

Salmon Dependent Community Sustainability and Well-Being Breakout Session

More than 20 people participated in the breakout session: Community Sustainability and Well-Being. Participants shared perspectives and ideas from across salmon dependent Alaska communities including King Cove, Cordova, St. Paul, Bethel and several more from southeast, Bristol Bay, the Aleutian Islands and along the Yukon River. Generally speaking, questions guiding group discussion included:

1. What does well-being look like?
2. What challenges do we face to ensure well-being in salmon-dependent communities?
3. Recommendations for change: What opportunities and solutions exist to affect positive change and enhance well-being?

Given the large group size, participants broke into three smaller (sub)groups to enhance dialogue and ensure input from all members. Although each group discussion took its own specific direction, salient themes emerged across subgroups. Elaborated on more fully below, key themes centered on the importance of:

- Inter-generational knowledge, learning and engagement with salmon
- Keeping fishing rights and livelihoods in Alaska, and especially in rural and salmon dependent communities
- Local participation, input and power in decision-making processes and resource management
- Healthy salmon fisheries, ecosystems and food systems, including ability to address climate change and other impacts; and manage the resource and sustainable harvest levels amidst drastic state budget cuts

1. What does well-being look like?

Social and Community Dimensions

- Healthy Salmon = Healthy Communities
- Counter to well-being = Forced assimilation
- Strong community foundations: schools, gathering places, infrastructure
- Taking care of elders in community (not just physically)
- Happy, healthy homes/households
- Safe environment for families (emotional, physical)
- Celebrating culture
- Values in actions: respect, community, elders, experiential learning, language
- Sense of cultural pride, confidence

Physical Dimensions

- Full freezer or full smoke-house
- Mental health (trauma, nutrition, vitamin D)
- Physical health (and caring about oneself)
- Movement through landscape (and ability to adapt to changes)
- Increased access to landscape, food (transport, tools, gear)

Knowledge and Learning

- Alaskans teaching in Alaska, returning home to contribute to community

- Increase in “mentorships”: informal, need open communication about desires to participate
- Foster curiosity, desire to learn skills, allow learning to occur
- Families passing on/retaining fishing practices, culture to kids
- Culture camps as a way to transfer knowledge of salmon, traditional values, etc. (Some kids won't get the knowledge/education without it)

Access, Governance and Control Over One's Livelihood

- Having access to livelihoods
- Having control over your own life
- Ability to stay in the region, to stop the migration of fishing permits away from community
- Continued access to resource by local people to ensure food security and local ability to enter 'salmon centric' jobs
- Valuing one's own knowledge and being valued by others
- Recognition in governance
- Partnerships (sharing ideas)

2. What challenges exist to ensure well-being of salmon dependent communities?

- Need to educate and provide youth opportunities in our salmon-dependent communities
- Need to change perspectives on commercial fishing so young people want to come back to communities
- Geographic challenges to participating in governance and management process
- Restrictions on king salmon harvests in Western Alaska = complexity of effects
- Five Bristol Bay communities are distressed (with average income around \$10,000)
- How to keep fishing rights in our communities? Size and diversity of state and industry is a major impediment. Need to be aware of scope and complexity of decision making authorities and regulatory and legal authorities (federal, state, tribal, etc.) and challenges
- Transferability of fishing rights affects communities but we can't extinguish transferability because of constitution
- Acceptance of limited access as a management system is key to Alaska's reputation as a well-managed fishery.
- Alaska's in a weird spot – wanting to “sing from same sheet” on salmon, but there is so much outside input/interest/political power. Alaskans need to stand up and say “we want to get salmon right for our communities” and collectively push back on outside forces
- Overcapitalization of fleet is an impediment (e.g. \$2.9 million replacement value of vessel, sold it for \$350,000)
- Profitability - overcapitalization of fleet (vessels), global economy/markets
- Diversification challenges - access rights, but also local economy as a whole; difficult for people to stay and make a living
- Housing/Cost of living
- Knowledge gaps – what do we need to know?: 1) Fish returning stability/run variability – oceanic conditions beyond control and not as predictive; and 2) TEK can be useful, knowing the past helps inform the present but the solutions of the past are different from solutions of the future.

- Funding for monitoring/accurate management: knowledge and understanding from biology/ecology
- Some big things are beyond our immediate control (e.g. climate change, ocean temperatures, etc.)
- Wild vs hatchery fish: competition for resources
- Wide differences in salmon returns to specific regions
- Local/TEK is often not considered
- More demands on the resource than in the past, need balance between users
- Regulations - Management structure, (mis)understanding of regulations, user groups and areas
- Fear of regulations/laws, consequences; criminalization of living, subsistence ways
- Climate change (eroding shorelines, shifting fish/wildlife timing and distribution)
- State budget cuts to monitoring projects, challenge to whole state (e.g. AYK counting towers, weir in PWS).
- Responsible mining in waterways – Canadian mines are undermining the sustainability of our fisheries resources. Need more dialogue with first peoples of Canada and Canadian government
- Lack of boots-on-the-ground knowledge/understanding
- Turnover, loss of institutional, other types of knowledge
- Antagonistic management
- Lack of cultural awareness
- Fear
- Coordination, self-determination of communities with respect to management
- Not understanding species changes/adaptability
- Language barriers, “Language” barriers
- Negative stereotypes, western perspective is dominant, little/no room for others perspectives
- Devaluing local livelihoods (e.g. Go to college!)
- Outsiders, problematic interactions
- Community rapport
- Need community involvement in project development, research
- Substance abuse (new, more)
- Lack of power, control, self-determination, self-governance

3. What opportunities and solutions exist to affect positive change?

- State of Alaska needs a state policy that reflects our needs: “This is our policy.”
- “If we’re going to get the salmon story right, we’re going to do it in Alaska.”
- Need for state-wide, collective-level work, unified voice, people power; but also need to recognize that one size (solutions) doesn’t fit all; there is a need to create local/regional solutions that won’t be resisted or opposed in other regions of state.
- Educate kids from early ages, instill value of local salmon at that early age (e.g. setnet camps, culture camps, more local young kids guiding fly fishing, participate in non-consumptive uses – this worked well in Bristol Bay).
- Keep kids connected to fishing traditions: culture camps, emphasis on learning tradition, practice, visiting other communities

- Making salmon a priority (e.g. school example in Sweden)
- Build from historic knowledge of other regions, states, countries to achieve best understanding of salmon and how to value salmon and “get” salmon right. “We can learn from the mistakes of the Lower-48.”
- Community involvement in state research, helping to manage runs financially or with manpower – picking up slack in monitoring. Paying for count towers, MOU to ADFG to jointly manage.
- Ability of Alaska to tax ALL commercial users, there is no income tax collected on amount made by non-resident fishers?
- Develop community infrastructure to support local salmon industry and direct and community markets: community cold storage, ice-machine, crane, etc. (Examples in Cordova and Kodiak).
- Strengthening local seafood sales; food access for all (Community Supported Fisheries, Alaskan’s Own, etc.)
- Regulatory allowances for trading and bartering
- Special provisions to support young fishermen? 1) Youth permits to allow young people to enter fishery without assuming massive debt; 2) Offer incentives to veteran fishermen to promote training (mentorship) of youth interested in becoming captain, next generation of fishermen.
- Need to create diversified fishing opportunities so communities and fishermen can adapt (e.g. loss of crab fishing statewide)
- Local involvement in management and data, research; local hire for salmon jobs (economically viable “good jobs”); sport fishing guides; permit holders; diversify jobs throughout the year; access to the fisheries
- Alternative sources of funding and people for data monitoring (Tribes; other users; e.g. BBEDC/BBRSDA paying for count towers; training young people to collect data (e.g. mouth of Yukon River)
- Better systems for public involvement in public resource decisions and sharing information back to communities
- Improvements in gear to address issues to reduce bycatch
- Build human relationships, trust: agency visits, rapport building, collaborative meetings (e.g. scientists and traditional knowledge bearers)
- Local, long-term public school teachers, rural campuses
- Address climate change threats to salmon and fishing communities
- Decentralization of management; out of urban centers (including meetings in regional hubs)
- Maintain State minimum enrollment in schools
- Broadband internet; cost of living reductions via alternative energy, other means; water/sewer improvements