

Here comes the Steller science

Industry-funded research minimizes fishing's harm to sea lions, other marine life

It should come as no surprise that the Alaska fishing industry has more than a passing interest in scientific research regarding the Bering Sea.

After conservation groups proclaimed in about 1990 that the Bering Sea commercial fishing industry was at least partly responsible for endangering Steller sea lions, it became clear that the entire fishery could be forced into retreat. The industry responded by dumping money into research that it hoped would point to some other factor as the driving force behind the Steller's decline.

At least four new research entities were created in the aftermath of those early battles over Steller sea lions. The industry created two. A wealthy banker with close industry ties, and Congress, created one each. Just like the North Pacific Fishery Management Council, a high percentage of board members for all four entities represent commercial fishing interests. The industry also provides millions of dollars in funding. All four entities, however, claim their scientific work is independent and not influ-

enced by industry oversight or money.

Steller sea lion research steadily but slowly

increased from about \$1.2 million 1993 to more than \$3.5 million in 1999. It surged after 2000 with the first

of several large appropriations from Congress. Between 2000 and 2004, Sen. Ted Stevens of Alaska pushed through grants totalling of \$129.7 million for Steller science, including \$21.85 million in 2004. Stevens said he intended to show that the industry is not to blame for what happened to the sea lions. In contrast, northern fur seal research got nothing from Congress in 2004.

"The pollock industry is the largest fisheries industry in the United States," Stevens said in 2000. "It's more than a \$1 billion industry that could seriously suffer, if not being put totally off bounds, if we don't get answers to some of these questions about mammals, particularly Steller sea lions."

Congress sent \$10.8 million of these funds to one of the fishing-industry creations, the North Pacific Universities Marine Mammal Consortium, including \$3 million in 2004. The chart below shows who is running these research organizations, and what they're up to:



SEA LION TERRITORY — Steller sea lions congregate at Billings Head, on the Bering Sea side of Akun Island, located southwest of Unimak Pass in the Aleutian chain. Photo by Ward Testa, NMML

NORTH PACIFIC UNIVERSITIES MARINE MAMMAL RESEARCH CONSORTIUM

What they research: Relationship between fisheries and marine mammals in the North Pacific Ocean and the Eastern Bering Sea. Works in association with scientists at the University of Alaska Fairbanks, the University of British Columbia, the University of Washington, and Oregon State University. Founded in 1992 by **John Roos** of the Pacific Seafood Processors Association. 2003 Annual Report donor list includes High Seas Catchers Cooperative, the Pacific Seafood Processors Association, and the Pollock Conservation Cooperative.

Example of research: A 2000 paper, "Testing the junk-food hypothesis," blames the Steller decline on their eating too much pollock. The fishing industry has seized on that result as an argument for more pollock fishing, not less. Federal scientists contend that the sea lion has been eating pollock for a very long time, and say that the premise — that pollock are much lower-cal than other fish in the Bering Sea — has been proven wrong.

Percentage of board members with fishing connections: 89% (8 of 9) including:

■ **Dr. Dayton "Lee" Alverson** Consultant for 39 seafood companies, and for Mundt MacGregor, the Seattle law firm representing the At-Sea Processors, ■ **James Brenner** Wells Fargo Bank Alaska, where North Pacific Council member Ed Rasmuson serves as regional president.

■ **Douglas Forsyth** Premier Pacific Seafoods Inc.

■ **John Gauvin** Consultant and former CEO of the Groundfish Forum, an industry group comprised of the smaller "head and gut" vessels

■ **Dave Hanson**, President, Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission

■ **Suzanne Iudicello**, Research Consultant

■ **Paul MacGregor** Partner in the Seattle law firm Mundt MacGregor

■ **Trevor McCabe**, Former staff member for Sen. Ted Stevens; former CEO, At-Sea Processors.

■ **Brent Paine** CEO, United Catcher Boats

■ **Glenn Reed** Vice president, Pacific Seafood Processors Association

NORTH PACIFIC RESEARCH BOARD

What they research: Marine ecosystems in the North Pacific, Bering Sea and Arctic Ocean. In 1997, the U.S. won a dispute with the state of Alaska (the Dinkum Sands Case) involving Arctic oil and gas leases. Congress put a portion of the \$1.5 billion award into a fund governed by the NPRB.

Example of research: One project examines whether decline in Bering Sea halibut might have been caused by changing ocean temperatures instead of too much fishing. One of the two principle investigators listed on the project is **Heather McCarty**, a consultant for certain segments of the Alaska commercial fishing industry. A similar McCarty research project funded by NPRB is examining whether changing ocean conditions may be at fault for the col-

lapse of the overfished blue king crab, rather than fishing interactions.

Percentage of board members with fishing connections: 47% (9 of 19) including:

■ **Jim Balsinger** Director, NOAA Fisheries Alaska Region; member, North Pacific Council

■ **Kevin Duffy** Director, Alaska Department of Fish and Game and member of the North Pacific Council

■ **John Gauvin**

■ **Stephanie Madsen**, Chair of the North Pacific Fishery Management Council and lobbyist for Pacific

Seafood Processors Association

■ **Trevor McCabe**

■ **John Roos**

■ **Robin Samuelsen** CEO, Bristol Bay Economic Development Corporation, an entity heavily invested in Bering Sea fisheries

■ **Jev Shelton** Commercial gillnetter

■ **John White** Commercial salmon fisherman

RASMUSON FISHERIES RESEARCH CENTER, UNIVERSITY OF ALASKA FAIRBANKS

What they research: Alaska's marine resources. Founded by Elmer Rasmuson, the North Pacific Council's first chair.

Example of research: 2004 project examines northern fur seal foraging in Bering Sea.

Percentage of board members with fishing connections: 80% (8 of 10) including:

■ **Dr. Dayton "Lee" Alverson**

■ **Jim Balsinger**

■ **Jim H. Branson**, First Executive

Director, North Pacific Council

■ **Alec W. Brindle** CEO, Wards Cove Packing Co.

■ **Alvin R. Burch** Executive Director, Alaska Draggers Association

■ **James O. Campbell**, former North Pacific Council member

■ **Ed Rasmuson** Member North Pacific Council; son of Elmer Rasmuson

■ **Clem V. Tillion** Consultant for proposed Adak pollock fishery; former chair, North Pacific Council

POLLOCK CONSERVATION COOPERATIVE RESEARCH CENTER, UNIVERSITY OF ALASKA FAIRBANKS

What they research: Topics funded by a \$1 million annual donation from the Pollock Conservation Cooperative.

Example of research: Three of six research projects in 2003 were related to pollock in the Bering Sea. 2001 projects assessed the extent of competition between Steller sea lions and commercial fisheries, and the possible link between killer whales and sea lion declines.

Percentage of board members with fishing connections: 67% (4 of 6) including:

■ **Jim Balsinger**

■ **Mike Hyde** President, Pollock Conservation Cooperative

■ **Trevor McCabe**

■ **Wally Pererya** Chairman, Arctic Storm Inc., owner of factory trawlers; board member of Pollock Conservation Cooperative; former member, North Pacific Council