OSRI) remains interested in opportunities to partner with the NPRB to support research that is relevant to their interests. NPRB shared some proposals that are competing in this round of funding under the Core Program and NPRB expects to learn in April which proposals OSRI is willing to support.

The Pollock Conservation Cooperative Research Center (PCCRC) remains potentially interested in partnering with NPRB to fund research under the Core and/or Northern Bering Sea Integrated Ecosystem Research Program (NBS IERP). PCCRC will consider supporting two proposals that the Panels and Board will consider under the Core Program during this meeting cycle.

The Bering Sea Fisheries Research Foundation (BSFRF) also remains potentially interested in partnering with NPRB to fund research under the Core and/or NBS IERP. BSFRF has a proposal in the competition in 2024 and therefore cannot contribute to Core Program proposals this year.

The Alaska Ocean Observing System (AOOS) has expressed interest in establishing an MOU with NPRB. In 2024, AOOS staff are associated with two proposals in the competition, precluding partnership for the Core Program this year.

NPRB is in the early stages of conversation with colleagues at NASA and the NOAA EcoHAB program about the potential to develop an MOU to allow partnership.

In 2021, NPRB provided \$150,000 to the Aleut Community of St. Paul Island Tribal Council to facilitate conversations in the Northern Bering Sea region about the Indigenous Sentinels Network and the potential for the network to facilitate community-based participation in the NBS IERP. The conversations are focused on data sovereignty. This contract has had two time extensions and has submitted just one interim report. NPRB expects a final report in May 2024.

NPRB Service – Review of Research in Response to Emergency Funds for Crab Recovery

NPRB has been asked to administer the review of proposals for research funded by the Alaska Department of Fish & Game using disaster relief funds for snow crab and Bristol Bay red king crab (BBRKC). The proposed timeline includes the release of a competitive RFP by ADF&G on May 1 with a deadline of October 1. Peer review would be accomplished in October-December 2024. Proposals and peer reviews would be distributed to SP members for review in early January. NPRB plans to host a one-day meeting in association with the 2025 AMSS and the SP and AP would meet simultaneously. A final report will be delivered to ADF&G by March 10, 2025. Ideally, the projects will begin in summer 2025.

A member asked if the NPRB SP will review the crab disaster proposals or if the SP will be augmented by those with crab expertise specifically. Staff explained that the peer reviewer pool will include experts with relevant expertise and the NPRB Panels will review the proposals following peer review.

A member asked if the process will be pushed forward on this timeline if there is a delay in NOAA getting funds disbursed. ADF&G will dictate the timeline for the review of proposals.

A member asked about the burden on staff. Staff responded that it is difficult to anticipate the number of proposals that will be received and that the timing is expected to be offset from the largest burden of work for Core Program proposal review, so staff expect that administration of the review process is feasible. The SP Chair expressed enthusiasm about the chance for the NPRB review process to bring rigor to the administration of disaster relief funds and the opportunity for lessons learned about capacity that could be applied if NPRB is asked to review proposals for other disasters in the future.

Core Program

Jo-Ann Mellish, Senior Program Manager for the Core Program, provided an overview of the proposal process. There were nine proposals (five Tier 1, four Tier 2) under consideration for funding by the Board at this meeting. Three proposals were ranked Tier 3 by the SP and were not considered for funding by the Board. The AP endorsed five of the nine eligible proposals.

MOTION: Fund three proposals ranked Tier 1 by the SP and endorsed by the AP (2201, 2199, and 2212) and the single Tier 2 flex grant (2209).

Action: Motion passed with no objections.

Staff reminded the Board of the adjusted timeline and process for the Core Program for the upcoming 2025, 2026 and 2027 RFPs. The 2025 RFP will be released in October on the usual schedule but there will be a hard deadline in February 2025 for all trophic-level categories, with an anticipated \$2 million available. The 2026 RFP will be open for flex grants only with \$300,000 - \$500,000 available. The 2027 RFP is anticipated to be released in October 2026 for all categories and at a \$4.5 million level.

Graduate Student Research Awards

Twenty applications for Graduate Student Research Awards (GSRA) were received this year and two were disqualified prior to panel review. The Board considered the nine applications recommended by the SP, four at the Master's level and five at the Ph.D. level. The AP endorsed three applications, two at the Master's level and one at the Ph.D. level.

A board member requested that information notated in Panel summaries be consistent between reviews.

MOTION: Fund GRSAs 2232, 2233, 2234, 2235, 2236, 2237, 2240, 2241, and 2242.

Action: Motion passed with no objections.

The GSRA Program is due for a five-year review in 2025 and NPRB will be soliciting volunteers for a committee in the fall meeting. The prior review was completed in 2019. The working group included two board members, one science panel member, one advisory panel member, and one staff member.

Communications & Outreach

Brendan Smith, Communications & Outreach Director, reminded the Board of how NPRB supports communication and outreach under its various programs and noted that the money allocated to outreach for Core Program science projects now represents approximately 4.5% of the funding awarded under the Core Program. A new group of outreach professionals was engaged to provide external reviews of outreach proposals this year.

2023 Outreach RFP: Funding Recommendations

There were ten outreach proposals under consideration for funding by the Board at this meeting. Six proposals were endorsed by the SP and five proposals were endorsed by the AP.

MOTION: Fund outreach proposals 2219, 2221, 2223, 2226, and 2227.

Action: Motion passed with no objections.

A member asked if NPRB has other sources of funds available to support the translation of products into Indigenous languages. Staff explained that NPRB does not, but this is something that can be considered when the Core Program is reviewed.

The SP Chair expressed appreciation for the addition of outreach professionals as peer reviewers for outreach proposals. The SP found the comments of peer reviewers valuable.

2024 Outreach RFP Approval

The Board reviewed and endorsed the draft 2024 Outreach RFP. The draft changes the review structure to a tier ranking analogous to the process used in other NPRB programs. The draft RFP adds

language explaining that proposals will receive external peer review by communications and outreach professionals.

There was discussion on using a tier structure for reviewing the outreach proposals. The AP Chair appreciated the suggestion for a tier structure, noting that the AP is reticent to say “no” and eliminate the possibility of resubmission. A Board member echoed appreciation for a tiered structure. Staff suggested that the outreach tier structure not include a tier 3 that would prevent proposals from advancing for consideration by other Panels or the Board. Staff will ensure the RFP articulates a process for how the tier ranking does or does not translate into opportunity to resubmit and on what timeline, to be consistent with GSRA. Staff will further develop the tier structure to present at the Fall meeting.

MOTION: Approve the 2024 outreach RFP as presented by staff.

Action: Motion passed with no objections.

One member noted that the indirect costs are high and asked if NPRB can limit it. Staff explained that NPRB cannot set an indirect rate that differs from the institution’s NICRA. Staff also noted that the use of contractual services are viable options for proposers to consider.

Other Activities

The Core Program project search tool on the NPRB website now includes a geospatial search feature.

Staff are still working with the Anchorage Museum on the Arctic IERP science exhibit. The date for the exhibit has been pushed back to 2026. A member noted that the exhibit about *Sikuliaq* needs to include recognition of the agreement the ship has with the Alaska Eskimo Whaling Commission that outlines standard operating procedures.

The NPRB photo contest will return, rebranded as “photo awards” and will be scalable to include additional media content in future years. Federal employees can participate but cannot accept a monetary award if they win.

Integrated Ecosystem Research Program

Danielle Dickson, Senior Program Manager for the Integrated Ecosystem Research Program (IERP), reported that the two Arctic IERP synthesis projects are making steady progress. The timeline for one of the projects was extended by one year to align with the other project and maximize opportunities for collaboration.

Staff reviewed the process for developing and soliciting pre-proposals for the Northern Bering Sea Integrated Ecosystem Research Program (NBS IERP) for new Board members and summarized the timeline and anticipated process for reviewing pre-proposals in the fall. The pre-proposal deadline is May 15, 2024. The pre-proposals will not receive external peer review and will be sent to SP members as soon as feasible. The AP will review and comment on all NBS IERP pre-proposals.

Staff welcomed guidance from the Board about the appropriate scope of comments that the Panels should communicate to the applicants during the review of pre-proposals.

Staff provided an update on engagement with tribes, Alaska Native Organizations, industry, and potential funding partners. Several entities have expressed interest in continued communication about opportunities to coordinate and potentially co-fund proposals.

Nominations

The Board considered nominations for open seats on the Science and Advisory Panels. The SP and AP Chairs discussed the candidates recommended by the Nominations Committee and provided information to the Board as needed.

MOTION: Reappoint Liza Mack and Tom Thornton to the Science Panel.

Action: Motion passed with no objection.

MOTION: Appoint Anna Henry, Amy Bishop, Jason Link, and Tracey Goldstein to the Science Panel.

Action: Motion passed with no objection.

MOTION: Appoint Suzie Zagorski and Brian Ritchie to the Advisory Panel.

Action: Motion passed with no objection.

The SP Chair informed the Board that two of the members whose terms expired were the SP Vice Chairs and that Chris Siddon and Suresh Sethi were elected as the new Vice Chairs.

Other Matters

Matt Alward, who sits in the Fishing Industry seat, noted that his term will expire in October 2024. The seat will be advertised and nominations solicited in late May-early June 2024 meeting and the Board will consider the candidates during the fall 2024 meeting. NPRB remains hopeful that the legislation Senator Sullivan's office drafted will pass and allow the Board to appoint that seat for a second term.

Meeting Schedule 2024-2025

The fall meeting will be held September 17-19, 2024 in Anchorage. The spring 2025 meeting will be held April 22-24, 2025 in Anchorage. Staff discussed the anticipated workload for the upcoming meetings for members to plan accordingly.

Recognition of Departing Panel Members

NPRB recognized departing Board members Tara Riemer and Andy Mezirow.

The meeting adjourned at 2:08 PM.