

## 2005 NOAA Fisheries Employee of the Year Nomination Narrative

**Nominee's Full Name:**

Mark E. Peterson

**Category for which Nominated:**

Program Employees – Management/Scientific/Technical GS 11-15;  
WG and Demo Pay Band Equivalents

Mark E. Peterson fully deserves to be the NOAA Fisheries Employee of the Year in the Management/Scientific/Technical category (GS 11-15, WG, and Demo Pay Band Equivalents) for the Northwest Fisheries Science Center. In 2005, Mark provided essential leadership and microbiological expertise during the NOAA assessment of the environmental impacts of hurricanes Katrina and Rita, and his participation was crucial to the success of that effort. He performed this role in addition to operating the fish disease diagnostic laboratory in the Microbiology Program in the Resource Enhancement and Utilization Technologies (REUT) Division.

Mark demonstrated capable leadership, competence, and innovation when faced with an activity never performed before in the Microbiology Program – shipboard field sampling. With a scant 48 hours notice before the initial post-Katrina assessment cruise to assess the potential impacts of microbial pathogens and chemical contaminants in seafood, Mark coordinated the assembling and deployment of microbiological equipment, supplies, and the microbiology field team. Mark was the only scientist to participate in all three assessment cruises in 2005, and he served effectively as the lead microbiologist for each cruise. His organizational skills under chaotic conditions ensured that the field team was well prepared and that samples were properly collected and analyzed at sea. During the final 3-week long cruise, Mark used his superior interpersonal skills to procure incubators from the NOAA Fisheries facility in Galveston, Texas, as replacements for units that did not arrive from the manufacturer. His innovative repair of key microbiological equipment that had failed at sea was vital to completing the assessment for pathogenic organisms. His creativity ensured that valuable time and resources were not lost in NOAA Fisheries' response to hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

The shipboard sampling posed potential biohazard exposures for both the ships' crews and the scientific parties. Drawing upon his extensive (>20 years) research experience at NOAA Fisheries with human pathogens such as *Clostridium botulinum*, Mark developed guidelines for biosafety security during sampling. He provided information, training, and protective gear recommendations to the ships' crews and officers, significantly reducing anxiety and improving safety. Through it all, Mark's cheerful and cooperative spirit promoted smooth activity coordination and lifted the morale of his co-workers, in spite of long working hours, prolonged periods away from home, and the uncertainties of the biological and chemical hazards of the samples.

In addition to the considerable commitment required by the post-hurricane assessments, Mark maintained his leadership role at the fish disease diagnostic laboratory at Montlake. The assessments occurred during a time of the year that is very busy for fish disease diagnostics – the spawning of captive broodstock salmon in the endangered species rearing program. Through long hours of careful laboratory work, Mark and his assistant, Anne Mataia, were able to provide time-critical diagnostic data that are used in rearing program decisions, allowing the captive broodstock program to complete its activities on schedule.

Over the past year, Mark played a valuable role in designing culture facilities for experimental projects in REUT involving pathogen exposure. His knowledge and experience in biosecure aquatic culture has been important for the timely and safe completion of human pathogen-shellfish research funded by NOAA's Oceans and Human Health Initiative and fish disease research funded by NOAA Fisheries and the Bonneville Power Administration. Without his dual expertise in microbiology and aquatic culture design, these research projects would have been more difficult and costly. Furthermore, Mark's contributions in culture facility design allow the other researchers involved in the project to focus on improving the quality and reliability of the scientific results.

In 2005, Mark has represented the Microbiology Program Manager and NOAA Fisheries on the State of Washington Co-Managers Fish Disease Policy Committee. This committee consists of representatives of treaty tribes, Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (Region 1), and NOAA Fisheries, and it is charged with revising the fish disease policy for Washington State to address some of the risks posed by fish management strategies. Mark's involvement has insured that NOAA Fisheries' concerns regarding propagation and transfer of endangered stocks were addressed in the revised policy. In addition he has also collaborated with scientists from the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife in fish disease research. Through these activities, Mark has strengthened ties with partner agencies and NOAA constituents.

Based on his contributions to the broader scientific community, the agency, and the NWFSC, we are pleased to nominate Mark E. Peterson for the 2005 Employee of the Year Award.