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A letter from Dr. M. Elizabeth Clarke, FRAM Division Director

There's exciting news in this edition of Groundfish Research. But I'm grabbing this first paragraph as an opportunity to offer everyone in Fishery Resource and Analysis a warm and sincere "thank you" for the many ways in which you have made my new job easier.

This summer has been an exciting time for us all, especially with the launch of the Groundfish Observer Program for the west coast trawl fleet. Our twenty observers (and five alternates) successfully completed a rigorous training program, and are now either at sea or preparing to leave. Their skills will net a wealth of important data for the Center, especially on issues related to bycatch. We wish each of our observers – and the skippers and crews who have been so cooperative in placing them in vessels –

fair weather, good fishing, and a safe return.

Also in this newsletter is a "thank you and farewell" to Cyreis C. Schmitt. After four years at the Northwest Fisheries Science Center, Cyreis is returning to the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife. Having her around when I became FRAM Division Director made the transition into the job infinitely easier. Which makes me just one more person who will miss her warm personality and outstanding work.

I know we have many challenges still to meet, but the Observer Program shows we are starting to make some progress.

Dr. M. Elizabeth Clarke, FRAM

Observer Program begins!

The new West Coast observer program is under sail! Twenty observers, and five alternates, began their training in late July to implement the first comprehensive coast-wide observer program to examine groundfish discard rates. The first observers are now at sea on both fixed gear and trawl vessels.

The first three observers were deployed during August, in the fixed-gear sablefish fishery, two on longliners and one on a pot vessel. Since September 1, ten more observers have already gone out on groundfish boats. More are being deployed every day. In all, 22 observing trips have been completed or are under way, for a total of 83 observer-days at sea.

The data that's coming ashore will provide accurate, fleet-wide information on total catch and bycatch associated with different fisheries and fish stocks. The fleet has been very cooperative in helping us place observers on their vessels.

Safety is a high priority. "Observers are outfitted with safety gear which meets or exceeds the safety gear of any observer program in the U.S.," explains Elizabeth Clarke, Director of the NWFS's Fishery Resource and Analysis Division (FRAM). FRAM has led development of this observer program. "Included in the observers' gear are 406 MHz category II satellite EPRIBs."

Observers will be transmitting their catch data electronically via the Observer Module of the Electronic Fish Catch Logbook (EFCL), a system developed by the Northwest Fisheries Science Center. The EFCL is designed to simplify the entry and increase the amount of commercial fishing data, with the added benefit of improving data access and verification.



Charter Observer class

Standing (left to right): Ted Erickson, Sean Balcklocke (alternate), Tim Peretti, John Mahan, John LaFargue, Allen Cramer, Steve Todd, Matt Drum, Tony Ventola, Doug Draper, Jillian Spencer (alternate), David Pearl (alternate), Greg Seeligson, and Ross Ferguson.

Middle row (left to right): Susan Strand (alternate), Karie Holtermann, and Andrea Crumpacker.

Seated (left to right): Garry Dale, Jenn Rogan, Jennifer Eichelberger, Tai Rymar, Kirsten Fleming, and Sharon Skeete (alternate).

Not pictured: Gerald Kuras, Lin Bennett, and Jon McVeigh.

Meet your Observer Program Coordinators



From left to right: John LaFargue, Jim Benante, Jonathan Cusick, and Janell Majewski

John LaFargue California Coordinator (Eureka, CA)

John studied marine fisheries at Humboldt State University. After graduating, he ventured to Alaska to work as a North Pacific observer, but even the charms of Dutch Harbor, Kodiak and Sand Point couldn't keep him there, and he moved on to observing the California/Oregon drift gillnet fleet. After working for the Southwest NMFS region for several years, he became lead observer for the Monterey Bay set gillnet observer program. John has also acted as an observer advisor for skipper workshops and marine mammal take reduction team meetings, and he attended the Observer Workshop in Newfoundland last year. John is excited about his move back to Arcata/Eureka and is looking forward to working closely with both the observers and the fishermen. He believes strongly in observer safety and put together an excellent safety-training program for the observers. When not tied to his desk, John can be found mushroom hunting, fly fishing, or traveling.

Janell Majewski Washington Coordinator (Seattle, WA)

After studying biology at Pacific Lutheran University, Janell became a North Pacific observer, surviving the rigors of the North Pacific for two and a half years. She then moved to the Coopera-

tive Fish and Wildlife Research Unit, where she researched bird predation on salmon smolts along the Yakima River. After that she participated in a seal predation project with the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife. Intrigued by the prospect of working with the new West Coast Groundfish Program, she took a position as a coordinator for both the Hake and Groundfish programs. Now that the observers are in their ports, Janell can be found hiking remote country trails, kayaking the Sound, or weeding her yard.

Jim Benante PSMFC Coordinator

Jim grew up in the Midwest and attended the University of Dayton. He graduated in 1996 with a B.S. in Biology. Jim brings with him nearly 6 years experience with observer programs as an observer, coordinator, and manager. He has observed on over 50 different vessels in the North Pacific Groundfish Observer Program, Pacific Drift Gillnet Observer Program, Mid-Atlantic Coastal Gillnet Observer Program, and Cook Inlet Marine Mammal Observer Program. Jim participated in the 2nd Biennial Observer Workshop in St John's Newfound as a panel member, and has actively participated in North Pacific Fishery Management Council meetings regarding observer issues and skipper workshops for the Pacific Drift Gillnet Observer Program. Jim's hobbies include anything that is outdoors and physically challenging.

Jonathan Cusick Oregon Coordinator (Newport, OR)

Jonathan grew up along the coast of California and received his Bachelor of Science in Marine Biology from San Francisco State University in December 1993. While attending university, he aided NMFS scientists at the Tiburon Lab with projects on salmon stomach contents and lingcod aging. For the past five years, he has worked as a North Pacific Groundfish Observer throughout Alaska and has spent two summers as an international fisheries observer on Japanese tuna longliners in the Southern Indian Ocean. He joined the West Coast Observer Program in April of this year, and is very pleased with the high level of experience and professionalism of the observers being deployed.

Thank you and farewell to

After four years of invaluable service to the Northwest Fisheries Science Center, Cyreis Schmitt is returning to her “home” at the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife. Everyone at NWFS will be sorry to see her go.

Cyreis came to the Center four years ago on a Intergovernmental Personnel Agreement from the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, so we always knew she was only “on loan.” Nevertheless, Dr. Rick Methot (now Groundfish Science Advisor, and until recently Director of FRAM), describes her as “my right-hand person in the Division; a tremendous manager and communicator who was always willing to meet new challenges.”



She came to the agency with the immediate brief of working to define “essential fish habitat.” That’s a big challenge in itself, but soon she was, in addition, coordinating all reviews of stock assessments. Finally, and simultaneously with these first two roles, Cyreis took on the position of Program Manager for groundfish.

Cyreis impressed everyone she worked with as exceptionally positive, smart, and articulate. Her wide-ranging knowledge of fisheries issues, both on the west coast and in Alaska, was crucial to the

Center’s role in the stewardship of sustainable fisheries. Whatever the challenge, though, what strikes people most is Cyreis’ talent for building good communication – whether with external reviewers, other agencies, the Pacific Fisheries Management Council, or representatives of conservation groups or the fishing industry.

Rod Moore, Chairman of the Pacific Fisheries Management Council’s Groundfish Advisory Panel, has worked closely with Cyreis for many years. “I have been around NMFS people all over the world since 1977,” he says, “and Cyreis is one of the most outstanding representatives of the agency I have met in that time. She was always especially skilled at bringing different ‘sides’ together.”

Dr. Elizabeth Clarke, who succeeded Rick Methot at the head of FRAM, describes her as “an invaluable asset for a new Director.” And FRAM Fisheries biologist Teresa Turk has called her “a mentor and an inspiration.”

We wish her well in her return to the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife – even if we are a little jealous of them for getting her back.

