

What is the Fisheries Observation Science Program?

The Fisheries Observation Science Program collects and analyzes critical fisheries data from U.S. West Coast fishing vessels. Independent field biologists known as observers are deployed aboard working fishing boats to collect this scientific data. While at sea, observers collect a variety of data on fishing operations, catch composition, and protected resources. They also collect biological samples from the catch. Staff provide logistical and scientific support, ensure data quality, and train observers. Our scientists also produce a variety of data products and reports to support fisheries management and the NOAA mission. Fishery scientists and managers depend on observer data and analysis for stock assessments, management decisions, in-season quota tracking, and scientific research.



Fisheries Observation Science Program

For more information on the **Fisheries Observation Science Program**, please visit our website:

<http://www.nwfsc.noaa.gov/research/divisions/fram/observation/index.cfm>



NOAA FISHERIES

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Observers

Observers are independent field biologists who are deployed aboard commercial fishing boats and at-sea processing facilities. Vessels operating in the West Coast Groundfish Trawl Catch Share Program are required to carry

a certified observer on all fishing trips. In other fisheries along the West Coast, non-catch share observers are assigned to fishing trips at random through the West Coast Groundfish Observer Program. The at-sea hake fishery is also required to carry observers which is supported through the At-Sea Hake Observer Program.

What do observers do?

While at sea, observers collect a wide range of information. For example, they monitor and record catch data, particularly any discards (the unused catch that is returned to the sea) and endangered or threatened species caught. Observers also collect species data, including diversity of catch, condition of fish caught, seabird sightings, and any marine mammal interactions with fishing operations. In addition, they gather biological data, such as sex, fish lengths, and weight.

Qualifications

To perform their duties, observers must have an extensive knowledge of fish species identification, biology, and data collection protocols. And, because much of the work is done in dangerous environments, observers must be well versed in at-sea safety and the rigors of working at sea.

Training

All observer trainees take an in-depth, hands-on training course during which they get an intensive overview of commercial fishing gear and strategies, sampling processes, and identification of fish, invertebrates, birds, sea turtles, and mammals of the West Coast. Trainees learn how to collect the appropriate fishery data and how to work efficiently under the strenuous conditions on commercial fishing vessels. Trainees must also demonstrate that they have the aptitude to perform this difficult job inde-

pendently and to act professionally in stressful situations. Observer trainees must pass with a minimum score of 80 percent to become certified.

Getting Hired

Observers are employed by private companies specializing in providing observers to commercial fishermen. To learn more about the application process, please see our website at:

http://www.nwfsc.noaa.gov/research/divisions/fram/observation/catchshares_how.cfm



Other Positions

Although Observers are crucial to the success of the Fisheries Observation Program, the Program staff includes a team supervisor, database manager, data analyst, field coordinators, and debriefers.



Postings for these openings can be found on the Federal Government website, www.usajobs.gov, and through our cooperative grant partner Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission, www.psmfc.org.