

Northwest Fisheries Science Center

Annual Guidance Memorandum for Fiscal Year (FY) 18

Transition

This Annual Guidance Memo (AGM) highlights a period of transition in leadership in NOAA Fisheries and at NWFSC. Dr. Kevin Werner assumed the position of Science and Research Director in May 2017. Dr. Mark Strom continues as the Deputy Science and Research Director. As of September 2016, Barry Thom is the new permanent Regional Administrator of the West Coast Region, and in April 2017, Scott Rumsey was named the permanent Deputy Regional Administrator. Dr. Cisco Werner assumed the NOAA Fisheries Director of Scientific Programs and Chief Science Advisor in June 2017 following Dr. Richard Merrick's retirement in January 2017. Also in June 2017, Chris Oliver was appointed by President Trump as the NOAA Assistant Administrator for Fisheries.

NOAA is still waiting for presidential appointees including a nomination for the NOAA Administrator role that requires Senate confirmation.

Purpose

This AGM outlines our priorities for Fiscal Year (FY) 18, and as has been the case in recent years, it describes our continued efforts to implement the [2013 NWFSC Strategic Plan](#) using scientific merit and management need as the primary factors in prioritizing our future activities.

Given the uncertainty around future budgets and their priorities, it is important that we have a robust and adaptive planning process that positions us to be ready and nimble for whatever budget and/or priority changes may occur in the coming months and years, while continuing to provide the best science for needs of fisheries management and protection of our trust resources.

This AGM takes a different format than previous years. Rather than divide NWFSC priorities for the year into Core Research Areas (activities with the highest funding priorities to meet national and regional needs) and Focus Research Areas (research programs of special interest for the coming year that may have required future funding to complete), the FY18 AGM is structured similarly to the [NOAA Fisheries Priorities and Annual Guidance for FY17](#). This guidance organizes programs, projects, and investments into three strategic goals:

- Ensure the sustainability of fisheries and fishing communities.
- Recover and conserve protected species.
- Improve organizational excellence.

There are several reasons for the change in the format of the NWFSC AGM. First and foremost, the Center will develop a clear statement of future priorities during FY18. These priorities will inform NWFSC strategies beyond FY18 including strategic plans, research priorities, organizational design, and investment decisions. These priorities will be developed in an iterative and collaborative manner using the collective wisdom and experience of the talented NWFSC team. In addition, in coming years, we are shifting the timing of the release of the NWFSC's AGM from October to May. This will allow advance research project planning before October.

This also requires the AGM to be more forward looking, and not as prescriptive as in the past. By remaining adaptive and flexible, we will be able to fully examine and evaluate new research ideas, ongoing projects, and emerging areas of scientific interest.

All files associated with this AGM can be found in this [Google Folder](#).

FY18 Budget Outlook

The Center's budget for FY17 was essentially unchanged from FY16. Our historical budget trends for the past 7 years can be seen [here](#) (this will be periodically updated). The level of reimbursable funds in FY17 was also comparable to the previous year.

While we do not know what the enacted NOAA and NOAA Fisheries FY18 budgets will be, the [President's Budget for FY18](#) does call for a NOAA budget that puts a higher priority on surveys, charting, and fisheries management than on other research programs and coastal and marine management. In Congress, the House and Senate committees with jurisdiction over NOAA passed their marked bills for NOAA's budget in July. [The Senate bill](#) included "5.6 billion for NOAA, a \$85.1 million decrease below the FY2017 enacted level, for core NOAA operations including: ocean monitoring; fisheries management; coastal grants to states; aquaculture research; and severe weather forecasting. ... Funding for NOAA Fisheries continues to target new areas of investment for fisheries management, including new monitoring technologies and support for state-led management schemes to ensure greater access to the nation's abundant fishery resources" (Senate CJS Committee language). For NMFS, the top line funding number from the Senate bill is \$867M. This is \$45.6M above the President's Budget and \$19M more than the [House mark](#) that was reported in mid July (the House marked bill was \$4.97B for all of NOAA). Of particular importance for the NWFSC, the Senate mark included \$10.5M for partial construction of a new facility in Mukilteo.

As Congress continues to develop their FY18 budget, NWFSC Leadership will continue to share the latest information [here](#).

Staffing Outlook

The flat budget allocations for the last several years, have resulted in the NWFSC having to hold labor costs flat. This has resulted in a net FTE loss of 89 (~25%) since 2012 ([see trends here](#)). While we have managed to slow the decline in total FTEs, we do anticipate some additional reductions through attrition.

While we expect that this will be at a slower rate than has occurred since 2012, strategic staffing and succession planning will become a more important part of our overall prioritization process.

As noted in the organizational excellence priority discussion, as the Center develops strategic science priorities, future staffing plans will likely emphasize recruiting and training efforts consistent with those priorities. Efforts to improve diversity, inclusion, belonging, and leadership will be a part of future staffing strategies. Also, efforts to improve interdisciplinary science and collaboration will continue to be a point of emphasis in order to promote a more nimble, aware, and capable workforce.

FY18 Priorities

The first area, improving organizational excellence, includes improving some of the ways that we make decisions about the work we do and how we do it. The second and third priorities, ensuring the sustainability of fisheries and fishing communities, and contribute to the recovery and conservation of protected species, are long standing areas of focus for NMFS and the NWFSC. Although the majority of traditional research and work at the NWFSC can be tied to these priorities, it is increasingly important for NWFSC activities and projects to articulate these connections.

1. Improve organizational excellence.

The focus of this priority is to improve some of the ways that we make decisions about the work we do and how we do it. This includes the following aspects:

- Setting NWFSC's strategic focus and identification of corresponding science priorities.
- Exercising the FY18 Activities Assessment Criteria and Project Tracking Database.
- Building leadership acumen and improving succession planning.
- Utilizing and increasing the diversity, inclusion, and belonging of our workforce.
- Improving facilities, particularly at Mukilteo and Montlake.

Future priorities will be identified through a robust and collaborative process that gathers input from both inside and outside of the Center. Discussion and decisions on priorities will be informed by (1) experience and collective knowledge of the NWFSC team, (2) trends in and around the natural and human environments of the Center's science particularly including stated science needs of key partners, (3) opportunities for scientific advancement, and (4) funding potential and limitations. The six science program reviews conducted over the previous five years will also inform future priorities. Moreover, priorities will reflect (and state) how the Center seeks to provide unique and valuable services to the stakeholders it serves. Projects that produce data or information to inform this process will be given high priorities.

To identify priorities, NWFSC Leadership Team will review NWFSC work at the project or activity level. This effort reflects similar efforts at the NMFS level and at other NMFS FMCs, notably the Alaska

Fisheries Science Center. In 2018 this structure will use the Project Tracking Database and Activities Assessment Criteria that has been developed by the NWFSC Leadership Team with input from Program Managers and their staff.

The Center continues to expect flat labor cost through FY18. However, once the Center develops strategic priorities over the next year, the Center may well look to focus staffing strategically toward identified priorities in FY19 and beyond. This may include expanding opportunities for the current workforce as well as targeting new recruitments.

This priority includes efforts to improve interdisciplinary collaboration, build leadership acumen across the Center, implement succession planning, and recognize, build, and utilize diversity and inclusion. The Center recognizes the importance of both leadership and diversity to achieving high performance in both the science and support functions in the Center. While no specific activities are identified in the AGM, it is expected that this will be a long-term focus of the Center and that the Center encourages the initiation of activities to promote and improve leadership acumen and diversity, inclusion, and belonging.

Finally, the Center recognizes a need to address facilities and infrastructure needs including seawater supply at Manchester, rebuilding Mukilteo, mitigating Montlake for the reconstruction of State Route 520, and ensuring that our facilities are the right size to meet our science needs.

2. Ensure the sustainability of fisheries and fishing communities.

The focus of this priority area is to provide the science on which the national fishery management process is based, namely providing information to allow maximum yields while preventing overfishing and continuing protection of marine ecosystems. This priority includes the work we do to support fishery management through the NOAA Fisheries West Coast Region and the Pacific Fishery Management Council. This focus includes efforts to advance aquaculture science for finfish and shellfish, and development of tools for early warning and forecasting the impacts of harmful algal blooms and pathogens.

We will continue to fully staff surveys for West Coast groundfish. We will continue to support the Pacific Fishery Management Council (PFMC) by conducting full and update stock assessments for species identified as priorities for FY18 with the West Coast Region and the PFMC. We will continue technical support for the US-Canada whiting treaty, and in FY18 will conduct studies to improve the whiting survey. We will also continue to support economic data collection for the Catch Share Program. We will continue to participate in regional and national efforts to implement electronic reporting (ER) and electronic monitoring (EM) for augmenting fishery monitoring efforts, and continue to work cooperatively with the WCR and Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission in support of the PFMC's electronic monitoring initiative, as well as conducting NWFSC research on enhanced electronic reporting.

We will continue to support activities contributing to awareness of the environmental conditions impacting fisheries and coastal communities. This includes, but is not limited to, data collection efforts like the Newport Line, assessments like the California Current Integrated Ecosystem Assessment, social science and economics studies, and frameworks using this information in Ecosystem Based Fisheries Management and in the Western Region Action Plan for addressing climate change impacts.

3. Recover and conserve protected species.

Under this priority area, the NWFSC will continue efforts to recover and rebuild species and protection of their habitat listed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) and the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA)

We will provide biological, social, and economic science to support the recovery of listed species, including Pacific salmon, Puget Sound rockfish, green sturgeon, Pacific eulachon, and Southern Resident killer whales (SRKWs). We will continue studies to assess the sources and magnitude of early marine mortality of steelhead and Chinook salmon in Puget Sound, Pacific Ocean telemetry studies of green sturgeon movement and habitat use, and predator-prey relationships for SRKWs and salmon.

We will continue efforts to improve captive propagation methodologies and practices through our captive broodstock programs, drawing on resources provided by our partners at Bonneville Power Administration. We will continue our close coordination and collaboration with the WCR and SWFSC on the Federal Columbia River Power System biological opinion and on other ESA consultations.