ONCORHYNCHUS

Newsletter of the Alaska Chapter, American Fisheries Society

Vol. XLVI Summer 2026 No. 3

In this issue:

President's Corner

Alaska Chapter Annual Meeting

Summer 2026 Student Graduates

Molly Ahlgren Undergraduate Scholarship

Recruiting for Chapter Historian

Environmental Concerns Corner

Meetings and Events

and more . . .



Daniel O'Connor empties the smolt holding box at the rotary screw trap on the Kwethluk River. Photo from Andrew Magel, KRITFC.

Life as a Volunteer on the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta

Daniel O'Connor

I was set up from a pretty young age for fisheries involvement, but maybe not the same way as many people. I didn't grow up fishing, but the salmon life cycle was a regular teaching in my Yakima, Washington, youth. Yakima also provided the unique climate of being a desert, while also an agricultural hub thanks to the Yakima River, and a short drive revealed the forests and peaks of the Cascade Mountains. This gave me an appreciation for the beauty of nature and the importance of our societal and personal relationship to the land we inhabit. In high school, I moved past the basic biology of salmon to environmental and marine science classes that had me wading a campus creek to record environmental data and helping raise salmon in a hatchery run in partnership with the Yakima Nation. While pursuing a college engineering degree, I used my free time to explore the outdoors from rock-climbing to hiking in the rainforest.

Approaching college graduation, I wanted to find something with a positive world impact that would leave me fulfilled and excited, which led me to the Jesuit Volunteer Corps (JVC). The JVC is a Catholic organization placing volunteers for a year of service in a variety of nonprofit organizations, including homeless shelters, food pantries, schools, and conservation entities. Reviewing the options, the Fisheries Technician position for the Kuskokwim River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission (KRITFC) presented an option to experience the outdoors, local fisheries, and life in Bethel, Alaska. After being accepted and graduating, I moved to Bethel.

In my year with KRITFC, I lived with five other Jesuit Volunteers (JVs) focusing on the four JVC core values: simple living, spirituality, community, and social and ecological justices. I participated in several fisheries activities including a Kwethluk River smolt outmigration project, the Takotna River weir, household

Continued on page 3

The President's Corner



Andrew Seitz, AFS Alaska Chapter President

Hello AFS Alaska Chapter,

It's amazing how time flies. As I write this, I am looking at birch leaves that are turning bright yellow right before my eyes. I can't help but reflect on summer, trying to recollect where time went and what I accomplished. Maybe you are in the same boat, so to speak, but I am confident that many of you accomplished great things related to jobs, family, home, adventures, and sustenance. Many times these overlap, and it is these accomplishments that make Alaska, our resources, and our lives, what they are.

I had the pleasure of interacting with hundreds, maybe thousands, of people connected to fish over the summer, while conducting my day job, several fieldwork campaigns, and helping teach summer courses to students of several different ages, and I never cease to be amazed by peoples' dedication to fish in this state. I realize that deep disagreements exist regarding fish, but nearly everyone with whom I interacted in a variety of settings truly wanted what is best for the fish. This dedication is reflected in our membership too, which is why volunteering for the AFS Alaska Chapter is such a rewarding endeavor.

In early September, the Alaska Chapter Executive Committee, holding its first meeting since spring, discussed and prioritized a variety of important topics that will help our Chapter continue to evolve. The biggest and most time-consuming task will be wrapping up a multi-year process of revising our Procedures Manual. This is our guiding document upon which we rely when procedural questions arise. Updates involve a multi-step process including Executive Committee proposed revisions, member input and voting (stay tuned for this), and review by a consultant with the AFS parent society. As we progress through these steps, I will keep you updated on progress.

One of the more exciting updates that will be reflected in our Procedures Manual is the future formation of sub-committees to execute procedures and decisions for two endowments that are now of sufficient size to begin disbursing money this upcoming year, the Student Presentation Awards Fund and the Meacham Family Student Travel Award Fund. The guiding principles of disbursing funds are codified in funding agreements, but we need people to actually identify recipients and execute the day-to-day tasks. These sub-committees will work closely with the Financial Assets Oversight Committee and the AFS Alaska Chapter treasurer to help manage these funds. If you are interested in new or additional volunteer opportunities in the Alaska Chapter, but are concerned about your time commitment, these are great opportunities as they should have relatively small time commitments while providing valuable service to the Chapter, the donors, and the recipients of the awards.

Speaking of opportunities, there are a myriad of other ways to help the Chapter, the most pressing of which is helping organize our Annual Meeting, to be held in Anchorage during 29 March 29–April 2, 2027. After organizing the meeting in March 2026 in Fairbanks, I can attest that it takes an army of volunteers to make the meeting happen. According to Chapter procedures, the President Elect, who is Dr. Erin Larson of the University of Alaska Anchorage, is organizing our upcoming meeting. Please be on the lookout for a call for volunteers, and if you miss it, please feel free to

Continued on page 3

The President's Corner, Continued

contact her directly at *presidentelect@afs-alaska.org* and inquire about opportunities.

One additional volunteer opportunity is fundraising for the Annual Meeting and the AFS Alaska Chapter, upon which I will expound in my next President's Corner. Stay tuned.

As always, if you have comments or questions, please feel free to email me at *president@afs-alaska.org*.

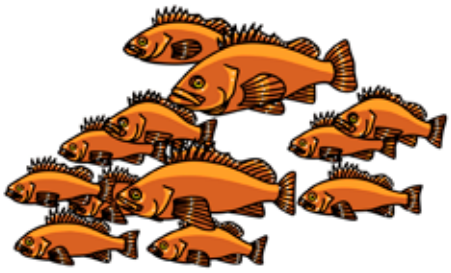
Sincerely,

Andy Seitz, President, Alaska Chapter of the American Fisheries Society

2027 AFS Alaska ChapterAnnual Meeting

We're looking forward to the 2027 AK AFS meeting during March 29–April 2, 2027. The overall meeting theme is "From Mountains to Sea: Navigating Past and Future Changes to Food Webs, Landscapes, and Temperatures," but any presentations from freshwater to marine, salmon or other species, and aspects of aquatic ecosystems are welcome.

The meeting will be held at the Marriott Downtown in Anchorage. If you would like to organize a session, please fill out this survey by November 20. Information on registration, the agenda and sessions, lodging options, and other meeting components will be posted on the *Alaska Chapter website*. If you have ideas for continuing education opportunities, or you are interested in joining the planning committee or being a meeting sponsor, please contact program chair Erin Larson at *presidentelect@afs-alaska.org*.



Life as a Volunteer on the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta, continued

surveys to gather subsistence harvest data, and community and KRITFC meetings discussing fisheries management options. Reflecting on the four values throughout the year helped me to organize my thoughts and experiences throughout these activities, and all the memories from that year shaped me in profound ways.

To live simply, we are encouraged to reject the maximalist lifestyle and to focus on relationships rather than objects, to be mindful of the present moment and the people and place around you. Living in Bethel on a volunteer's income made simple living come naturally as we had to be intentional with our finances. But many of my experiences working in fisheries and the people I met exemplified the fulfillment that can be found in living simply.

I was introduced to the subsistence way of life, where much thought and effort is put into harvesting what the land provides. The joy of catching dinner or providing for yourself or your community brings a sense of purpose, and working to do my part to ensure the land can continue to provide in the future was rewarding. My work involved quite a bit of travel which often meant packing light and camping out on schoolhouse floors or in canvas tents. At times it also meant simple meals that could be packed with our gear or eating what we caught at our destination. One of these trips took me to Takotna to help with the community-run weir. After being picked up from the Takotna air strip. we stopped on the side of the rode to watch a spruce grouse, the first of many I'd see on that trip (and we'd even be eating one that night). This was a perfect reminder of what it really means to live simply, find awe in the ordinary, and

Continued on next page

Life as a Volunteer on the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta, continued

to find the humility to appreciate the place, and people, around you.

The JVC also emphasizes being intentional with how we interact with others, to be honest, inclusive, and willing to work out our differences, to share responsibilities and learn from one another. I was able to find my role through my work with fisheries, but also helped in the Bethel community through coaching the junior high basketball team. I quickly learned the value of building relationships and living with others who may be different from you, especially when working in the field. About a week into my service year, I was sent out into the field to help break camp at the Kwethluk River weir site; I was going to be camping there for several days with some KRITFIC and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service employees who I had never met before. A couple hours before I left, I met my coworker who was boating upriver with me. By that evening, three of us were in the camp's maqivik (steam). When there are limited resources and only one way to get clean at camp, you are forced to get pretty close with those you are living with. Contrary to a lot of aspects of modern life where it is so easy to avoid interactions with others, working in fisheries made community an unavoidable aspect of life. As the year went on, I had other opportunities to engage and grow in the Bethel community. From working meetings to community meetings to household surveys, I learned how integral salmon are to the community, not only as a necessary resource, but also as a unifying presence and shared experiences for the community.

As a Catholic, I was always taught the importance of engaging with your spirituality, which is something the JVC also encourages. Throughout the year, our volunteer program provided opportunities to reflect and appreciate the ways our own and others' spirituality connects us to one another and the earth. This is a value that I also found I was able to interact with in a number of ways throughout my year. Whether it was how most large meetings begin with an invocation, or how local harvesters report on local catches or environmental and ecological conditions. This provided a great understanding of how local people are intrinsically connected to the surrounding world, resulting in a shared sense of spirituality. Personally, from boating on remote waters, to berry picking on the tundra, to flying up and down the Kuskokwim River, there were plenty of opportunities to be in nature and find the peace that often comes in these places.



Daniel O'Connor with a Rainbow Trout caught during sone downtime at the Kwethluk River weir. *Photo from Daniel O'Connor, BLM.*

The fourth JVC value, social and ecological justice, asks, with the understanding of the other three values, what kind of world would you like to create and what actions will you take to influence its creation? As JVs, we are called to work for peace and justice, being aware of how our attitudes and behavior affect others, to change structures which create poverty and oppression and destroy ecological systems, and to find solidarity with those afflicted and suffering due to social and ecological injustice. These principles were probably the most clearly present in the work I was able to be a part in this year. I learned a lot about the state of salmon fisheries in the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta, but also the importance of community involvement and trust, and the importance of hearing from the public and making sure all voices are heard. I was

Life as a Volunteer on the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta, continued

able to see how climate change and environmental harm will often hurt those people and places on the margins first, but I was also able to be a part of the effort to ensure the land will be healthy for future generations.

At times, my year working out ot Bethel was very hard, being in a new place and away from family, but the lessons learned and the memories I have from these experiences will never be forgetten. The experiences reminded me that in a time where it is easy to be disconnected from the world around you, it is more important than ever to stay connected to the land we live on as well as to those who came before us on this land. And with that comes the responsibility to make a more just and kind world for those that come after.

After growing up in Yakima, WA, Daniel O'Connor obtained a B.S. in chemical engineering from the University of Notre Dame before working out of Bethel, AK, for a year as a Jesuit Volunteer with the Kuskokwim River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission. Daniel now works with the U.S. Bureau of Land Management in Wenatchee, WA, on Post-Fire Emergency Stabilization and Rehabilitation.



Danial O'Connor empties the live-box at the Takotna River weir. Photo from Andrew Magel, KRITFC.

Kaylee Brown 2026 Molly Ahlgren Scholarship Recipient

In 2022, after finishing an associate degree in the humanities, a lack of passion and certainty led to a decision to quit pursuing a formal education and make the move to Juneau, Alaska. In 2025, a rediscovery of curiosity, joy, and delight in the natural world led to my decision to return to school, an inclination I see plainly reflected in Molly Ahlgren's life and legacy.

I did not know Molly Ahlgren. Though, through her memoriam, I regarded an image of a woman who was not only a champion of the sciences, but also, a source of radiant felicity to all those she encountered. My education is wildly important to me, and Molly Ahlgren's dedication, vibrant passion, and curious nature have surely inspired me to remain grounded in joy and wonderment throughout my academics. However, it's clear that a person like the late Professor Ahlgren is more than her contributions to science. She was a friend, a community member, and a teacher, who inspired students in her work in the fisheries sciences at Sheldon Jackson College. Through this scholarship, she continues to do so even after her passing. For me, the part of her legacy that describes her infectious aliveness inspires me most.



Kaylee Brown, one of the recipients of the 2026 Molly Ahlgren Scholarship. Photo by Parker Winston

I was in Home Depot searching for LED grow lights for my houseplants when I received the news I was awarded the scholarship. I cried. As a somewhat nontraditional student who chose to continue working to fund my education, receiving this scholarship changed the trajectory of my semester and relieved much of the pressure that comes with working while in school. That spring, I focused on chemistry, glaciology, and forest ecology, which formed a picture of the ecosystem

Continued on next page

Summer 2026 Student Graduates

Please join us in congratulating the following students who recently graduated.

Brauner, Megan – (Ph.D. in Oceanography; Advisor Gwenn Hennon) Iron Availability Structures Microbial Communities, Metabolism, and Interactions Across the Northern Gulf of Alaska Shelf Gradient

Commins, Mary – (M.S. in Fisheries; Advisor Megan McPhee) - Second-Generation Effects of Short-Term Hatchery Supplementation in Auke Lake Sockeye Salmon

Deach, Melissa – (M.M.P.; Advisor Keith Criddle) - Whale Vessel Strikes: A Comparison of U.S. East Coast and West Coast Policies

Goodwin, Maris – (M.S. in Fisheries; Advisor Jessica Glass) - Environmental DNA Metabarcoding Insights into Spatiotemporal Patterns and Environmental Correlates of Gulf of Alaska Estuarine Fish Communities

Harings, Margaret – (M.S. in Fisheries; Advisors J. Andres Lopéz and Erik Schoen) - Harnessing Environmental DNA to Understand Salmon Run Timing and Abundance in Tributaries of the Yukon River

Harris, Rahnal (Dondei) – (M.M.P.; Advisor Keith Criddle) - Closing the Arctic Enforcement Gap: Maritime Domain Awareness, Force Design 2028, and the Future of Arctic IUU Fishing Governance

Hayden, Natasha - (M.S. in Interdisciplinary Studies; Advisor Courtney Carothers) - Exploring the Relationship Between Alutiiq People of Kodiak Island and Salmon in the Twenty-First Century

Johnson, Carter – (Ph.D. in Fisheries; Advisor Ginny Eckert) - Effects of Sea Otters on Dungeness Crab in Southeast Alaska

Nicholson, Emily – (M.S. in Marine Biology; Advisor Brenda Konar) - Spatial, Temporal, and Environmental Characteristics Associated with Alaskan Oyster Farm Biofouling Communities

O'Connor, Jordan – (M.M.S.; Advisor Lara Horstmann) - Assessment of Microplastics Exposure, Translocation, and Potential Long-Term Storage in Alaska Polar Bears

O'Neil, Riley – (M.S. in Marine Biology; Advisor Brenda Konar) - Influence of Alaskan Oyster Farms on Benthic and Sea Otter Prey Communities

Russo, Andrew – (M.M.P; Advisor Keith Criddle) - Everyone Agrees, No One Acts: The "Unrules" that Quietly Govern International Fisheries Law

Kaylee Brown, continued

that allow the aquatic species I had become enamored with to thrive.

That summer, I completed my second season with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game where I cataloged the presence of vital salmon species in small streams, especially coho. I applied my newly minted knowledge of the Alaskan environment to identifying juvenile fish and to a monitoring project where I learned to identify the macroinvertebrate species these animals feed on.

To say that I am grateful doesn't capture the impact of the scholarship on my overall education. To say that I am inspired doesn't capture the awe. A person like Molly Ahlgren is special, and although I never met her, it is more than obvious she was someone I'd like to model. In my future, I hope not only to capture a version of her passion for detritivores or sea cucumbers, but also her knack for spreading that passion to all those who came to listen.

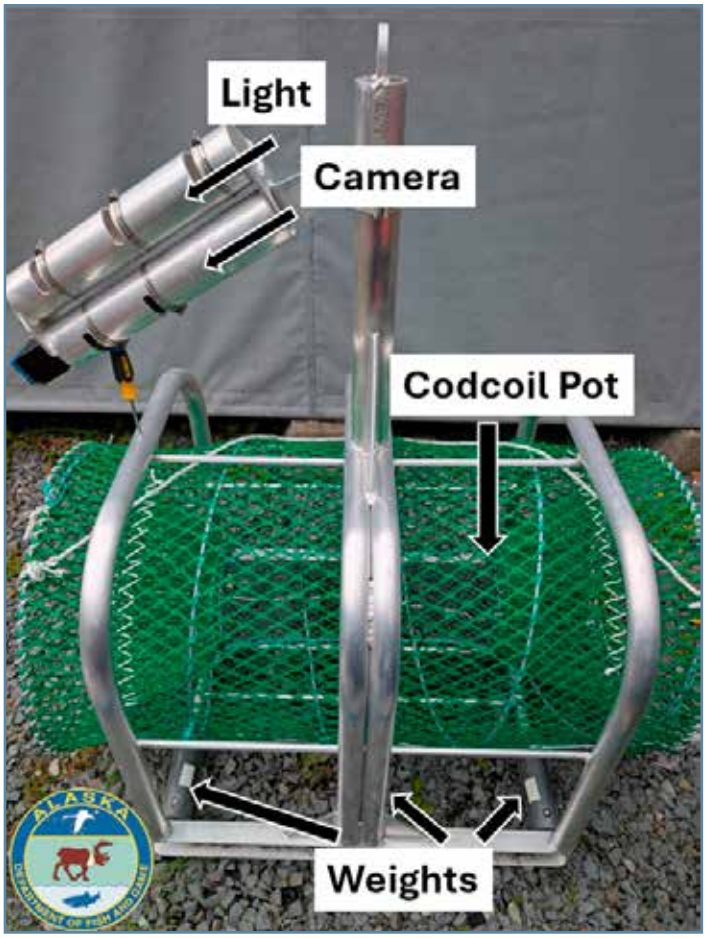
Lights, Camera, Sablefish…But Wait, Sharks!?

Abigail Brady, Rhea Ehresmann, and Aaron Baldwin

In July 2026, the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) deployed a special research project to capture underwater footage of Sablefish (*Anoplopoma fimbria*) interacting with collapsible codcoil pots during the Northern Southeast Inside Subdistrict Chatham Strait Sablefish survey. The research project involved deploying one standalone camera-equipped pot in addition to the 14 standardized survey stations. The collapsible pot was fixed inside an aluminum frame using heavy-duty twist ties and baited using 4 lb of Illex squid in a bait bag. A GitUP camera and a 3,500-lumen light, both in waterproof housings, were attached to the aluminum frame above the pot, providing a view of one of the pot's ends where Sablefish enter through a tunnel.

During standard survey operations, two of the 14 standardized stations were set in the evening, with a third station set the following morning. To minimize disruptions to the standard survey operations, the standalone camera unit was deployed in the morning before the third station was set. This schedule ensured that the camera unit was out of the way during setting and hauling of other gear, and that the soak time was not much longer than the battery life of the light, which was approximately seven hours. In some instances, the camera was hauled in less than seven hours, allowing us to capture unique footage of the haul. While there were some setbacks and troubleshooting during the trial runs of the device, by the fourth deployment, we collected much-improved footage.

There is no shortage of life at depths of 300–350 fathoms (1,800–2,100 ft). A boreopacific armhook squid (*Gonatopsis borealis*) bumped into the pot during its descent, and what looked like a Spiny Dogfish (*Squalus suckleyi*) could also be seen lurking at the side of the frame. Once the camera settled on the ocean floor, we were able to see a variety of benthic life among deployments. Some areas were muddy, while others showed hard substrates with scattered anemones, shells, and various brittle star species. Pacific glass shrimp (*Pasiphaea pacifica*), Sablefish, and Pacific Halibut (*Hippoglossus stenolepis*) were observed interacting with the pot. Armored brittle stars (*Stegophiura ponderosa*) were quite energetic, while spiny-brown brittle stars (*Ophiophthalmus cataleimmoidus*) were noticeably less mobile.



The aluminum frame supporting a light, camera, and baited collapsible codcoil pot, with approximately ding 66 lb of lead to help ensure an upright landing. Photo from Rhea Ehresmann, ADF&G.

An unbelievable amount of excitement occurred during video review when the camera captured unexpected footage of Pacific Sleeper Sharks (*Somniosus pacificus*) interacting with the pot at multiple locations. There is a lack of footage of Sleeper Sharks in Alaska and limited understanding of their life history. Sleeper Sharks are occasionally caught during commercial fishing and have been documented as bycatch in various fisheries. These sharks can become entangled in the groundline used for longline fishing or caught in purse seines. While Pacific Sleeper Sharks are known to feed on cephalopods, flounders, marine mammal carrion, and other prey, these sharks were possibly attracted by both the bait and the light. Despite

Lights, Camera, Sablefish…But Wait, Sharks!?, continued

the aluminum frame weighing nearly 100 lb, Sleeper Sharks were able to move it with relative ease. Footage documented the sharks pushing and tipping the frame. During one deployment, a Sleeper Shark tipped the frame backward, then tipped it forward again, ultimately rolling it onto its side. Although this final movement displaced the frame, it also provided a clear view of the shark's lateral profile during the haul.



Sablefish swarm around the codcoil pot, attracted by Illex squid bait and a 3,500-lumen light. Brittle stars and an anemone are visible on the seafloor. Photo from Rhea Ehresmann, ADF&G.

The opportunity to obtain footage of Sablefish and other species at such depths was exciting. Our primary objective was to observe how Sablefish interacted with collapsible codcoil pots, and we were successful in capturing some great footage. However, it remains unclear whether their curious and cautious behaviors were influenced by the light at these depths or whether they are generally cautious around the pots. We plan to redeploy this camera during future surveys to capture additional footage and better understand Sablefish behaviors and interactions with other marine fauna in our state waters. If you would like to check out the highlights from our survey, you can watch our video online at the following links: Facebook: *https://www.facebook.com/reel/37915795328065368*; Vimeo: *https://vimeo.com/1221865628?share=copy&fl=sv&fe=ci*.

Letter Concerning Cuts to Federal Employees

The AFS Alaska Chapter was recently approached by the Alaska chapters of The Wildlife Society and the Society of American Foresters about submitting a joint letter from our organizations to Alaska's congressional delegation expressing our concern about cuts to federal resource agencies that support responsible management of fish, wildlife, and forests. The letter stressed that around 30% of personnel in natural resource agencies of the Department of the Interior and Department of Agriculture have left federal service, and remaining staff are stretched overly thin, negatively affecting the abilities of agencies to oversee management of natural resources on the 224 million acres of federal lands in Alaska. The letter further encouraged that natural resource agencies be funded at levels at least comparable to recent years. The AFS Alaska Chapter Executive Committee supported a joint letter, but wanted to ensure support by the Chapter membership. A poll on SurveyMonkey received 55 responses with 54 expressing support for a joint letter and 1 in opposition. Andy Seitz, AFS Alaska Chapter President, signed the letter on behalf of the AFS Alaska Chapter membership.

Student Subunit Happenings

Emily Williams, Student Subunit Representatives

Subunit Officers – The 2026-2027 Subunit Officers are President Blake Toney (Juneau), Vice President Dakota Rygh (Juneau), Secretary Willa Johnson (Sitka), Treasurer Danielle Tyron (Fairbanks), and Recruitment and Engagement Liaison Roberto Ponce Velez (Fairbanks). As we get our Subunit Instagram (*uaf_afs_studentsubunit*) up and running this year, we plan to continue highlighting research being conducted by our members. If you are a student and would like your work highlighted, please email *student@afs-alaska.org* or message us on Instagram.

Subunit meetings – The Subunit started the 2026 academic year with a September meeting where students received an overview presentation on AFS structure, its mission, and the many additional opportunities for students. We also played a fun fish trivia game, put together by Sam Comeau (former AK AFS subunit president) that tested students fish knowledge and brought out some friendly competition! Both the Fairbanks and Juneau campuses had a great turnout with a large number of undergraduates participating in Fairbanks. More recently, the subunit has been planning our next meeting that will take place in October. If you are a student subunit member and have any insight into meetings you would like to see this year, please reach out to *student@afs-alaska.org*.



AFS Alaska Chapter Student Representative Emily Williams.

AFS Alaska Chapter Annual Meeting Preparation – The 53rd AFS Alaska Chapter annual meeting will be taking place March 29–April 2, 2027, in Anchorage. In preparation for the meeting the student subunit will be planning the student symposium for students to give practice talks, planning the student retreat that will happen the week before the conference in Anchorage, and soliciting auction items for the annual meeting. If you are a student interested in helping with any of these or with the main annual meeting planning, please email *student@afs-alaska.org*.

Professional Development Workshops

Maggie Chan

If anyone has ideas for professional development workshops or has an interest in teaching a workshop, please contact Maggie Chan (*maggie.chan@noaa.gov*).

Oncorhynchus back issues at
https://www.afs-alaska.org/newsletter

Recruiting for Chapter Historian

After nearly 23 years as the AFS Alaska Chapter Historian, Randy Brown has stepped down. Prior to stepping down, Randy maintained spreadsheets with historical AFS Alaska Chapter information such as awards, committees, Executive Committee officers, annual meeting details, etc. Randy also maintained digital archives related to major Chapter initiatives, such as Chapter positions on mineral developments, timber practices, and other activities that could adversely affect fish habitats. Requests for historical information are relatively rare and resolved by simply looking into the historical files. With the AFS Alaska Chapter seeking a new historian, if that might be you, please contact Chapter President Andy Seitz (*president@afs-alaska.org*) for more information.

Molly Ahlgren Undergraduate Scholarship

The Molly Ahlgren Scholarship was established by the family of Dr. Molly Ahlgren and the Alaska Chapter of the American Fisheries Society (AFS) in 2004 to honor Dr. Ahlgren's life and dedication as an Associate Professor of environmental science at Sheldon Jackson College (*https://afs-alaska.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/27/2025/12/onco251.pdf*).

There will be a total of $8,000 available from the Molly Ahlgren Scholarship Fund to be awarded in the current funding cycle as either one, two, or three scholarships, depending on the qualifications of the applicants. The maximum scholarship amount would be $8,000 and the minimum amount $2,000. The Scholarship will be provided for the 2027 Spring semester to undergraduate students in their sophomore, junior, or senior year of studies pursuing a baccalaureate degree involving the disciplines of fisheries, aquatic, or biological science. The Scholarship selection will be made in the fall of 2026.

Applicants will be evaluated on their work and/or educational experiences and interest in the disciplines involving fisheries, aquatic, or biological science, interest in professional advancement, and reason(s) for financial need. The Scholarship recipient(s) will be introduced at the Alaska Chapter Annual Meeting to be held in Anchorage, AK, during March 29–April 2, 2027. Travel to the Annual Meeting is recommended, but not required. The Alaska Chapter is working on establishing funding for travel expenses, but funding is not currently identified.

If travel funds become available and the Scholarship recipient(s) attend the Alaska Chapter meeting, they will be expected to write a brief statement about their experience at the Alaska Chapter meeting that will be published in the AFS Alaska Chapter newsletter, Oncorhynchus. Recipients will also be expected to be a member of the AFS or have submitted an application to become a student member of the AFS, if awarded a scholarship. Applications must be received before 5:00 PM Alaska Time, Thursday, November 12, 2026. For any questions and additional application information, email Ray Hander at *masc@afs-alaska.org*.

2026 Coastal Connections Camps

The Coastal Connections Camps program is supported by Alaska Sea Grant and the CORaL (Community Organized Restoration and Learning) Network, a consortium of educational organizations funded by the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill Trustee Council. The five-year old summer camp program served a record 88 middle-school campers across nine camps in six locations. including Valdez, Kodiak, Seward, and Whittier, and expanding to Seldovia and Bethel in 2026, with Bethel marking the first time for activities along the Bering Sea.

The weeklong day camps focus on science, teamwork, and personal resilience. Guided by the Whole Being Teaching method, camp structure aims to nurture students' cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development while learning about local environments. Camps include traditional summer fun like kayaking, hiking, and art projects, as well as scientific discovery, team-building exercises, and content aimed at individual growth.

The new Bethel camp drew its activities and lessons from the natural and human history of the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta. Students learned about the cultural importance of kayaks in Western Alaska, kayaked on a local lake, collected water samples, and examined samples under microscopes. Students also visited a traditional fish camp on the Kuskokwim River, gaining hands-on experience in subsistence practices and learning about the importance of salmon to the region.



Nolan Nicholas in the Bethel camp uses a microscope to identify plankton samples from lake water.
Photo by Kyle Kolda\, Alaska Sea Grant.

Environmental Concerns Corner

Joel Markis and Sue Mauger

This fall, the AFS Alaska Chapter added its voice to two federal rulemakings, both with potentially real consequences for Alaska's fish and fish habitat. On the proposed rescission of the 2001 Roadless Rule, the Chapter co-signed the parent society's national comment letter. That letter urged the U.S. Forest Service to keep durable protections for the nation's roughly 45 million acres of inventoried roadless areas, and noted that the Tongass and Chugach national forests contribute an estimated 25% of Alaska's commercial salmon harvest. The Chapter also submitted its own Alaska-specific letter, pointing out that the rescission is being justified nationally by wildfire risk, a rationale that does not fit the coastal rainforests of Southeast and Southcentral Alaska.

On the proposed narrowing of the definition of "waters of the United States" (WOTUS) under the Clean Water Act, AFS joined the Coastal and Estuarine Research Federation in opposing the change. The Chapter again submitted its own Alaska-specific comments, noting that a standard limiting protection to waters that flow year-round and wetlands that are permanently flooded fits poorly in the Arctic. Many Arctic streams are frozen for much of the year and wetlands sit over permafrost, yet both provide essential fish habitat during the open-water season. For a state with more wetlands than the rest of the country combined, that matters. Both Chapter letters received unanimous approval from the Alaska Chapter Executive Committee and are archived on the Chapter website. Comments like these are important for Alaska and help build the scientific record that we all hope decisions are based on.

AK Chapter AFS Comments: Rescinding 2001 Roadless Rule

AFS Roadless Rule Comment Letter

AK Chapter AFS WOTUS Comment Letter

AFS / CERF Joint WOTUS Comment Letter

Currently, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has proposed a rule, prompted by a petition from the Alaska Oil and Gas Association, that would create a streamlined permitting track for oil and gas production sites in the National Petroleum Reserve in Alaska (NPR-A). Sites within 25 miles of existing infrastructure could use this streamlined process, including qualifying pads, roads, and pipelines which would be approved within 60 days under a single rule-level environmental impact statement, rather than the project-specific review and public input that accompanied past developments like the Willow Project. The BLM is asking for input on questions where fisheries professionals have real expertise. These include what fish and habitat surveys should be required before an application is submitted, whether special areas such as Teshekpuk Lake and the Colville River should be excluded, and whether the number of approvals should be capped? Comments on the proposed rule change are due November 9, 2026, through *regulations.gov* (docket BLM-2026-0133). The BLM has also drafted a partial overarching Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to go alongside the proposed rule. The partial EIS (Chapters 1 and 2) covers the purpose and need and outlines four alternatives. Comments that "address the alternatives, scope of analysis, and potential environmental concerns the BLM should consider as it completes the environmental review process" should be submitted through BLM's ePlanning site (DOI-BLM-AK-0000-2026-0012-EIS). We encourage Chapter members to review both and add their expertise and voice.

Alaska Beacon Article on Permitting on NPR-A

NPR-A Proposed Rule Comments

BLM NPR-A Production Site Development EIS Comments

Finally, if you are interested in joining our environmental concerns listserv, email *ecc@afs-alaska.org* with "Join ECC Listserv" in the subject line and we will sign you up. This listserv will be a space for learning and discussion and hopefully improve our capacity for commenting as a Chapter on projects or permits where our fisheries expertise will be valuable.

AFS Alaska Chapter Meeting

March 29–April 2, 2027

Anchorage, Alaska

Meetings and Events

Alaska Marine Science Symposium AMSS.png

January 25–39, 2027. This meeting will be held in Anchorage, AK. For more information go to *https://www.alaskamarinescience.org*.

American Fisheries Society Alaska Chapter Annual Meeting March 29–April 2, 2027.

The 53rd annual meeting of the AFS Alaska Chapter will be in Anchorage AK. More information will be posted at *https://afs-alaska.org*.

American Fisheries Society Western Division Annual Meeting

May 9–13, 2027. The next AFS Western Division meeting will be in Tucson, AZ. More information will be posted at *https://wdafs.org/meetings/annual-meeting*.

American Fisheries Society Parent Society Annual Meeting

September 26-30, 2027. The 156th annual meeting will be held in Pittsburgh, PA. For more information go to *https://afsannualmeeting.fisheries.org*.

NPRB Photography Awards

The Photography Awards contest sponsored by the North Pacific Research Board is back for 2026. Professional, amateur, and youth photographers are all encouraged to submit up to five images of seascapes, marine life, and/or human connections, as well as the new category called "Photo Story." Images must be taken within the waters of the North Pacific Ocean including the Gulf of Alaska, Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands, and Bering Strait or Chukchi/Beaufort Seas. Cash awards will be given to the top three photos along with and the chance to be published in the annual NPRB calendar. The entry deadline is December 1, 2026. For entry information, go to *https://nprb.org/photo-awards*.

AFS Code of Conduct

The Ethics and Professional Conduct Committee (EPCC) of the American Fisheries Society has developed a code of conduct for our meetings and AFS-sponsored functions, whether virtual or in person. This brief document is available at *https://fisheries.org/about/governance/afs-meetings-code-of-conduct/*. Please read through this document to ensure that we are collectively working to build awareness of this policy to ensure that all AFS-related gatherings are a respectful and inclusive experience for everyone.

The Alaska Chapter
of the American Fisheries Society
is a 501 (c)(3) tax exempt organization
EIN 23-7368960.

ONCORHYNCHUS

Oncorhynchus is the quarterly newsletter of the Alaska Chapter of the American Fisheries Society. Material in this newsletter may be reprinted from other AFS websites.

Editor
Bill Bechtol
Bechtol Research
P.O. Box 3426, Homer 99603-3426
Phone 299-6146
bechtolresearch@hughes.net

Production
Connie Taylor
Fathom Publishing
P.O. Box 200448, Anchorage 99520-0448
Phone/Fax 272-3305
Connie@FathomPublishing.com

Please submit materials for the next issue of *Oncorhynchus* by December 15.

2026–27 Alaska Chapter Officers

President Andy Seitz
University of Alaska Fairbank
president@afs-alaska.org

President-Elect Erin Larson
UAA Alaska Center for Conservation Science
presidentelect@afs-alaska.org

Vice President Taylor Scott
Northern Southeast Regional Aquacuture Association
vicepresident@afs-alaska.org

Immediate Past-President Whitney Crittenden
Alaska Department of Fish and Game
pastpresident@afs-alaska.org

Treasurer Trent Dodson
Kenai Watershed Forum,
907-486-6555, *treasurer@afs-alaska.org.*

Secretary Andrea James
Chickaloon Village Traditional Council
secretary@afs-alaska.org.

Student Subunit Representative Emily Williams
University of Alaska Fairbanks
student@afs-alaska.org.

Feel free to contact the Executive Committee members.