

# IMPACT REPORT

## Making Waves

AMCC protects and promotes the integrity of Alaska's marine ecosystems and the health of ocean-dependent communities.

Four strategic goals ground our work:

- 1 Empower Effective Stewards & Coastal Leaders
- 2 Protect Healthy Fisheries & Marine Ecosystems
- 3 Promote Working Waterfronts
- 4 Address & Adapt to Climate-Driven Change



**Dear Friends,**

On behalf of Alaska Marine Conservation Council, we're thankful for every one of you - our members, partners and allies - for helping make the efforts you'll read about in this brief Impact Report possible.

Our mission is no small undertaking: we advocate for healthful fisheries with outcomes that support generations to come. Without community, AMCC could not navigate the tremendous forces at odds with our efforts, from the systemically privileged, globalized corporate food system to changing ocean conditions that are difficult to plan futures around. **Regardless of these pressures, healthy marine habitat is essential to life itself, and every season that passes without protections for diverse wild fisheries has consequences. We must persist.**

While the fisheries management arenas we must navigate to advance solutions are painfully slow in a time of great need, and representation among those appointed to manage Alaska's fisheries still don't fully reflect our community values - your support and engagement makes a difference! **The chorus of voices demanding change is as loud as ever, and we are making gains to safeguard what we all value.**

AMCC's community is grassroots and ever-growing. Time and again we prove that together, with persistence and heart, we can make waves that shape shorelines. Thank you again for standing with us!

With tremendous gratitude,

Marissa Wisniewski (Wilson)  
Executive Director



# CONSERVING ALASKA'S WILD FISHERIES

## Year in Review: Defending Essential Fish Habitat



**Fisheries management in the North Pacific is complicated. Multiple layers of state, regional, federal and international regulations impact Alaska's fisheries. Navigating these processes can be vexing. Yet, despite the complexities, some concepts are just simple, like healthy habitat is essential for healthy fisheries.**

**The Background:** Throughout AMCC's history, a key objective has been to protect essential fish habitat, especially from industrial-scale bottom trawling. **But what exactly is Essential Fish Habitat?** EFH is a fishery management term for the habitat where a species can access the food and shelter essential to their survival - think crab hiding in corals and seaweed. It also encompasses other sea floor dwellers, like sand dollars and mollusks. These organisms play vital roles as ecosystem engineers, shaping fish habitat, stabilizing sediment and more.

**The Threats:** Just as FY2023 was beginning, the North Pacific Fishery Management Council (NPFMC) announced an emergency closure of the Bristol Bay Red King Crab (RKC) fishery for the second consecutive year, citing ongoing declines, despite rebuilding efforts. **Around the same time, AMCC realized a critical oversight in RKC rebuilding plans: habitat damage caused by pelagic trawlers while harvesting massive amounts of species like pollock.** Despite regulations prohibiting contact with the ocean floor, research presented to the NPFMC revealed that during crucial molting and mating seasons, nets from these "midwater" trawlers were operating on the seafloor up to 70% to 90% of the time.

This revelation was alarming on multiple fronts. Massive nets dragging along the seafloor are destroying habitat critical for the survival of crab and many other species, and can also

crush them outright. Especially problematic is that pelagic trawlers are allowed to fish in the protected waters of the RKC "Savings Area" historically closed to bottom trawling due to these very concerns. Additionally, preserving undisturbed seafloor habitat, similar to leaving old-growth forests intact, is critical to mitigating climate change.

**The Solutions:** AMCC has been working in earnest to raise the flag about these issues. We published a white paper outlining our concerns (**learn more, right**) and distributed it to stakeholders, decisionmakers and the science community, even presenting recently at the World Fisheries Congress. We've taken every opportunity at NPFMC and Alaska Bycatch Task Force meetings to submit comments and testify in defense of EFH. And you joined us!

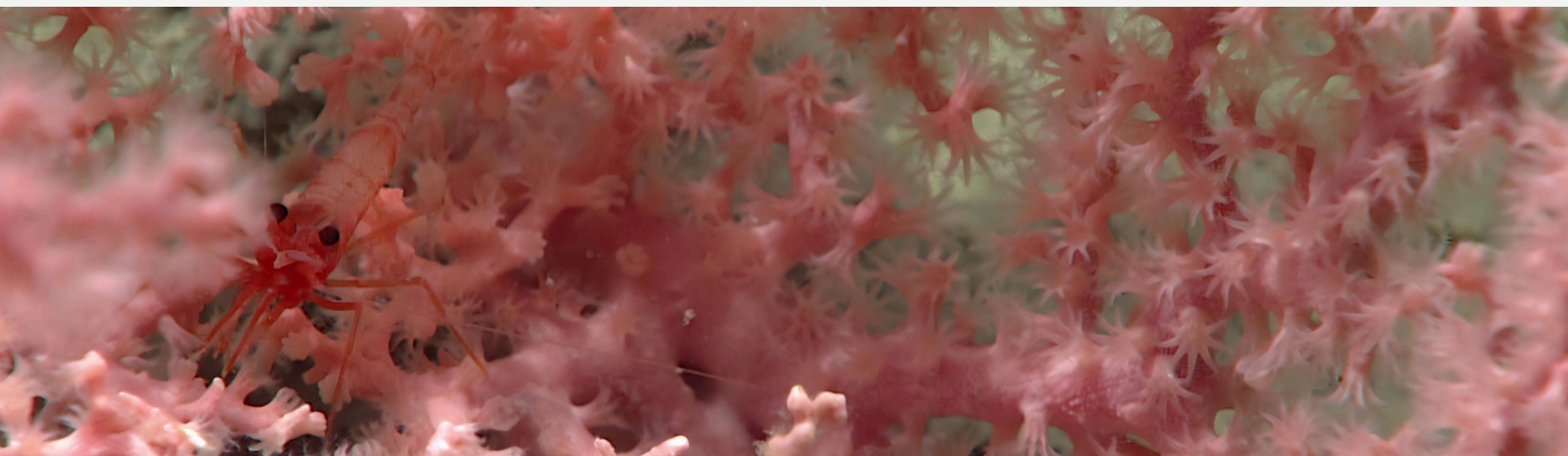
Despite regulatory complexities and industry pressures, our commitment to defending EFH remains resolute. We've made inroads in the past year raising awareness, rallying support and advocating for change *together*. While the NPFMC's response hasn't yet addressed our concerns, we persist to make waves, knowing each swell brings us closer to our goal of building the resilience of Alaska's oceans, wild fisheries and fishing livelihoods.

**AMCC provides updates on NPFMC activities bimonthly on our blog, offering insights and analysis on key fisheries management decisions and conservation efforts. [Read more at akmarine.org/blog](https://akmarine.org/blog).**

### FOOD FOR THOUGHT



**Alaska's pollock fishery is the largest fishery in the US by volume. Most pollock is processed into imitation crab and fast food fish sandwiches. The industry claims it's sustainably harvested... what do you think?**





## ALERT! HELP US GIVE HALIBUT THEIR DAY IN COURT

Each year, an average of three-quarters of a million halibut are caught and discarded as bycatch in the Bering Sea by a fleet of factory bottom trawlers targeting other flatfish. The majority of the halibut are juveniles destined to migrate as far south as California.

In 2016, AMCC with fishermen and communities from Alaska to the Pacific Northwest organized in response to such waste. We spent more than six years successfully advancing a bycatch limit for the trawl fleet that was linked to the abundance of the halibut stock and no longer on static caps. This was approved by regulators in 2021, and the new rule was to take effect in January 2024. But in December of 2023, the bottom trawl fleet filed a federal lawsuit calling the new rule unfair – and asked that it be overturned.

AMCC joined a coalition called the Halibut Defense Alliance to help defend the new halibut bycatch limits in court. We're asking for help to cover legal fees to protect this ecologically, economically and culturally important West Coast fishery. The outcome of this court case is important not only for halibut, but for the ability to enact bycatch reductions for any species.

We're already seeing substantial benefits from our involvement, with AMCC and other members of the Alliance ensuring that the administrative record is inclusive of vital information for a successful outcome. Intervening was an expensive but essential step for defending this action.

To see the full list of coalition members, please visit [gofundme.com/f/halibut](https://gofundme.com/f/halibut) or scan the QR Code below.



Thanks to those who have contributed so far! If you're unable to donate, please help by sharing this link: [gofundme.com/f/halibut](https://gofundme.com/f/halibut) or scan the QR code with your smartphone camera.



## THE MYTH OF “MIDWATER” IN THE ALASKA POLLOCK FISHERY

Despite a multi-year effort to revive the Bristol Bay Red King Crab fishery, closures persist as population declines continue. Last spring, AMCC wrote and shared a short white paper exploring the overlooked factors contributing to this decline, including the impacts of pelagic trawl gear on critical crab habitat and the broader marine environment. [Read more at akmarine.org/publications](https://akmarine.org/publications) and share!

# MAKING WAVES: GRASSROOTS ADVOCACY IN HIGH GEAR



Thanks to your support and engagement, throughout fiscal year 2023 AMCC worked to advance sustainable, equitable and climate resilient fisheries - efforts that continue today. Check out our impact updates below. Please stay engaged with these issues and raise your voice when we send Action Alerts. **Our urgent and collective action is vital to safeguarding Alaska's marine ecosystems, wild fisheries and fishery-dependent communities!**

## Advancing Sustainable & Equitable Fisheries

The Magnuson-Stevens Act (MSA), up for reauthorization since 2016, remains stalled in Congress and opportunities to strengthen the law to build greater resilience to climate change and reduce bycatch are too. **In the interim, AMCC and our partners have been advocating for guideline language revisions for three of the MSA's 10 National Standards addressing fair allocations (4), access for fishing communities (8) and bycatch management (9).** In May 2023, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) announced a comment period for an advance notice of proposed rulemaking on these new guidelines. With our partners, we raised awareness about this important opportunity and the role fishermen have in the process. 395 comments were submitted, mostly by fishing communities, tribes and individuals in Alaska strongly supporting changes! While writing this report, NMFS shared that a proposed rule will be released by early summer. Watch for future Action Alerts from AMCC!

## Advocating for Salmon Bycatch Reductions

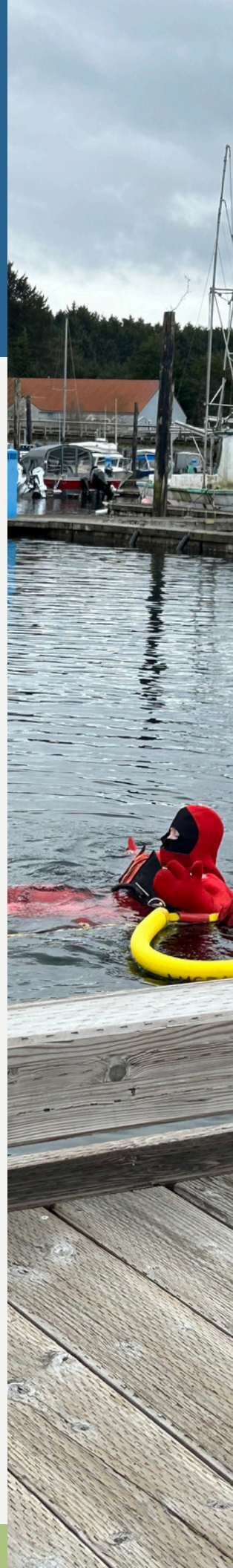
Chinook and chum salmon continue to be caught as bycatch in the Bering Sea pollock fishery, while these stocks have declined to crisis levels for communities along the Yukon and Kuskokwim Rivers. Some members of the North Pacific Fishery Management Council (NPFMC) have agreed this is a humanitarian crisis, but instead of taking swift action to reduce bycatch, the council recommended additional analysis to inform "tradeoffs" of potential chum bycatch limits or other regulations on the pollock industry, with no further action yet on Chinook bycatch. **AMCC has striven to be an ally to the sovereign, salmon-dependent communities of the Yukon and Kuskokwim River regions for years, and we continue to advocate alongside them at the NPFMC to call for urgent and meaningful action on bycatch reductions.** Look for more updates on this issue!

## Building Resilience to Climate Change

One of AMCC's priorities at the NPFMC has been to support development of a programmatic environmental impact statement (PEIS) which incorporates Traditional & Indigenous Knowledge into fisheries management and assesses the risks associated with climate change for the marine ecosystems of the North Pacific. **In FY2023, we raised awareness about the crucial role fishermen have in the process and advocated for a PEIS that aligns with our mission.** Though some progress has been made, while writing this report, the NPFMC has slowed its timeline for developing this critical framework, recognizing the need to better involve Alaska Native peoples and fisheries stakeholders in the process. We will continue to actively engage in development of the PEIS at every opportunity.



**Stay Connected! Sign-up for our monthly e-news at [akmarine.org](https://akmarine.org) and never miss an update or alert.**





## THRIVING WORKING WATERFRONTS

### CATCH 49: Creating Harmony in Harvest

In Alaska's coastal communities, fishing livelihoods are inextricably linked to the health of the marine environment from which we harvest, making fishermen uniquely positioned to be the most credible and emphatic advocates for fisheries conservation. This harmony is at the heart of our mission.

AMCC's work to safeguard wild fisheries and marine ecosystems helps ensure that small boat fishermen can live, work and thrive in Alaska's coastal communities. Through our **Catch 49** program, we not only provide economic opportunities for Alaska's stewardship-minded fishermen but create a demand for seafood harvested using low-impact methods. **But what does "low-impact" mean exactly?**

These methods prioritize sustainability and minimize damage to marine ecosystems. Seafood curated by Catch 49 has been harvested using only these techniques – never by destructive practices like bottom trawling. **Learn about two inspiring fishermen we partner with and their fishing techniques!**

#### Chris Johnson | Jig Gear | Black Rockfish | Kodiak

Chris operates the F/V North Star. He and his wife, Danielle Ringer, are lifelong Alaskans from multi-generational fishing families. (Danielle is a fisheries anthropologist who's collaborated with AMCC on research related to fishing communities.) Chris uses jig gear to fish for black rockfish and Pacific cod. **Jig gear consists of vertical lines each with multiple hooks. Jig-caught seafood has one of the lowest bycatch rates and environmental impacts of any fishery in Alaska.**



#### Nathan Hill | Setnet | Sockeye Salmon | Naknek

Nathan is from a multi-generational fishing family. He's been providing Catch 49 with wild sockeye salmon since 2017. Nathan lives on Iliamna Lake and fishes on a productive setnet site on the Naknek River. **A setnet is a passive net anchored to shore that intercepts schools of fish as they pass through. The net remains in the water until fish are harvested by hand, generally allowing any non-target species to be freed unharmed.**



Through our partnerships with fishermen like Chris and Nathan, Catch 49 delivers high-quality, wild seafood to Alaskan families while championing sustainable alternatives to destructive fishing practices. By supporting these fishermen and choosing Catch 49 seafood, you're investing in a future where the ocean thrives alongside the communities it sustains. Join us in creating harmony in harvest!

**To learn more about Catch 49's current offerings and subscribe to our newsletter, visit [catch49.org](https://catch49.org).**

## AK ON-BOARD LAUNCHES FOR ASPIRING COMMERCIAL FISHERMEN



In 2022, the Young Fishermen's Development Act (YFDA) became law, supported by AMCC and the Fishing Communities Coalition. With YFDA funds, AMCC and partners developed AK On-Board - a crew member training program for aspiring commercial fishermen, emphasizing technical and safety skills, apprenticeships and fishery management. The first 3-day training in Sitka was a success! Stay tuned for trainings in Petersburg in June and Kodiak in spring 2025!

# THANK YOU TO OUR FY2023 OCEAN GUARDIANS!

AMCC's work is made possible thanks to the many caring individuals, businesses and foundations who share with us a concern for Alaska's oceans and wild fisheries and the ways of life they sustain.

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Susan Alward  
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\* Tide Pool Monthly  
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# OCEAN GUARDIAN: RJ KOPCHAK // CORDOVA, AK

## AMCC Board Chair & Member Since 2004

RJ Kopchak recently started his term as AMCC's Board Chair. We're grateful for the expertise he brings to the organization and his twenty year commitment to our mission. We asked him recently why he values AMCC. Here's what he had to say, in his own words...

**What inspired you to become an AMCC member?** I became a part of Alaska's ocean economy when I started crewing on a halibut boat in 1974. I fell in love with the fishing life and have watched as science, management, harvest and ocean productivity have changed over time.

**Why do you think AMCC's work is important?** The key to healthy oceans and fisheries is management policies driven by science, but unfortunately, these decisions are being driven by industry. Understanding the interrelationships of science, management, habitat and harvest is critical to the sustainable use of our ocean resources. AMCC's staff is immersed in advocacy efforts that bring this whole system thinking and science-based management solutions before decision makers.

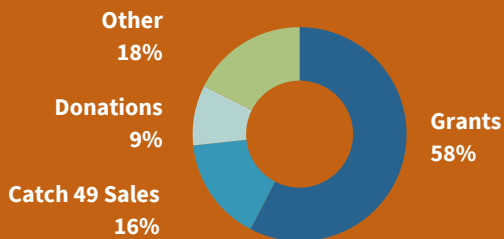
**What would you tell someone to encourage them to become a member today?** I would tell them that this invaluable service requires our financial support and engagement - AMCC can't do it alone. This is why I'm a sustaining donor, with an easy and automatic monthly contribution. I encourage you to do the same. Conserving our marine environment, and the economies dependent on our ocean resources is a year-round job. Let's keep AMCC working full time!

**We're honored to count RJ as a member and thank him for his leadership. If you value AMCC, please join our Tide Pool Monthly Giving Club or make a one-time gift at [akmarine.org](http://akmarine.org). Thank you!**

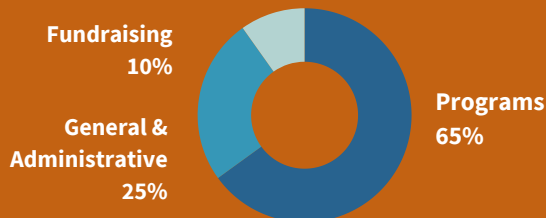


## FY2023 FINANCIAL SUMMARY

### Total Revenue by Type: \$510,974



### Total Expenses by Type: \$740,642



Please note: The discrepancy between revenue and expenses is primarily due to the timing of a key grant and the downturn in market conditions affecting Alaska's fisheries, which also impacted Catch 49. To request a copy of AMCC's FY2023 (10/1/22 - 9/30/23) Financial Review and 990, please contact us at [fish@akmarine.org](mailto:fish@akmarine.org).

## AMCC BOARD & STAFF

Board of Directors: **RJ Kopchak** (Chair), Cordova. **Melanie Brown**, Bristol Bay & Juneau. **Georgie Heaverley**, Anchorage. **Darius Kasprzak**, Kodiak. **Dave Theriault**, Anchorage. **Josh Wisniewski**, Seldovia.

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[Learn more about AMCC's Board & Staff at akmarine.org.](http://akmarine.org)

In addition to our staff, AMCC works with the following mission-focused contractors: Coast Strategies, Danielle S. Williams Consulting and Koteff Accounting Group.



**A special thank you to the fishermen and allies who contributed their photographs to this report:**

Front: Charlie Peterson, Page 2: NOAA, Page 3: Robin Clark (Courtesy of Suzanne Abraham), Page 4 & 5: Theresa Peterson, Back: Danielle Williams.

# IMPACT REPORT

[Join the Tide Pool Monthly Giving Club today and be the change you want to sea!](#)

Like the tides, recurring gifts are reliable - a source of abundance AMCC can count on. Even small donations can have a big impact. These gifts allow us to be better positioned to safeguard Alaska's ocean, fisheries and communities and you a budget-friendly way to support a cause you care about!

Sign-up today at  
[akmarine.org](http://akmarine.org)  
or scan the QR code.



Thank you!

## Support the Businesses that Support AMCC!

We're grateful to the generous businesses that supported our mission in FY2023



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